

GIVING VALUE TO THE NATURAL HERITAGE RELATED WITH THE NATURAL ROADS: TOURISTIC OPORTUNITY FOR CASTILLA-LA MANCHA

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1. INTRODUCTION

The differentiation of tourism spaces requires a pure and complex geographical reading that incorporates scalar and temporal dimensions of the analysis (SIMANCAS, 2016: 53), which raises the need for a new way of thinking about the territory and, in general, the heritage, whatever the type, from its utilitarian consideration as "cultural resource by virtue of a social valuation" (ORTEGA, 1998: 47). From this perspective, the territory occupies a central position, not only as a contender of natural and cultural elements but as a whole, to be interpreted as a hereditary good as a territorial heritage object of tourist interest (PILLET, 2012: 347). The evident convergence between territory and heritage, result of a new culture of the territory (CAÑIZARES, 2008: 56 et seq.) has its reflection, not only in academic literature but also in the institutional sphere.

The UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) Convention for the *Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (1972) and the subsequent incorporation of *Cultural Landscapes* (1992) into the heritage construct are in line with this trend of thought. However, it is in 2008 that the ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) *International Charter on Cultural Routes* advances significantly in this type of issues when the need to understand the macrostructure of heritage at different levels was manifested. The treatment of heritage through the itinerary requires to consider the territory as a structured heritage with global meaning, as long as roads and itineraries "imply a displacement in the local, regional, national and international scope [of interest for the geography of tourism] resulting from its adaptation to the geographical environment" (PORCAL, 2011: 768).

These institutional representations of heritage have an evident relation with the increase of the demand and tourist valuation of the natural environment, based on a growing social need of psychological root that is satisfied with the practice of a tourism in surroundings almost unaltered by the man, whose main motivation is "observation and appreciation of nature and traditional cultures" (MUÑOZ, 2008: 293). However, in this process the touristic mythification and adaptation of some areas to the detriment of others motivates high intensity tourism in contrast to the large protected area in Spain: 27% according to the Ministry of the Environment. This reflects how the geographical and cultural diversity of the European Union (EU) has also social and economic inequalities that has greatly concerned its member states.

The recommendations contained in many community documents, in this regard, call for greater territorial cohesion, based on the adoption of a place-based approach. Territories endowed with a network of itineraries have, in this respect, the intrinsic capacity of these to enable interconnections favorable to the dispersion of environmental, social and economic impacts (ICOMOS, 2008). However, the availability of infrastructures and equipment by itself is not enough. It should be accompanied by actions that give life to the available material and human capital, in order to promote formulas of connection between areas of different conditions, degree of population and dynamism, as well as to promote possible synergies in correlation with the European guidelines on territorial management.

The tourist deployment of rural interior spaces requires innovative and coherent initiatives using the real territorial space. This is why, as it is pointed out from the Anglo-Saxon school, we must consider that the tourism phenomenon is a political and social construction (TRIBE,

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2004: 47) and, therefore, its development in structurally weakened spaces is not limited exclusively by lack of infrastructures and means, but by a lack of valuation, as well as lack of interest in activating unused or underutilized resources (FERNÁNDEZ-ARROYO and MARTÍNEZ, 2015: 2009). In this way, the neglect of the role of the territory has been "the cause of a great number of problems in the receptive spaces of tourism" (VERA, 2011: 310).

2. POSSIBILITIES AND VALUATION OF THE NATURE TRAILS PROGRAMME

The *Nature Trails Programme* was originally developed with the project called *Greenways*, since 1993, to acquire its current name in 1996 and to diversify the typology of paths that have to be rehabilitated: the railroad platform incorporates the trails of mountain and riverside, livestock routes, itineraries in protected natural areas and thematic itineraries, among others. In 2003, this project sponsored by the ministerial body in charge of the Environment raises the added objective of creating a network of non-motorized itineraries that covers the entire country.

The purpose of connecting places distant from each other, which is the basis for promoting an environmentally sustainable system of displacement, leads to the configuration of the so-called "non-motorised vehicle natural routes" (MAGRAMA, 2014). Among them stand out the courses aligned to the fluvial courses that acquire a projection of transnational scale: the rivers Duero, Tajo and Guadiana, before the possibility of crossing "*The Line*" that separates Spain from Portugal.

In Castilla-La Mancha the possibilities that are attributed to this program have not been sufficiently considered, since much of its potential lies in the commitment that society acquires in relation to them by allowing public, private or mixed entities to act as promoters of activities linked to the route of the natural roads. The regional administration of Castilla-La Mancha (2015: 26), in its *Strategic Tourism Plan 2015-2019*, does not explicitly mention the purpose of boosting this infrastructure, despite considering nature a priority product. This entails a loss of opportunities due to the lack of interest in incorporating to the touristic regional product the natural paths of the Tajo and Guadiana rivers, which travels through the region along 605 and 327 km. respectively, in addition to enabling a transversal design of sustainable mobility between distant places, allows with its implementation to connect rural and natural areas of difficult access with potential domestic and national tourist demand.

