

CUENCA: A CONSOLIDATED TOURISTIC DESTINY*

Joaquín Saúl García Marchante

Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha

E-mail: joaquinsaul.garcia@uclm.es

Approaching the fifteenth anniversary of the inclusion of the city on the World Heritage List by Unesco (December 1996), the progresses that have been made in it to consolidate its prestige as an international touristic destination is the result of the collective effort in which authorities and population have been involved.

The **recovery** of its historic heritage has included to the collection of great value buildings, the restored ones, both religious and civilian, the interventions in the frontages of the popular neighborhoods San Martín and San Miguel and in the rest of the houses of the Historic Centre, symbolic part of a protected city, where the collective memory of the society that traditionally have lived in it highlights.

The **protection** of the ravines of the rivers Júcar and Huécar, also included in the declaration, has been important during these past years, where the banks of the rivers have been fit up and the frequent usage of these natural places has increased by the citizens.

In this way, with the original overlapping of the natural and the built, example of a sort of construction and a historic landscape, the hereditary preservation of the group has been achieved, enhancing its elements of own identity used as a touristic icon globally.

The multifunctionality of the historic centre, its variety of uses, make different aims possible to reach from the time of the declaration till nowadays, improving services for the citizens and the visitors, giving new initiatives in restaurant industry resources as well as educational and cultural functions making use of some restored historic buildings.

To finish with the attractive points of the city, two questions related with communication have been resolved, the road and the railway, that. The connections through highway A- 3 in Tarancón, make possible its usage without topographical difficulties. A fact to emphasize is the new line of high speed train Madrid –Valencia

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that finishes with forty years of railway abandon of the city in its connection with the centre and the Mediterranean arch.

The designation by the UNESCO has been useful to join the city to the group of Spanish Heritage Cities that had gathered to ask for incentives to different administrations to solve problems with the protection of their rich and singular heritage and also to work in touristic campaigns to show their existence abroad.

One of the best results of the declaration has been the creation of the Royal Council of the city of Cuenca that in Royal Decree on the 23d of January in 2004 is constituted with the presidency of H.M. Juan Carlos I. The management is done by the Consortium of the city of Cuenca which according to its needs for the maintenance of the heritage and creating a list of necessities, carries out the different projects financed by the institutions linked to it, starting with the ministry of Education, Culture and Sports.

The means of communication that have been developed considerably during the last years were in charge of producing and broadcasting its image that due to its singularity has turned out to be interesting and eye-catching favoring the arrival of a great number of foreign visitors. Magazines of important newspapers of the world have echoed Cuenca, for example The New York Times (Feb. 2011) in double page on Sunday edition, highlights the heritage interest of the city. According to the media coverage, a Japanese TV cartoon serial first shown in January of 2010, which has been a success due to the increase of Japanese citizens in the city, makes reference to the urban scenario of the historic centre of Cuenca using high quality reproductions.

Meanwhile, the city has grown weakly in population, exceeding the number of fifty thousand inhabitants (57.869 in January of 2010) and it is a quarter of century old of urban expansion since in the first years of the 80's started its dissociation of the postwar city and got settled in the garumnense hills close to Valencia road. A beltway that connects its three strategic exits to Madrid (West), la Mancha (South) and Valencia (East), has been provided and has solved, with anew alternative the connection to the Serranía, which is a closely linked space and the reason why its touristic attraction.

Due to the solution of some urban problems and to favor the modernization of its management infrastructures, means have been created in order to be in the touristic and cultural strategies. This is how Tourism of Cuenca Foundation was created, which gather province and local institutions and also employer's organizations. It understands touristic regulation and in 1999 ordered a Dynamic Touristic Plan and the Estrategic Plan of Touristic Development is set off, using previous results.

In the last four years, the City Council has designed an urban intervention plan, Cuenca Revitaliza, where has included, among other projects, the recuperation of the poor historic area of San Antón, financed with a program Iniciativa Urban.

Through the Local Town Planning Management, is arranged the urban development that still depends on the PGOU of 1995 and it is still waiting for approval the POM 2006 which will finish the expansion of the city related to new railway and road infrastructures, as well as new hospitable, touristic or cultural complements.

We could conclude this introduction with the statement of how important is the touristic activity in nowadays in the city of Cuenca, just because of the observation of the evolution of the activity in the last years and because of the approaches of the immediate future. Future projects are almost in the present time and the message offering better family and labor life conditions to their residents is spreading in marketing campaigns based on the equidistance between Madrid and Valencia and the obvious improvement of its communications.

