

## THE INTEGRATED TOURISM DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL OF THE MUNICIPALITIES IN THE AREA AROUND CASTELLÓN AIRPORT

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In the inland rural areas of the Western Mediterranean arc, the symptoms of the crisis of the agricultural models of the middle of the last century still persist, reflecting their effect on territorial and socio-economic resources among other areas. This situation has been affected by the fact that these models have not been replaced by others to promote the repositioning of the local communities and the revitalisation of the area. The capacity for response to reorientate the region from a functional perspective currently shown by traditional local activities is fragile. However, despite this territorial fragility, civil society in these areas is trying to make use of the new socio-economic dynamics, including those linked to tourism.

The study focuses on the territorial area around Castellón Airport consisting of nine municipalities: Benlloch, Borriol, Cabanes, la Pobla Tornesa, Sant Joan de Moró, la Torre d'en Doménec, Vall d'Alba, Vilafamés and Vilanova d'Alcolea (Municipalities of the Castellón Airport Zone – MUZAC). It covers 486.1 km<sup>2</sup> and belongs to the county of La Plana Alta de Castellón (Valencian Region), included in area 3 of the Valencian Region Tourist Areas Plan. These municipalities also meet criteria of homogeneity in terms of regional balance, physical geography and historical characteristics, such as forms of tourism, the range of shared tourist resources and the level of tourism planning and development.

The main aim is to show an example in which integrated tourism analysis has been applied, based on the study of the elements of the tourism system.

The formulation of specific objectives for the area around the airport must come through an analysis of the general aspects and elements of the tourist system and a diagnosis of it, taking the form of:

- The transformation of endogenous resources into tourist products, including businesses and organisations linked to tourism.

- Strengthening the relations between products and the tourism demand based on training and the application of new technologies.
- Making sustainability an integral part of all areas of tourism development.

This research applies integrated tourism methodology which, in order to be developed, must include three phases: analysis, followed by an integrated tourism diagnosis phase and a strategy design phase.

So, to develop the first phase, a preliminary analysis of the general aspects of the physical-natural environment, demography and socio-economics of the area under study was carried out. This was followed by an analysis of the elements of the integrated tourism system, consisting of tourism resources, businesses, demand, infrastructures and services.

Along these lines, the creation of an inventory of tourist resources has formed the basic instrument for subsequent analysis and evaluation. Based on this, the tourism resources of the nine municipalities in the study area have been identified, quantified and hierarchised.

The analysis of the businesses and organisations related to tourism has involved the structure of commercial accommodation, including but not restricted to hotels, analysing its recent development from a quantitative and qualitative point of view using the Valencian Tourism Agency's official statistical sources. The analysis has been completed with the tourist residential function rate, as this is an important indicator. It represents the potential non-commercial accommodation of the area and also allows us to discover the level of specialisation of a particular destination area deriving from the residential development linked to tourism.

The demand analysis has been carried out firstly by using the statistical data provided by the Vilafamés tourist office corresponding to 2015 and 2016 and the study made by the Valencian Tourist Agency at the end of 2015 on the profile of the international tourists who visit the Valencian region via Castellón Airport.

To study infrastructures and services, the results of a questionnaire have been applied using the Delphi method which, as will be detailed below, was also applied to the other elements of the tourism system.

So, once the analysis of the elements of the tourism system has been carried out, a questionnaire was designed and applied to experts in the tourism sector and those responsible for the local management of the study area, using the Delphi-type method already mentioned. The sample consisted of 36 questionnaires distributed in person and online. These included a total of 102 scale items based on the Likert 5 valuation and structured into two blocks of closed questions and one block of open questions. The first block of closed questions was aimed at elements of the tourism system and consisted of seven questions, broken down into sub-questions and items and corresponding to tourism resources; socio-economic and environmental factors; the tourism range; tourist demand; infrastructures and services; promotion, sales and marketing, finance and public management; and new technologies and information management. The second block of three closed questions was for tourism forward planning. The first was to evaluate the factors that could hamper tourism development in the MUZAC; the second concerned the actions considered fundamental for activating tourism development; and the third involved the sustainability of tourism development.

