

“THE ADVENTURES OF SWITZERLAND IN LA MANCHA”: HERITAGE AND CULTURAL TOURISM IN THE SPANISH YEARS OF POLICY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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INTRODUCTION

In 1972 a group of Swiss and German travel agency directors came to Spain to visit the region of La Mancha in order to learn about the tourist resources that this region could offer. During General Franco's dictatorship, tourist activities experienced a boom through foreign mass tourism mainly focused on the coastal areas. But in this case the administration prepared a project to attract them to inland tourism, specifically La Mancha. The Provincial Delegation of Ciudad Real of the Ministry of Information and Tourism declared an interesting itinerary to show the best tourist attractions of this region where diverse natural and/or cultural resources form its heritage. Some of them are known worldwide due to the publication of Cervantes' novel, *Don Quixote*. The destinations were not chosen randomly, they were aware of the interest that foreign people expressed for the cervantine route, some of the more representative settlements to achieve the desired commercial success.

General Franco's dictatorship bet intensely on tourism as the key element of Spanish economic development, attracting the main European tourism flows. This activity was essential to achieve a balance of payments because of the foreign capital. Sun, beach, landscapes, history and monuments were (and are currently) important attractions. Stereotypes, traditionalism and folklore became resources and were used for this purpose.

The Spanish Civil War was a turning point for the way of living in Spain. With regards to tourism, it brought a halt to initiatives which had previously been started. Nevertheless, *The Natural Tourism Service* (1938-1939) was created which was in the care of Luis Antonio Bolín Bidwell, member of the Home Office which had the same role as the dissolved National Tourist Board. After the war, *The Natural Tourism Service* was transformed into *The State Tourist Office* (1939-1951). The post-war period, poverty and isolation complicated its task but in spite of that, some initiatives appeared which took advantage of the conflict; such as the *North Spanish War Route* which attracted French people to learn about

the battlefield and the form of the battle. However, it was considered by some authors as a political and propaganda intervention more than a touristic initiative. During these years, there was a big propaganda mission abroad, as it can be appreciated in touristic posters; later, in 1948, the advertising slogan *Spain is beautiful and different* was created.

The advances in tourism were slow but progressive during the first half of the twentieth century, and during the second half the country had a more favourable international context after the uprising of political and economic sanctions by the ONU. That produced the necessary stability to increase the movement of people. *The Ministry of Information and Tourism* (1951-1977) promoted the boom of tourist activities and it was supported by public initiative. In 1962, Manuel Fraga Iribarne was responsible for that Ministry. *Tourism Deputy Minister* was created as an attendance and cooperation body in some *National Plans for Economic Development*.

LA MANCHA AS A TOURIST DESTINATION

Some territories were created as holiday destinations (of sun and beach) highly valued in Europe and the administration worked intensely in its advertising in order to set up the offer of *tour operators* through interesting advertising campaigns, although the aim was not only to attract foreign people but also Spanish.

Among the numerous tourist initiatives in this period, the attention was focused on the *advertising of La Mancha as a tourist destination in Switzerland*, a project called "The adventure of Switzerland in La Mancha". It's been over 40 years since the group of Swiss and German travel agency directors landed at the Barajas-Madrid International Airport to discover the resources of the don Quixote area. Lavished with gifts, they went back to their countries convinced that La Mancha could be part of their holiday destination.

La Mancha boasts different natural and cultural resources which create its territorial heritage; The *Windmills* of Consuegra and Campo de Criptana, *el Toboso* (Dulcinea's village), the *Inn of don Quixote* in Puerto Lápice, *Medrano's Cave* in Argamasilla de Alba and *landscapes*. They have been used a large amount of times as touristic propaganda and overall they were really important in the different routes designed around don Quixote, who is the main character in the literature by Miguel de Cervantes *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote de La Mancha* (1605). In the novel, Miguel de Cervantes created and described a territorial "context" or "environment" and he has transmitted it to the readers throughout history since its publication. This territory has been visited throughout history by crowds who while they have been looking for *don Quixote's* adventures they have discovered, lived and narrated their own great feats along the way.

The Cervantes novel and the windmills became icons in this region which was traditionally only considered "in passing" between Madrid and Andalusia. Despite the fact that La Mancha was already well-known all over the world because of the novel in 1970s, it could not compete as a tourist destination. The extraordinary coasts or those places which were more important for the administration due to its heritage, location etc., provided them with the required infrastructures and equipment to welcome tourists.