3. THE INTEGRATION OF NATURAL SPACES IN THE TAJO AND GUADIANA NATURAL ROADS

The use of geographic techniques has proved being useful in counteracting the sectoral treatment of territorial resources. The protagonism recently assigned to the territory continues unequally corresponded with systematic methodological proposals of accompaniment that serve to identify the territorial potentialities of each area (SILVA, 2008: 74). An identification of the heritage in its double and artificial differentiation, natural and cultural, is useful considering its correspondence with the profiles of the demand and with the purpose of facilitating its adaptation to the tourist offer. Based on this consideration, we think in the operation of our proposal based on a double consideration: on the one hand, identify those natural resources of tourist interest located in the area of influence of the Natural Pathways to relate them in turn with the territorial heritage in which they integrate and, on the other hand, their geographical contextualization into a useful planning framework according to possible formulas of governance on specific agreements, from which it is possible to reach a conciliation of general interests to different territorial level to apply a shared policy (FARINÓS et al., 2005: 121), in this case, oriented to the management of a global, integrative and specific tourism product.

The use of GIS allows a broad view of the possible interrelations between elements of territorial variable, noting, for example, in the case of Castilla-La Mancha, as the natural road to Tajo is conformed by more than 183 km. of trails on protected natural space, while the natural road to Guadiana does for 202 km., which means that 30.3% and 62% of the route of these roads, respectively, develops inside natural protected areas in Castilla-La Mancha. In a

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territorial context such as the one in Castilla-La Mancha, taking this infrastructure as a vehicle initiative enables an effective connection of the powerful natural heritage of the region composed of protection figures such as: one of the ten UNESCO *Biosphere Reserves* that has as protagonist the water: "La Mancha Húmeda", where in turn are located wetlands of International Importance included in the *List of the Ramsar Convention*; one of the eight geoparks that Spain contributes to the Global Geopark Network; fourteen areas protected by the European ecological network *Natura 2000*; one of the most visited natural areas of Castilla-La Mancha: the National Park "Tablas de Daimiel"; as well as two Natural Parks and twenty-two protected natural spaces, among a hundred and eight spaces protected by regional regulations under various protection figures.

It is a series of protected areas for which these roads are developed, but for the moment it is worth to notice his remarkable isolation from the territorial context in which they are inserted, as well as the lack of tourist definition and integration to the regional tourist circuits.

4. FINAL REFLECTION AND PROPOSAL FOR THE VALUE-SETTING OF THE NATURAL ROADS

The search for new economic models based on the singularity and the endogenous potential of the places refers to the need for an economic transition towards a more sustainable model, as it is recognized from the international arena with actions such as the *Initiative for a Green Economy* launched by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) or *Towards Green Growth* by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In our work, we point out the priority interest of the itineraries promoted by the *Nature Trails Programme*, since it is based on the defense and promotion of areas with accessibility difficulties. Taking as a laboratory the region of Castilla-La Mancha, we have proven the function of these routes linked to the river courses of Tajo and Guadiana for the efficient concatenation of a tourism product in spaces accredited by its high ecological values.

Consequently, and in line with the consolidation of the new paradigm of territoriality, "in which many and unrelated processes situate the territory in the first place" (CAÑIZARES, 2008: 57), we propose as a proposal the contextualization of these itineraries within a coherent territorial framework, in this case in making a division of the geographical regions proposed for Castilla-La Mancha, by Panadero and Pillet (PONS, 2011), because without a doubt, the this areas are the most popular territories, which leads them to be commonly used for tourism purposes (PILLET, 2015: 195). In addition, it is proposed to make their correspondence profitable, with the delimitation of the rural territories, since it is evident the strategic interest that acquires such imbrication for the implementation of a regional tourism product around the different sections of the natural roads of Tajo and Guadiana.

This territorial definition makes it possible to adapt the natural roads to tourism trends in the search for more personal and deep experiences, related to the place and the encounter with the social and landscape particularities. Moreover, it constitutes a logical framework from which to establish the network around to the itineraries, with which to create a destination or tourist route whose management and commercialization is coordinated from the Local Action Groups, with the involvement of the Socioeconomic Areas, specific municipalities, town halls and Administrations at Regional and National level. Institutions and Local Action Groups, coordinated around a network of itineraries closely linked to nature and contextualized in a regional framework that differentiates heritage intrinsic values to the characteristics of the territory, they have the possibility and the responsibility to put in value and to profit in an integral way the qualities of the territorial patrimony.

This infrastructure of roads can sew the paths that solved the social relations of the agricultural world to offer today an alternative of future. A utopian future for pursuing an effective territorial cohesion. A future that passes through a change of productive and territorial model with great doses of hope deposited in the tourism.

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