

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

TOURISM PERIPHERIES: THE ARTICULATION OF A METROPOLITAN BORDER DESTINATION. A CASE STUDY IN THE SOUTHEAST OF MADRID

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1. INTRODUCTION

The rural peripheries of the metropolitan borders are areas of tourism development still scarcely explored at European level compared to the tourist peripheries that are located in remote areas (Müller & Jansson, 2007). And yet, 50% of the European rural tourism offer refers to metropolitan spaces (Ehrlich, 2017). At present, there is renewed interest in these areas when considering potential destinations capable of rebalancing the tourist flows that saturate some urban centers. Among the reasons used are that they have a more favorable situation than their counterparts in remote areas due to the proximity and accessibility of larger markets and more dynamic sociodemographic characteristics, for example. These spaces offer in the metropolitan environment a territorial heritage characterized by its “rurality” (Weaver, 2016) and with high potential to serve as a basis for sustainable development (Troitiño Vinuesa & Troitiño Torralba, 2018). In addition, a context of change in rural tourism practices would place these spaces at the head of the tourist transition (Lane & Kastenholtz, 2015; Salvatore, Chiodo, & Fantini, 2018) and the opportunities of proximity tourism (Díaz Soria & Llurdés Coit, 2013).

In this context, the Community of Madrid presents a potentially favorable situation. In 2017 it received 16.5 million tourists, (not including day-trippers), of which 6.7 million correspond to trips made by tourists residing abroad, 15% more than the previous year. This represents 8% of the total international arrivals in the country, so that it ranks sixth among the 17 Autonomous Communities. The remaining 9.86 million, corresponds to trips made by residents in Spain, of which 3.16 reside in the Community of Madrid itself and perform 8.25 million overnight stays.

The Government of the Community of Madrid promotes in its Tourism Strategy 2016-2019 the objective of “*achieving a better geographical and temporal distribution of tourism, that is, limiting seasonality and achieving a balanced distribution of visitors*”

throughout the region” (Community of Madrid, 2016, p. 37). To this end, it promotes the creation of products and destinations that face the great challenge of articulating an attractive and competitive offer in collaboration with the main tourist municipalities, destinations and private agents in the sector. Several programs are defined in the framework of different public policies: tourism, rural development, heritage, and environment.

The objective of this research is to evaluate the main and most recent programs carried out under the tourism policy and rural development policy from the point of view of its capacity to generate cooperation in destination management. What is the territorial response to the arrival of tourism deconcentration programs? What is the capacity of actors to compose an extended tourist destination in this peripheral space? To answer these questions, it is intended to recognize i) what degree of enrollment the programs receive from the agents involved, and ii) what the structure is of the relationships deployed for the public management of tourism and how it is perceived by the local actors.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research is carried out in a rural tourist periphery of Madrid metropolitan border such as Comarca de las Vegas (a group of municipalities) in the southeast of the Community of Madrid. Its delimitation responds to different objectives (agricultural, tourism and rural development). Therefore, the configuration of a tourist destination starts from undefined limits. The development of this research is based on various sources of information and research techniques. In the first place, basic quantitative techniques of statistical description have been used to characterize the main features of the tourist profile of the area. Secondly, from 22 semi-structured interviews, a discursive database has been created to interpret the degree of enrollment of the interviewed agents in the programs analyzed. Finally, 18 of the 22 interviews have served to carry out an analysis of social networks as an approach to the public action system of tourism in the region. This method has the advantage of inferring the limits of tourist destinations from the relationships between its actors, thus leaving earlier “apriorisms” that had to do with political-administrative boundaries (Bouba-Olga, Carrincazeaux, & Coris, 2008; Carson et al., 2014; Scott, 2004).

3. RESULTS

3.1. The analysis of supply and demand draws tourism development at different speeds

The western / eastern duality to which the territorial organisation of the study area is subject is also tourist. Aranjuez is the great tourist attraction node. Of urban rank, it concentrates a heritage of universal value that favors the attraction of a greater flow of visitors and tourists, more international, and the creation of an accommodation offer of greater capacity than the rest of the area. The eastern sector is dominated by small towns

of rural range and of incipient tourist offer, although very reduced in the best of cases, and practically null in others. Chinchón is the great exception because, with just 5,000 inhabitants, it shows high tourist specialization indices.

3.2. . Enrollment in public programs varies depending on the tourism development of the municipalities

The eastern sector of the Comarca de las Vegas, with the exception of Chinchón, has not been a traditionally tourist territory, but the initiatives of development of this activity have come from the instruments of the Rural Development Policy such as the LEADER program and the programs of the Community of Madrid, more recent. In this way, the availability of public funds serves to finance an amalgam of actions (towards cultural heritage, gastronomy and wine, archaeological sites and cyclist routes). Our analysis show that in a context of marked agrarian character of the region, tourism encourages the interest of public administrations to a greater extent than of business sector. In 2013, an impulse by the Community of Madrid towards the structuring of the product through the articulation of local resources renews the interest in the tourism development of the LAG (LEADER managers). However, the new programs of the Community of Madrid are integrated into very different profiles of tourism development. The agents' enrollment in the programs varies depending on the tourism profile, so that, in the tourist centers consolidated as Chinchón, it is lower. It is in the "nested peripheries" (the peripheries of the peripheries) where the enrollment is greater because programs are perceived as more needed.

3.3. The structure of the tourism public action network has a low density and high polarization

The exploitation of the 18 semi-structured interviews conducted with agents representing public and private entities involved in the management and tourism development of the region has revealed the low rate of relationship between agents in the area. The graph has a density of 0.14. In the relationship graph, two central nodes stand out, the Community of Madrid and, to a lesser extent, the LAG. The relations are atomized by municipalities, especially in Chinchón, where a localized cluster stands out.

All the interviewed agents recognize that the overlapping of programs does not mean coordination between them. The LAG appears as the most legitimate agent to promote this cooperation; however, it leans towards the interests of the private sector away from tourism and closer to agriculture and agribusiness. Tourism development relations are built around the Community of Madrid and, outside of Chinchón, efforts are focused on obtaining the enrollment of the business sector. Nor do the relations between Chinchón and the rest of the municipalities prosper because tourism operates with relative independence from the public actions undertaken and, in addition, local policy focuses on the promotion of municipal events.

4. CONCLUSIONS

It has been observed how the intended extension of the tourist activity through the area, promoted by several public programs, is not yet supported at high levels by local agents. This weak enrollment is also materialized in a network of relations that is not very dense but very polarized by the Community of Madrid. The argument of this investigation raises how the political project has important limitations derived from the context of the periphery of the metropolitan border in which the space in question is located. The relations in this territory of high population density are less present than what traditional structural sociology would have told. This contributes to the dilemma posed to the contemporary states in terms of governance, as it needs to create networks to promote collective projects, but at the same time it sees its own programs obstructed by these same networks (Moscardo, 2013). The possibilities for a destination to prosper in this case study are difficult when faced with the weak cohesion of its internal links, the changing perimeters of public policies (and therefore financing perimeters), the polarization of the relations for the Community of Madrid and the weight of the agro-industrial activity in the region. To unlock this narrow public management network of tourism development, it is necessary: i) to connect the main attraction nodes, such as Aranjuez and Chinchón, with the environment taking into account that, trips in the Community of Madrid are structured based on one-day or weekend trips and ii) to conceive the metropolitan rural peripheries as specific areas within public policies such as the European Rural Development Policy, for example, with facilities when developing joint actions with the capital (for example in tourism promotion).