

PERCEPTION OF POPULATION LIVING IN THE VILLAGE OF CAÑAMERO ABOUT GEOPARK VILLUERCAS-IBORES-JARA (EXTREMADURA, SPAIN)

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Tourism in Spain is a very important economic sector supporting local economy (>10% GDP) and employment (>10% of the jobs) in times of economic recession. About 65 million international tourists visited Spain and spent more than 63 billion € in 2014. In the region of Extremadura, this sector has grown considerably in the last decades, although disparities between UNESCO World Heritage cities such as Cáceres or Mérida and rural regions are observed. Actions scheduled within 11 Promote Tourism Product Plans (PTPP) are aimed to reduce the negative effects of the rural regions. For example, in Villuercas-Ibores-Jara region, the application process and subsequent declaration of Geopark area must be highlighted as one of the most important actions belonging to the PTPP.

In the case of Villuercas-Ibores-Jara region, this territory is largely rural, economically poor and with a high rate of population aging. Furthermore, tourism activities are little exploited in spite of having valuable tourism resources. Only the Royal Monastery of Guadalupe receives an average of 35,000 visitors per year (90% from Spain) according to the data supplied by the Local Tourism Office. These values confirm Guadalupe as a religious tourism destination of particular relevance in whole Spain. However, the main tourism activity of the region is concentrated around this monument. Therefore, an appreciation of other (natural and cultural) resources in the area is still necessary.

Geopark Villuercas-Ibores-Jara is located in the southeastern part of the province of Cáceres (Extremadura, Spain) and occupies an area surface of 2,554 km². It is a mountain massif, dominated by materials of old ages such as Precambrian schists and slates or Ordovician quartzites, which highest point reaches 1,600 metres of elevation. A series of anticlines, synclines and faults, among others, are the main geological features. From a landscape point of view, it is composed of parallel mountains with quartzite ridges, alternating with fluvial valleys over schists. Remarkable is also the presence of a great variety of fossils such as cloudinas or trilobites and aragonite speleothems in the limestone cave of Castañar de Ibor.

The declaration of Geopark in 2011 has supposed a commitment to the geotourism based on promoting tourism activities in 44 geosites, among other many actions. This fact will mean presumably differences in the lives of the local population, so knowing their perception of the Geopark and its possible tourism product and resources is still necessary. Therefore, the main goal of this work is to know the perception of local people about Geopark and its effects. To this end, the population residing in the municipality of Cañamero was selected to the survey because it is the municipality that more geosites contains. Furthermore, the Visitor Reception Centre of the Geopark is located in the village and it is also a stopping place for many visitors of the Royal Monastery of Guadalupe.

Cañamero is located in the southern part of the Geopark, flanked by Rucas River (tributary of Guadiana) and crossed by the regional road EX-102. Regarding to physical features, this village is situated in the heart of the Geopark being an example of the exceptional landscape of the area. Remarkable are also the forest where you can see tree species such as pine or cork oaks.

Concerning to human aspects, its total population in 2013 were 1694 inhabitants, with a high rate of aging people (27.5%), as a consequence of a great emigration in the decades of 1960 and 1970. The municipality has a strong rural character, with a predominance of agricultural activities and a little industrial tradition. One of the activities for which the village has gained national fame is the wine production, even since older historical periods. Its wines are protected under the Designation of Origin Ribera del Guadiana.

A total number of 107 people (6% of total population) were interviewed in order to know their perception about Geopark. A confidence level of 95%, an error probability of 5% and an accuracy of 4% were obtained with this sample size. Surveys were mainly conducted in the commercial and leisure areas of the municipality and also close to the town council to have a political view. Furthermore, many local people volunteered to answer the questionnaire in their private homes, a fact that shows the great collaborative attitude and reliability of the information provided by the respondents. The interviewer was the first author of this article, a native and resident in the town and fully aware of the respondents and their environment.

The questionnaire was composed by 14 questions. 13 of them (except nº 5) only could be answered according to previously defined options (never more than 5). These questions were focused on 3 blocks: a) characterization of the respondents according to gender, age and way of life, b) respondent's view of the Geopark and its consequences and c) knowledge of the local population on tourism resources and products associated with the Geopark, emphasizing the geosites, hiking paths and signals (main activities budgeted in the PTPP).

The question no 5 allowed the respondent to freely express their opinion about the benefits or not of the Geopark. The opinions were classified into 4 groups: a) people who think that the Geopark is good for the region, b) people who think that the Geopark is particularly good for Cañamero besides for the entire region, c) people who are unaware of the effects of the Geopark and, finally, d) people who are in total disagreement with the Geopark. This grouping of responses served to quantify the variable, without prejudice to the qualitative value of these opinions to the discussion.

Regarding to the gender of the respondents, 51 cases were men and the other 56 remaining were women. With regard to age groups, 43% of respondents are 50 years old and over, 36% between 36 and 50 years old, and 21% under 35. These percentages confirm the representativity of the sampled cases according to gender equality and age structure. Otherwise, more relevant information concerning to respondents is shown. 7 out of 10 local people do not live directly from the tourism activities. Almost 80% of local people are aware of the existence of hiking paths or other tourism products in the region.

Although only 3 years have passed since the declaration of Geopark, around 85% of residents believe that the municipality of Cañamero is being benefited cause of the Geopark, both from economic and cultural point of view. This fact is very interesting because only 30% of local people are related to tourism sector. However, most of them think that other municipalities such as Guadalupe (Royal Monastery) or Logrosán (region capital) is being more benefited than their own municipality.

The respondents that expressed a favourable opinion argue mainly that Geopark will be good for the region in terms of jobs. Secondly, they state that the Geopark is very positive to preserve the natural and cultural heritage and, finally, they consider that the Geopark can make the region national and internationally known. Other many respondents consider that the Geopark is good but they do not express relevant reasons or simply they argue that so far little information has been provided about it.

A small number of respondents ($\approx 10\%$) are against the Geopark because they think that is harmful to agriculture and livestock husbandry. Furthermore, they state that the Geopark is only good for a few people (tourism sector, politicians, etc.) and even they think that is a waste of money for the regional and national governments in times of economic crisis. There are also people that consider that the Geopark will influence negatively in traditional activities such as wild animals hunting. However, the declaration of Geopark does not imply any legal restrictions to traditional activities in contrast to other protection figures such as National or Natural Park.

The respondents were asked also about their opinion on infrastructures and information provided from the Geopark. 52.8% thinks that there is little and insufficient information about the Geopark despite of promotion campaigns conducted. 62.6% of respondents think that the signage in the Geopark is scarce and insufficient but they do not express any opinion about hiking paths. If funding were available, it would be ideal to replace obsolete signaling information and for an updated and renewed (in English, Braille, explanatory illustrations, etc).

As conclusion we can confirm that a significant majority of residents in Cañamero react positively with the Geopark. They also think that the Geopark produces benefit at regional and local level, assuming a boost for municipalities such as Guadalupe or Logrosán. However, improvements in the tourism promotion as well as effective management in information and signaling are necessary, according to the opinion of many people. Finally, further research in the other 18 municipalities that belong to the Geopark and a great effort to better understand the reasons why some people do not like the Geopark are still needed.

