Tourist-Cultural Routes and Itineraries in the Official Tourism Portals of the Spanish Autonomous Communities

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1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural tourism is one of the tourism typologies that offers more possibilities today. Culture for the tourism sector represents a form of sustainable tourism, in which tourists are characterized by their high economic and cultural level. In addition, it enables the development of depressed areas, puts an end to seasonality, promotes employment and allows the enhancement of the heritage, traditions and customs of a region.

In recent years we have witnessed an increasing interest on the part of organisms and institutions for the creation of tourist routes and the declaration of cultural itineraries. These tourism realities have generated many definitions by organisms (ICOMOS, Council of Europe), and authors (Parrado del Olmo, 2003, López, 2006, Moreré, 2009, Hernández, 2011, Navalón, 2014), giving rise to a debate on two concepts that, although they share similarities, can be considered different.

In the dissemination of routes and itineraries, the Spanish autonomous communities play a fundamental role since, according to the 1978 Constitution, they must carry out the "promotion and management of tourism within their territorial scope" (Article 148.1.18a). Therefore, the autonomous governments have developed and promoted tourist routes and itineraries through publications, websites, creation of equipment and signage.

With the realization of this work is intended to study the concepts of routes and itinerary and on the other hand, know their use and dissemination by the CCAA in their official tourism portals.

2. OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this work is the analysis of the concepts of route and itineraries proposing a definition of synthesis of the terms under study. On the other hand, the treatment that both concepts have in the offer of routes and cultural itineraries carried out by the entities or institutions of tourist promotion of the Spanish Autonomous Communities will also be studied.

This second objective is specified in the following more specific purposes:

A) Know the information about routes and itineraries available on the web for users; it is the main objective of the research and the methodology pretending the understanding of the usefulness and structuring of the information.
B) To verify the offer of routes and cultural itineraries; is the initial step that will allow us to perform the following analyzes and verify if the websites promote these resources.
C) Check if a distinction is made between the concepts of route and itineraries; throughout the document we have studied the proposals and differences between both concepts. Therefore, at this point, it is necessary to understand the treatment that the Autonomous Communities do in the portals about the terms, and if they are presented according to their differences or particularities.
D) Offer a typology of cultural routes; It is intended to know the type of existing cultural routes, encompassing them in a classification model.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this work consists of two phases. Initially, we have read the existing bibliography (monographs, scientific articles and institutional documents), assuring us the theoretical basis necessary to know the state of the question about culture as a tourist product and the evolution, similarities and differences of the concepts of routes and itineraries. Subsequently, the research consisted in the systematic and structured search of the official tourism promotion websites of the CCAA. The sample includes all the Autonomous Communities with the exception of the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla.

This analysis has been carried out in the following phases:

a) Determine the routes that can be considered as cultural; for this we will account for both those that are classified by the CCAA, and those routes that can be considered cultural, as is the case of ethnographic, gastronomic, thematic, oenological and, ultimately, all those that propose the realization of cultural activities or use cultural resources.

b) Study the use of the concepts of routes and itineraries; based on our definition of synthesis, we will check whether the texts of the portals refer to the differences between the two resources.

c) Understand the dissemination of European cultural itineraries; by comparing the official list of cultural itineraries of the Council of Europe and the itineraries promoted in the portals.

d) Analyze the typological classifications of routes; with the use of their own model (Arcila, M. et al., 2015) the classifications of routes promoted on the websites have been crossed with the proposed route model.

e) To verify the commercial information about routes and itineraries; structuring the offer of hospitality, culture and leisure according to their level of detail.

4. RESULTS- DISCUSSION

The application of the methodology described above has yielded the following results:

A) The cultural routes are promoted in the totality of the CCAA; this is explained by the appreciation of the culture of the regions, the desire to provide added value to the tourist offer, to deseasonalise the sector, promote local-level development, strengthen cultural policies, recover patrimonial resources and promote understanding and understanding between the countries.

B) Confusion of the concepts of routes and itineraries; only 17.6% of the sample makes an adequate distinction of the terms. In this way it is observed that this confusion can be approached from the philological point of view, since the concepts of route and itinerary are treated as synonyms.

C) Poor promotion of European cultural itineraries; the offer of European cultural itineraries takes place in 13 of the 15 Autonomous Communities (86.6% of the sample), although only 3 of the 22 declared itineraries are advertised (Camino de Santiago, Ruta de Carlos V and El Legado Andalusí). We can understand this fact since the presence on the web is conditioned to the tourist possibilities of the itineraries, leaving in the background the cultural character of the same.

D) Absence of homogeneous route typologies; each institution elaborates its own classification without having present the conceptualizations offered by the different international organisms on this matter. Therefore, attempts to understand the type of cultural routes in comparison to a model differ from the classification of the CCAA.

E) Presence of commercial information; all the portals offer gastronomic, leisure products, etc., which demonstrate the possibilities that tourism offers as a strategic sector.

5. CONCLUSIONS

When analyzing the concepts of route and cultural itinerary we can conclude that they are two different concepts, although complementary. In general terms, it can be stated that the existing interest in the definition and differentiation of the concepts of routes and cultural itineraries is explained by the demand for them as tourist products.

The tourist routes are an essentially tourist element, that is to say, a product made using the territorial resources. The route is an invention being the important thing in it not so much the route, which is created with a tourist interest, but the natural, historical, ethnographic, geographic, etc, that composes and justifies it.

For its part, we understand that the cultural itinerary is a journey developed over time and that responds to human needs. The putting into value of the itinerary is the own route and not so much the elements that integrate it, although these last ones are a factor that allow to understand the reason of the existence of the itinerary. We must also take into account that when a cultural itinerary is enhanced from the tourist point of view it is called a cultural tourist itinerary. This terminology gives us to understand that not all the itineraries are susceptible of tourist utility since the same one will depend on the characteristics of the itinerary, the interest that causes and the possibilities of development that it generates.

Therefore, it can be concluded that both route and itinerary are concepts with many similarities but that differ in the intentionality of their creation, their use and their purpose.

The study of the promotion of routes and itineraries in the autonomous communities has provided data that show the need for improvement of official portals.

In the first place, it is necessary to structure the offer of routes and itineraries, adapting to the heritage of the territories. A lack of standardization and systematization is detected in the promotion of these resources and, therefore, the information offered to the user is incomplete.

Secondly, the results obtained show that European cultural itineraries, with some exceptions (Camino de Santiago), are not used as an instrument that facilitates differentiation in the destination markets. That is why it is considered necessary to present them as different elements to the routes, categorized independently.

Third, the lack of a homogeneous route typology makes it difficult for the user to navigate through the portals and the presentation of them is in some cases incomplete, since there is a lack of detailed information that includes some basic data of the routes.

Finally, we can say that despite the weaknesses present in the official tourism portals, it is clear that the proliferation of routes and itineraries are a sign of the advancement of cultural tourism.