ITINERARIES THROUGH LA MANCHA

The project “The Adventure of Switzerland in La Mancha” was determined by the Madrid Propaganda Section of the Directorate General for Tourism Advertising and the Ciudad Real Provincial Delegation of Information and Tourism. The organization was in charge of the latter and it was also in charge of the Swiss airline “Swissair”. In addition, other public and/or private institutions collaborated in the project such as the Provincial Council, Torremolinos S.A travel agency and the town halls of the places that would be tourist destinations: Ocaña, Tembleque, Consuegra, Almagro, Santa Cruz de Mudela, Valdepeñas, Villanueva de los Infantes, Argamasilla de Alba, Campo de Criptana and Alcázar de San Juan and hotel services of the Inn of don Quixote in Puerto Lápice, the National Youth Hostel in Manzanares and the Motel Meliá The Gentlemanly in Valdepeñas.

Foreign experts took interest in the itinerary in La Mancha after coming from Zurich and being picked up from Madrid-Barajas Airport on Friday 22nd and staying until Sunday 24th September. Although the project was not determined as *The Route of don Quixote*, the visit to the areas traditionally linked with the novel was incorporated. It was selected according Franco’s regime, to promote those places which, in one way or another, have been important in the Spanish History either due to the characters or its works, in this instance El Quixote. Therefore, there were more routes which were just as interesting places to visit in which the administration had worked with some projects to restore, improve and tidy up the monuments. There were also some different “protection” figures of architectural heritage, in this instance *Historical-Architectural Ensemble* or touristic “advertising and dissemination” such as *the origin of Geotourism* which generates interesting links between countries.

The expedition created an interest in the mass media, due to the following of the regional and national media. In the itinerary the visit to the most representative monuments of the towns was included: the square and arches in Ocaña as well as San Pedro’s Church and the Convent of the Discalced Carmelites, the Square and arches in Tembleque, the Corral de Comedias Square (comedy theatre), Bernardas Street, the Tourist Information Office and the shields and heraldic wealth in Almagro, Virtudes square bull ring in Santa Cruz de Mudela, the Asunción Church in Valdepeñas, the main square, the San Andrés Apóstol Church, the Rectory and the Remedio Hospital in Villanueva de los Infantes and the Santa María Church and fortified tower of the Gran Prior Palace in Alcázar de San Juan. Also included in the itinerary were the cervantine style landscapes and views such as the Windmills of Calvario hill in Consuegra, the Paz hill in Campo de Criptana, the popular Inn of Don Quixote in Puerto Lápice which Cervantes visited and the typically characteristic nature of Lagunas de Ruidera, where experts in tourism expressed its potential as a suitable touristic destination.

Equally, they tasted the typical gastronomy and they learnt about the most representative products. They learnt about the folklore and La Mancha traditions, for example the *knight naming* ceremony in the Inn of Don Quixote in Puerto Lápice, the popular bobbin lace industry in Almagro, the Bull Festival in Las Virtudes, the machines and the workings of the windmills in Campo de Criptana and the popular wine tasting with *La Invencible* cooperative in Valdepeñas.

CONCLUSIONS

The expedition “The Adventure of Switzerland in La Mancha” is an interesting model to analyse the origin of rural tourism in our region, especially for foreign people, where there was traditionalism which still continues nowadays. The relative underdevelopment of Spain and its rural territories was not a weakness, it was as an opportunity for tourists to learn about settled traditions in the region. This itinerary highlighted the territorial resources of the region with the don Quixote image, in an international touristic way using one of the great Spanish literary work.

In this period of time some towns were recognized by the administration of Franco due to the role of the resources in the national tourism context. In the case of the places mentioned above, work was done along several don Quixote’s routes to improve infrastructures and viewpoints and reconditioning was done to show the La Mancha landscapes and the architectural element restoration related to the cervantine style novel etc. These ideas are doubtlessly interesting and some of them are innovating for advertising tourism of La Mancha. These facts allowed us to establish interesting connections between tourism and heritage, some of them due to the state intervention restoring carefully selected elements of historic-artistic heritage for its “reuse” and “maximization” to become an attraction for tourism. This itinerary of La Mancha was the last aid of the works of the Franco period with relation to his profitability after the arrival of foreign currency in La Mancha.