

COMMUNICATION AND TOURISTS AWARENESS ABOUT WORLD HERITAGE SITES IN MADRID REGIONAL AREA

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INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Cultural heritage is essential to attract tourists to destinations but it is not enough. Cultural resources must be converted into a tourism product through strategies and policies developed by public and private agents. Some destinations with special cultural heritage have been recognized by United Nations Scientific, Education and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as World Heritage Sites (WHSs). For some authors this means prestige and added value for the places that have obtained this recognition that can be used to promote these destinations. But literature also takes into account some problems related with sustainability as consequence of being UNESCO' World Heritage Site (WHSs) mainly to mitigate tourism impacts on sites. It is commonly held view that World Heritage recognition increases tourist numbers.

In Madrid Regional Area three places have been designated as WHSs: 1) 'Monasterio y Sitio de El Escorial', 2) 'Universidad y Barrio Histórico de Alcalá de Henares', 3) 'Paisaje Cultural de Aranjuez'. This paper analyses the use of WHSs in information-communication about the above three places but also further consideration of the role that WHSs play in attracting tourists to visit those places. The specific research questions of the study were:

1. How is used World Heritage recognition in information-communication by local Web sites?
2. How is used World Heritage recognition by some Spanish institutions like Madrid Regional Government, Madrid Municipal Government, Visitors Convention Bureau (V&CB) and Spanish Tourism Promotion Institute (Turespaña) in information-communication through their Web sites?
3. How is the tourists' knowledge of the three WHSs located in Madrid Regional Area?

4. How is the World Heritage recognition perceived by tourists? Has this recognition any influence in tourists' visitation?

METHODOLOGY

This research was undertaken through observation how World Heritage recognition is used in Web sites. Concerning the place of »Monasterio y Sitio de El Escorial« two local Web sites were evaluated, five local Web sites for the place «Universidad y Barrio Histórico de Alcalá» and four local Web sites for the place «Paísaje Cultural de Aranjuez». Further Web sites were evaluated, two for Madrid Regional Government, one for Madrid Municipal Government, one for Madrid Visitors & Convention Bureau (V&CB) and one for Turespaña. Other primary data for the study comes from a survey through CATI system to a sample of 300 potential tourists residents in 13 Spanish regions.

FINDINGS

The two municipality' official Web sites for 'Monasterio y Sitio de El Escorial' doesn't mention the World Heritage recognition on their home page. One of these Web sites contains an indirect reference to the UNESCO recognition. All information in both Web sites appears only in Spanish. The two main Web sites concerning 'Alcalá de Henares' belongs to the municipal government and both use the World Heritage recognition. The whole Web sites can be read in Spanish, English and French.

About the place 'Alcalá de Henares' there are five Web sites. The two most important ones belong to the municipal government and both Web sites include the UNESCO recognition. One of them contains a tourism city guide with one page dedicated to the UNESCO recognition. This city guide offers its information in Spanish, English, French and German. The whole Web site can be read in Spanish, English and French.

The three main Web sites concerning to 'Aranjuez' are using the World Heritage recognition. The Web site 'Turismo en Aranjuez' belongs to the Association of Small and Medium Enterprises of Aranjuez (APIME). At the top of its home page presents a link to 'Aranjuez Tourism', appearing below together with the distinction of WHS. The page contains four menus regarding where to stay, where to eat, nature and culture. Access to the pages is available in these menus with the same header on the home page with the UNESCO recognition, right appearing in a separate frame official logo of the distinction. The Web site does not offer the ability to view or download any guides or site plan. The Web site is available only in Spanish. The Web site 'Aranjuez Real Sitio y Villa' belongs to the municipal government. This Web site presents some photos at the top of its homepage appearing on the left the name of the city and on the right the UNESCO recognition. This logo in a smaller size, not completely readable, also appears in the bottom right of this page. The website is available only in Spanish. The Web site 'Aranjuez' belongs to an unknown private entity presenting the city under the World Heritage recognition. The information is available only in Spanish.

The official Web site of Madrid Regional Government 'Madrid.org', the official Web site Net of Tourism Information of Madrid Regional Government 'Madrid about you' and

the Web site for Madrid Visitors & Convention Bureau (V&CB) 'esMADRID.com' do not contain in their home pages explicit references to the World Heritage recognition. Exploring these Web sites using the search engines available and keywords, it allows getting some information regarding the three WHSs located in Madrid Regional Area.

The official Web site of Madrid Municipal Government '¡MADRID!' have not any mention to World Heritage recognition, nevertheless there is a link to the Web site of for Madrid Visitors & Convention Bureau (V&CB) 'esMADRID.com'. The World Heritage recognition does not play an important role in the promotion of Madrid Regional Area.

The Web site of the Spanish Tourism Promotion Institute (Turespaña) have not explicit mention to WHSs. This recognition does not seem to represent an important argument in marketing communication strategy for international tourism, even though Spain is the second country in the world with 44 properties inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. In this sense Spain strategy is similar to that used by France, which also has an important number of properties (37) on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

The data from the survey showed that only 18, 4% of the tourists knew at least one of the three World Heritage Sites located in Madrid Regional Area. Only 1% of the total tourists stated to know the three Heritage Sites. About the influence of World Heritage recognition in attracting tourists, the survey data showed that a high percentage of tourists, 60, 7%, considered that UNESCO recognition have a positive influence in someone's decision.

CONCLUSIONS

Local Web sites concerning the three World Heritage places located in Madrid Regional Area could be improved to distribute better information. World Heritage recognition is an important factor in attracting tourists but data available are insufficient to draw definitive conclusions. UNESCO recognition works better as a slogan than as a brand, taking part of the brands' image. As a good slogan it survives along the time and it is useful to catch tourists' interest to new and unknown WHSs. Marketing communication of Madrid Regional Area should include World Heritage recognition on Web sites to promote knowledge and image of WHSs.

