

EQUIPMENT AND FACILITIES IN SOME MUNICIPALITIES IN THE PROVINCE OF ALBACETE: A DIAGNOSIS IN ORDER TO DESIGN RURAL TOURIST PROMOTING POLICIES¹

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Equipment and facilities are built as a response to demands from the resident population. However, in many areas, the inhabitants are scarce and most of them are affected by the seasonality of tourism.

This article researches equipment as a tool for attracting tourism, especially the 'tourism of return' type, where the power of attraction is due to nostalgic reasons rather than traditional resources, which are sought by the traditional tourism. It explores opportunities for boosting tourism in rural areas seen as a recreational space or even to reside temporarily or permanently. We consider these resources in the province of Albacete through cartographic analysis.

The welfare state in Spain, which was consolidated during the political transition in the second half of the seventies, provided facilities among other things. The Moncloa Pacts of 1978 were a milestone. Equipment is considered to be an indirect salary which is required to the State in order to pay the cuts resulting from the crisis of 1973. Since the eighties, municipalities took many of the tasks demanded by citizens. The Local Government Act requires them to provide certain public services and the quality and variety as reference for residential attractive become more and more important.

Infrastructures and equipments have been considered as a necessity. The provision of facilities directly affects the population welfare, promoting positive effects on the economic development. The equipment is a major generator of activity and employment. It has a dual role: social welfare and economic development on one side and tourism development on the other.

Dotacional improving is an element of competitiveness in the territories. This is especially clear in certain cases, such as the traditional urban-rural dichotomy. Equipment is one of the most important factors that make rural population to stay in rural areas.

¹ This paper is part of the research project: 'Changing Territories. Geographical study of the settlements network in the urban-industrial corridor of south Castilla-La Mancha. Recent processes'. N°. PA108-0220-9844 Call for Projects of Scientific Research and Technology Transfer (2007-2010), by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Junta de Comunidades de Castilla-La Mancha.

Equipment is a factor of social segregation. As population grows and diversifies their equipment increases. If it decreases, though, then the per capita investment cost for similar services grows. The spatial organization of public services in rural areas is characterized as “Chirtalleriana logic”. This becomes much more evident in cultural and leisure facilities in areas with low population densities.

These ideas clash with two problems: the sparse population and the high cost associated to providing them with equipment, and the significant demographic fluctuations experienced in the holiday periods. This produces a vicious circle (few people, less investment in equipments, less people). In contrast, the recovery of resources and promotion generates a significant increase in tourism and improves communities’ quality of life.

The World Tourism Organization establishes heritage and resources. the first refers to goods that meet tourist needs; the latter refers to the means that make possible such activity. These are important elements in the welfare of communities and key in many aspects of citizens and tourists life. Structural resources are often paradoxically unappreciated, but they are indispensable. Tourists appreciate the positive aspects between the landscape, natural sites, cuisine, cultural heritage, and so on. However, infrastructure and equipment are usually underestimated. On surveys these are always appointed as needed to improve.

It is accepted that limited or lack of infrastructure also influences the growth of tourism. The facilities provide a plus in quality and competitiveness of the territories in reference to tourism. The most affected forms of tourism are those in which permanence in the destination is longer, i.e. second residence tourism. Most demand for second residences is concentrated in the domestic market. It has seen a significant growth in recent years. In 2003, 30% of tourists visiting Spain stayed whit relatives or friends. The case of Spanish citizens is even more representative, hovering around 65%. Some second residencies are located in urban neighbourhoods or in coastal areas which could also be considered urban areas because of the size of their population or economy. In other cases, tourism of second residence is set in rural areas, in places of natural beauty or evident heritage, or in areas that suffered from rural exodus in the second half of the last century. In recent years, thanks to raised income and the generalization and globalisation of leisure and tourism, the creation of a summer population has become usual, even forming summer settlements in many rural communities.

Occasionally, people leave the city searching for rest in rural areas, but seeking to keep their living conditions. The key element to transform secondary residence into principal is the presence of equipment, which ends the external dependence of rural communities. An area with equipment and infrastructure facilitates the establishment of second residences. The proliferation of second residences with a temporary population not residing in these areas routinely increases demand for public services.