The block of open questions included five about the new trends and habits associated with demand; the obstacles and measures for tourism development; the identification of tourism planning problems and whether new laws are required; the respondents' view of their level of tourism competitiveness compared to their close competitors, and, finally, a general question about aspects of future tourism development.

The result of the analysis phase of the basic aspects and elements of the tourism system and the results of the questionnaires to the panel of experts made it possible to work on the second phase of the research, the integrated tourism diagnosis, which was systemised in a matrix using the SWOT technique.

It can be stated that the general aim of the research has been achieved in both its internal and external analyses. The positioning of the municipalities around Castellón Airport in socio-economic terms has been discovered, along with their predisposition for greater development of tourism. In fact, there is a considerable possibility of structured development, as it has been possible to deduce from their potential based on tourism resources. In addition, and from a regional perspective, the supramunicipal approach has been very well received in the nine municipalities making up the study area, in both the public and private sector, and this is an important factor for the sustainability of tourism development.

Based on the results of the analysis applied to the elements of the integrated tourism system, the interviews with the panel of experts and the diagnosis, we have been able to show various types of potential. These have been expressed in the proposed strategies, basically translated into the tourism resources possessed by the study area. However, some important weaknesses have been highlighted, such as the lack of structure in tourism products. Leaving resources to one side, the weaknesses have shown up in the range of regulated accommodation, public transport, services and lack of investment, among other aspects identified in the diagnosis. However, the opening of the airport and the current trends in the new demand both represent opportunities that can and must be taken by the municipalities in the surrounding area.

Because of this, the objectives must, firstly, help strengthen the basic demographic and socio-economic aspects, above all in better business coordination and association-building, greater awareness-raising in civil society, and the quality of the environment. The last of these has a much more interdisciplinary component, as it is oriented towards the sustainability of the region, translated into a line of action concerning the treatment of waste deriving from stock farming, the visual impact on the landscape and load capacity.

In the tourism system, in the specific case of tourist resources, the objectives must concern the development of the tourism potential of the natural, landscape and cultural heritage, cuisine and planned events to create competitive products. The aim of strengthening the range of regulated accommodation is also crucial, as there are great weaknesses in this, both in the number of places and, in qualitative terms, in the diversification of categories, as the only notable campsite places are on the coastal strip at Cabanes. To generate a product dynamic to improve the positioning of the study area in the tourism market, it is therefore necessary to increase the number of hotel establishments and to promote their quality. Along the same lines, the application of new technologies is a basic objective considering the weakness shown in the study area, particularly among businesses, in marketing the range of regulated accommodation, bars and restaurants and

shops. In relation to demand, the objectives are aimed at improving the positioning of the study area in the market, as there are no well-identified tourist products on offer; the commercial accommodation (hotels, hostels, rural accommodation, etc.) and non-commercial accommodation is not sufficiently well known; and there is very little monitoring of tourist satisfaction by private and public tourism agents. Another objective is to increase the range of leisure and additional activities, such as the network of footpaths. Concerning infrastructures, considering the regional positioning of Castellón Airport in the study area, an objective of improving the road connections of this inland area with the coast has been established, as well as improving public transport and increasing information services. Tourism promotion also needs to be boosted and encouraged, based on the potential of the products that can be generated by the study area. As has been discussed, these must be designed using a specific strategy for developing tourism products – nature-based tourism, cultural tourism, active tourism, ethnology, wine tourism, sports tourism, golf tourism and hiking – complemented by a sales and marketing strategy.

Finally, focusing on governance and participation in sustainable tourism management, a revitalisation strategy has been proposed in the form of programmes aimed at boosting public services; raising the awareness of private agents involved in the tourism industry in the study area; training, particularly of the social agents involved in tourism; and a cooperation and organisation programme including civil society in municipalities around Castellón Airport.