

IDENTITY CONFIGURATIONS IN TOURISTIC TERRITORIES. GENERAL CONDITIONS IN GALICIA¹

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1. INTRODUCTION

The configuration of territory, when dealing with making up the support and development infrastructures for tourist activity, presents nowadays multiple options that share a link with a feeling of identity. In such a context, structures, mobilized resources and territorial dynamics reflect a mode of response to the main demand in the tourism sector: cognitive, emotional and recreational experiences activation at the destination point. When subject to be represented by an account of the territory in those terms, the definition of an identity proposal incorporates a set of reference points where both the internal and external selection criteria are interactive. It is a particularly relevant issue within the study of territories that are either peripheral or far away from the spatial-growth axis —the so-called interior, border, mountain or rural territories.

2. IDENTITY OF LAND AND TOURISM

The increasing interest in all those phenomena related to the notion of diversity and the information exchange speed in modern times makes up an ambivalent context for the aforementioned territories. Promoted by policies that impose new requirements in order to maintain an active presence within multifunctional frameworks, and protected by the current value of being different, every strategic action offers a starting point

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related to uniqueness and authenticity. Both qualities are based on geographic reality and the concepts of legacy and value, bringing out in the open the territory intended for tourism —a scene with multiple agents whose face is the landscape (Martínez de Pisón, 2007; Nogué, 2008; and Berdoulay, 2009). Semantic territories and landscapes with symbolic properties are projected on multiple-format images where singularity, tradition and significance act as the coordinates for touristic promotion and appeal (Sarasa, A. 1998; Palmer, 1999; Wearing & Neil, 2000; Viñals Blasco, 2002; Cànoves et al, 2004; Sabaté, 2008; and De Uña & Villarino, 2009). For the tourism sector, and *in* the tourism sector, identity and image feed an always-changing process that offers to users both tangible and intangible resources. Those resources are all connected within a set of values as an initial response based on the interests and interactions between local and foreign agents. Regarding this response, rather than what a territory *is* in a certain moment, what really matters is what the territory *has been*, and what it *can* be.

The analysis of possible identity configurations requires to start from what it makes them visible, by exploring their reference points, contents and meanings. Identity is a time-and space-variable concept: distinguishes what it is owned and what is not, integrates it within a message related to its image representation, and implies an added value to the territory's local dimension, eventually evolving towards a quality brand (Miossec, 1977; Urry, 2001; Yagüe, 2002; Sancho & Vera, 2008; Villarino et al, 2009a). Besides, valuation of the strategic referents regarding identity is interdependent of the dynamics at local/global level. Regardless the key to their formalization —physical, symbolical, political or functional— referents and their variable contents delimit a particular organization of elements and selected meanings (Maccanell, 1973; Castells, 1998; Wang, 2000; Vaccaro & Beltrán, 2007). The system's internal and external identification takes place by means of the nature's excellence goods —the territory's protected areas network—, the different modalities of society-environment cultural relation —cultural landscapes—, the narrations thought to be read in maps, photographs and multimedia products, or some different tours within the territory —paths, itineraries, routes. Institutional programs and public policies reinforce the system's formalization and instrumentalization using pre-established approaches. Moreover, tourism's analysis within this framework eases the detection of functionality and dysfunctionality situations regarding their evaluation as development agents (Sarasa, A, 1999 and 2000; Jeong & Almeida, 2004; Cànoves et al, 2006; and Jimeno, 2008).

3. LOCAL CONFIGURATIONS: GALICIA

Galician territory represents within Europe a «convergence region» with a physical and functional identity, delimited according to different scales. Belonging to the Atlantic axis, Galicia is completely opposed to any Mediterranean reference point —exclusively. The territory called Euroregion Galicia-North Portugal sets a reference point of an integrative nature —the «line» that brings together specific border territories. Those local configurations, supported by a sense of possession and attachment to territory, define identity portraits —mostly at a regional level (Doval, 2004; Souto, 2006). Galician «comarcas» are geographical, social and homogeneous regions acting as a basic reference

point of its territorial identity configuration. Those «comarcas» have a particular meaning regarding biophysical features —natural «comarcas»— and cultural features —functional «comarcas». As territorial units, «comarcas» are nourished with cognitive, emotional and instrumental contents.

3.1. Framework of References

Tourism identity proposals —from a general perspective— keep the emphasis on the singularity of protected natural areas, the tradition of rural landscapes and the time experience by means of cultural itineraries. Tourism demand expectations (Rial et al, 2008) make up an image of Galicia as destination with a framework of physical-functional references —green environment, gastronomic quality, rain— and psychological-social references —calm, rest, safety, good quality-price ratio. As an example of both categories interacting with each other, promotion by Autonomic Tourism Agents —TurGalicia— can be mentioned, where territory and landscape are key elements when selecting landmarks as unique references. Those landmarks can go linked to messages or slogans where abiotic elements are charged with intangible meanings. Tourism configurations are also articulated by connecting different identity formalization spheres. All that with a patrimonial element acting as a quality node. The process —very selective— generates quick answers at a local level. Sometimes identity configuration integrates all the references within a historical context. The different contexts for territory identity formalization and the meaning of human activity incidence are intertwined in a unidirectional scheme with an unquestionable symbolic function.

3.2. Territorial Articulation

The territorial assets used to draw a strategic representation of identity, and the shapes interwoven within the local dimension of Galicia, present a range of different categories with certain potential for innovation and change (De Uña & Villarino, 2008; Villarino & De Uña, 2008; Villarino et al, 2009b; and De Uña & Villarino, 2010). The network of protected areas is key to the generation of strategies supporting —within natural heritage— identity articulation. Those goods and products with traceability, quality and brand features —guarantee of origin/protected geographic indications— confer a specific value of identity linked to a cultural and natural patrimony. With a similar meaning, recreational and festive events are used as territorial identity symbols.

When references and contents are coherently inserted within a territorial identity project's configuration —with a strong social cohesion— the fact of enhancing the tourism space incorporates fixed and mobile elements, intertwined with tangible and intangible elements. All of them represented by induced images that reach a great acknowledgement and diffusion. Landscape becomes an essential configuration regarding territorial identity's formation and consolidation. The significance in historical construction processes of the Galician identity and its media profile is reinforced by regulations. The European Landscape Convention (2000) and its incorporation into the Law on Landscape Protection in Galicia (2008) highlight this function. Landscape covers both singular personality and

cultural identity in Galicia. Both the present concept and image of Galician landscapes come from the historical evolution —full of folklore expressions— of the identity references system. Original, archaic, modern, idyllic or mythological, territory agents seek and draw a strategic configuration.

4. PROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS

Tourism territories' identity swings over the restructuring of nature values and the recovery of places linked together with their cultural landscape. Local configurations —promoting an experiential sense of tourism— can be assumed as a reality or as simple territory labels. Identifications and identities are a control variable within the territorial diversification process, which has speeded up in Europe since the last decade of the 20th century. The narrative discourse and multiple-format images serve as markers for the process in a given moment. Territory identity for tourism evolves from a negotiated strategic configuration with different levels of cohesion and response. Studying the diverse time-and-space modalities eases the understanding and awareness of the territorial state and its impact on tourism. In Galicia, where the historical distribution of its land use and the diverse changes of its production system have marked the differences between coastal and interior territories for centuries, the territorial identity configurations —reflected on a typical landscape— point to the horizon of tourism expectations. The value and consequences of these proposals' launch, regarding governance, sustainability and development, set what the geographic research will be focusing on in the future.