The balance is complex. Considering facilities as a resource can make territories grow with a certain kind of tourism, underestimated to date. The motivations of residential tourists are different. They are owners of a house, making their permanence easier. The nostalgic attractive is more important than other characteristics of the tourism phenomenon as shown by statistics. The attachment and affection towards the land of origin is not blurred. It may cause a seasonal return at first and permanent or almost permanent at a later stage. Tourism, whatever its form, has led in recent years a revitalization of rural

economies because of the loss of competitiveness of agricultural activities. A reverse flow is possible. It began in the third quarter of the twentieth century in Spain. Today's migrations are from the city to the countryside. The migration was for work then; nowadays it is weekend trips and vacations from the city to the countryside.

Applied Geography studies two traditional fields of application: on one hand, the delimitation of functional areas or zoning of the territory from variables such as education, health, etc; on the other hand, the analysis of the allocation of public facilities in order to improve the deficit.

The study area corresponds to the province of Albacete. It is a representative territory of inland in Spain which suffered a demographic exodus. The county of Albacete has been excluded from the study as it has a completely different dynamic -demographical and economical. The province of Albacete has an area of 14,926 km². It is divided into 87 municipalities and 391 centres of population. The provincial capital is strategically located in the centre of the province. It has an important role as articulator. Its population reached 164,771 people in 2007. Most rural population is located in the south-western of the province, including the Sierras de Alcaraz and Segura. Other important rural area in the north-east is the Manchuela. Many territories suffered regressive population dynamics. This makes them to be potential territories of tourism of return, without neglecting other tourist types. The province of Albacete has three important environments of regulated tourism (Natural Park of the Lagunas de Ruidera, Sierra del Segura and Jucar valley).

The methodology we have followed consists of a careful analysis with a series of previously selected variables. Those variables were mapped and added to a final synthetic index. It has been represented in different levels of aggregations. Emphasis has been made in the spatial representation of the variables used.

The study of the facilities has been based on the '2005 survey of infrastructure and equipment'. Data from this survey have been implemented into Geographical Information Systems software in order to obtain spatial results. The regionalization through facilities is a necessary step for the articulation and management of the territory. The analysis makes it possible to get an accurate understanding of the territorial reality thanks to the high level of detail provided by the statistics and the mapping methodology employed. This form of mapping, with demographic variables tested for representing socioeconomic variables, ignores the necessary administrative structure for traditional choropleth maps. The use of maps is crucial to the analysis of planning and management services. Interpolation has been used as a method of mapping. Maps reveal themselves as a powerful tool of representation thanks to their ability to easily show the location and distribution of spaces, as well as the relationships among them.

Several variables have been selected to design a synthetic value of the complex and multifaceted phenomenon of tourism in general and of second residences in particular. Creating indexes heavily depends on an individual point of view. The indirect methods used to identifying the elements give value and determine the relative importance of each one. In our case, we have chosen an indirect method which involves a weighed aggregation of indicators that give a synthetic value. This method has several stages: identification and measurement of components in quantitative and qualitative terms, setting of a weight and combination of elements leading to a synthetic index.

The fundamental condition for the selection of variables was their nature and their relationship and positive effects on tourism of second residence, associated with the guarantee of similar levels of welfare benefits in the cities. The nominal rate of variables shows the state or quality of the different equipments. These variables have been weighed with a numerical value for comparison purposes. Categories have been established to be interpreted in ordinal terms (from better to worse).

The selected variables were organized into four main groups: '*basic supplies*' (water, electrical power and natural gas). Restrictions on ground water or energy are often uncomfortable of residents. Other noteworthy group equipment is '*medical facilities*'. Those provide health services to the population, especially elderly, whether they are residents or tourists. Senior citizens constitute a growing group in all areas, especially in rural inlands in Spain. The possibility of return of the retired population from cities can be added to this. Health care has been weighed with a similar weight given to the group of basic supplies. The Third type of variables, which is more eclectic, is called '*environment quality*'. It refers to the quality of the environment (wastewater, solid waste collection, with attention to collection in origin, lighting and street pavement). All these elements make the environment more comfortable for its citizens. The last group is '*new technologies*'. It consists of three variables focusing on telecommunications. They range from the traditional TV antenna reception to public Internet access. They are essential elements, both for residents and tourists. Each one has different variables analyzed and mapped for subsequent incorporation into the synthetic index

Other variables which were analyzed in the preliminary study, but that have finally been excluded were: parks, sports facilities, mail service, education and roads. We find them noteworthy, though. Accessibility, transport and communications network are a key factor that complement the analysis of the distribution of equipment. Analyzing this concept exceeded the goals set for this study. They have been considered in the study, however, but we have not formalized their analysis.