

ANALYSIS OF THE PROPOSALS OF THE SOCIAL ACTORS IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL RECOVERY OF THE PORTMÁN BAY (REGIÓN DE MURCIA). NEW PERSPECTIVES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Portmán Bay (Murcia, Southeast Iberian Peninsula) is home to one of the largest environmental disasters on the Mediterranean coast: the silting of the Portmán Bay and the most of the continental shelf facing this bay, caused by the dumping of more than 60 million tonnes of mining waste to the sea, over more than thirty years (Banos-González and Baños Páez, 2013).

The treating site from Peñarroya Company used sea water for the concentration of the ore through a differential flotation process, reaching a processing capacity up to 10,000 t día⁻¹. The wastes of the process, called “estériles”, were dumped into the Mediterranean Sea over the operation period, from 1957 to 1990. Almost 60 million tons of wastes completely filled the Portman Bay and the continental platform from several kilometers of radius (Benedicto et al., 2013). After the cessation of discharges, more than 80% of the bay of Portmán is closed; it means, around 75 ha. which had previously been occupied by the sea (Benedicto et al., 2008). The footprint in the landscape of the Sierra Minera (Mining Range) extends in about 40 km².

In 2011, the favourable Environmental Impact Statement was announced of the Project to recover and environmental suitability of the Portmán Bay, promoted by the Ministry of the Environment (BOE, 2011), which included the dredging of the bay to bring the breakwater line closer to 250 m. to the coast line of 1957. The expectations regarding the aforementioned project, which had the consensus of both the administrations involved and all the neighborhood groups and ecologists, were very high. Nevertheless, the project is paralysed from 2011.

From a socio-economic point of view, the recovery of the bay may be the beginning of a change on the course in the traditional approaches of tourist development of coastal areas. Moreover, the need for an alternative model in this sector is evident by the moment of stagnation of the sun and beach tourism (Amat Montesinos, 2011). In addition, its improvised and exacerbated exercise has often contributed to the irreversible deterioration of natural resources, which are often highly vulnerable and constitute one of the main values of the tourist activity. This means a threaten, not only for future tourist activity but for the welfare of the receiving communities themselves. This requires rethinking new approaches, and conceptual and operational models, which serve to find perspectives of sustainability to those tourist developments that improve the socio-environmental pressure exerted by the more traditional schemes (González y León, 1996; Morillo-Moreno, 2001).

To this end, this intends to analyze the positioning of the different social agents in face of the previous and current proposals presented for the development of the recovery actions of the Portmán Bay and its surroundings.

2. METHODS

Likewise, it is intended to elaborate and analyse a strength, weaken, opportunities and threaten matrix (S.W.O.T, hereinafter) to determine the possibilities of action and the guidelines that the strategic planning processes envisaged in the area of study should follow, in order to develop a real model of sustainable tourism development.

Based on a participant observation analysis (Ander-Egg, 1987; Hennink et al., 2010), the position of the different social agent involved in the recent history of Portmán has been assessed, in order to understand the different positions that they defend regarding the development and regeneration of the bay.

From the S.W.O.T analysis (Wehrich, 1982; Helms y Nixon, 2010) we try to deepen into the strategic planning processes envisaged in the area of study, which are useful for the provision of necessary information, and valid for the execution of actions and corrective measures that can be included in the development of improvement strategies.

In order to quantify this analysis, a confrontation matrix has been developed to establish the degree of influence of externalities on the internal factors through the relationships between opportunities and threats, regarding strengths and weaknesses. The used values express a null influence on the comparison between pairs (0), low (1), mean (2) and high (3). In this way, we obtain a sum of four interactions, which allow us the design of adequate strategies to deal with plausible future scenarios.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of the confrontation S.W.O.T. matrix (Figure 2) indicate that the quadrant that shows the highest score is the one referring to the F-O (Strengths before Opportunities) situation. These results show a very positive evaluation of the strengths of the region in the face of possible external opportunities, which can promote advantageous feedback processes. Among the strengths, the quality and uniqueness of the environment, as well as the presence of very rare and priority habitats may represent an opportunity to be able to receive European funding regarding the biodiversity conservation; as well as the cultural values of the surroundings. In this line, the UNESCO has recently included the Cartagena-La Unión Mining Range in the indicative list of "Exceptional cultural landscapes".

Equally high is the assessment of D-A (Weakens before Threatens), which shows a transversely different scenario from F-O quadrant. This time, the potential threats may increase existing fragilities. The property of the land of Portmán and its surroundings, is characterised by a situation of almost monopoly of the company Portman Golf S.A, which acquired the Company Peñarroya-Spain; for this reason, any initiative of development in this sense must be consensuated with this entity. Moreover, the low qualification of the unemployed population, coupled with the lack of employment in the locality has influenced the increase in migration processes (CREM, 2016). Another factor that should be taken into account in these processes is the scarcity of public road transport and the poor quality of communications infrastructures. In fact, Portmán is rated as a Special Isolation Point from the perspective of the health care.

The analysis of the limitations for the development from environmental, patrimonial and territorial perspectives derived from the land management of Portmán Bay, offers a series of conditions. Around 500 ha. out of almost one thousand hectares that includes the area of the visual basing from the bay, are considered "under significant limitations" regarding potential residential developments. This is due to the fact that this area belongs to Public Maritime Land Domain and Protected Easement Zone and Natura 2000 Network; likewise, the area has suffered recent fires and it is under geomorphologic protection in relation to slopes, among others.

Other 700 ha., approximately, would be subject to major constraints for urban developments derived from the need to eliminate mining risks and from the contamination of soils, as well as those derived from the maintenance of the natural values of the surrounding.

It should be noticed that there are another set of additional constraints (to the previous one), derived from the protection of the natural and archaeological heritage, which mean around 880 ha. These additional constraints –including those affected by the limitations– concern more than 90% the surrounding of the visual basin of the Portmán Bay. Therefore, it can be concluded that the viability of suitable land to be considered for building-up in the surrounding of the current urban nucleus is scarce.

The F-A quadrant (Threat before Strengths) shows a relatively high value, which means that the strengths of the region are not powerful enough to cope with external threats. The current context of economic and social crisis at the global level hinders investments for the environmental restoration of Portman Bay, even those already com-

mitted; as well as for the construction and exploitation under a concession to private initiative of the marina, scheduled to take place after the recovery of the Portmán Bay.

Finally, the relation D-O (Weaknesses before Opportunities) obtained the lowest score, which means that the weaknesses analysed can be addressed under potential favorable scenarios, underlining the importance of an adequate planning and management in face of the structural deficiencies of the area. Through the appropriate development proposals included in the General Territorial Plan of La Unión, it is possible to carry out the recovery and rehabilitation of the mining remains and the enhancement of the spaces of greater environmental value of Portmán and the Sierra Minera of Cartagena-La Unión. In this sense, one of the greatest impulses would be in the possible declaration of Calblanque, Monte de las Cenizas and Peña del Águila as National Marine Land.

4. CONCLUSION

The results of S.W.O.T. analyses shown in this work have revealed the potential for an environmental and cultural tourism of these extraordinary places. Nevertheless, the own weaknesses and threats might overcome these potentialities if a careful management and a clear commitment is not carried out, regarding a highly sensitive development model with the natural, landscape and cultural heritage.

A tourist model linked to the environmental restoration and to the consensus of the different local social agents, who assume the project as their own, constitutes a basic element for the adaptation of the territory as a tourist product. The integral analysis presented in this paper represents an essential tool in making future decisions in the management and planning of a model of sustainable tourism.