

## THE INCLUSION OF THE LANDSCAPE ASPECTS IN THE TOURISM PLANNING. THE ANALYSIS OF THE ANDALUSIAN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM STRATEGY

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The subject and main objective of the present article is to analyze the treatment given to landscape in tourism planning. For this the research focuses on an analysis of the tourism planning instruments that have emerged from the Sustainable Tourism Strategy for Andalusia: the so-called Sustainable Tourism Programs. There are 31 Programs in all and their express aim is to “favor sustainable tourism development in Andalusia by means of a strategic planning system proposed by the territory (bottom-up and in partnership) and implemented by stakeholders in tourism in the area ...”.

Since the passing of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy for Andalusia in 2006, over 400 Andalusian municipalities have reaped the benefits of executing Sustainable Tourism programs that have entailed an investment of over 900 million Euros from autonomous regional (60%) and local (40%) funding. In short, these Programs can be stated to be the most important experience of tourist destination planning as far as outreach, mobilization of financial resources and involvement of public and private stakeholders is concerned, of all those applied in Andalusia to date, and without doubt also one of the most important in all Spain.

Taking the above-stated general objective (an analysis of the treatment afforded to landscape in tourism planning) as the starting point, a series of specific objectives have been set, which are as follows:

- To conduct a theoretical approach to the interrelationships that exist between landscape and tourism activity.
- To review the precedents that exist regarding the joint treatment of landscape and tourism in autonomous community policies in Andalusia.
- To propose a methodology for the analysis of the treatment of landscape in tourism planning.

- To apply the proposed methodology to the Programs that have emerged from the Sustainable Tourism Strategy for Andalusia and draw conclusions as to how said treatment can be focused.

To achieve the first specific objective, this research draws from the definition of landscape as stated in the European Landscape Convention (2000) and emphasizes the concept of landscape as the result and image of tourism destinations' territorial quality. There is no doubt in this regard that landscape can be a core factor in the appeal and competitiveness of a tourist destination, especially when its characteristic features (landscape character) and differential elements (landscape uniqueness) are maintained.

In other respects, the article does not neglect to consider the conflictive relationships that can be observed between landscape and tourism (basically the negative impacts that tourism activity produces on the landscape of coastal, urban and rural destinations) and it supports the need for intervention or action to be taken with regard to these conflicts through the incorporation of landscape criteria and objectives into the tourist destination planning instruments.

With regard to the second specific objective, the research analyzes the joint treatment of landscape and tourism in some of the Andalusian Administration's other planning instruments, such as the Sustainable Tourism Master Plan for Andalusia (2008-2011) and the Andalusian Landscape Strategy (2012), and interesting conclusions are drawn for the subsequent analysis of the Sustainable Tourism Programs.

As to the research methodology, this was basically qualitative in type and focused on a comprehensive analysis of landscape-related content in the 31 Sustainable Tourism Programs under study. This analysis took into account the landscape content in both the programs' information and diagnostic evaluation sections, and also in the sections that included the proposals and dealt with finances. All the mined information on landscape was transferred to files (one per program) in order to synthesize, sort and analyze the information more easily.

The most outstanding results of the analysis, organized into four subject areas, are as follows: the amount of attention paid to the landscape in the information and program diagnostic evaluation sections, the most usual landscape content in these same two sections, the attention paid to landscape in the proposals section and, finally, landscape actions and projects to which the most financial resources are devoted.

With respect to the degree of attention paid to landscape in the analyzed information and program diagnostic evaluation sections, three types of document can be distinguished according to the consideration and treatment that they afford landscape:

- a) Programs with no or scant reference to landscape or limited landscape content. There was a higher number of these than was initially anticipated, comprising almost a third of all the analyzed documents.
- b) Programs with an essentially descriptive focus or treatment of landscape, which comprise half of the analyzed documents.
- c) Programs that present a sophisticated concept, and provide a characterization and a detailed analysis of landscape. These are in a tiny minority, as barely four documents reach this level of treatment of landscape.

The following stand out with regard to the most usually observed landscape content in the programs' information and diagnostic evaluation sections:

- a) The usual result in the analyzed programs is that there is implicit recognition of the landscape values of the territory that is the object of the planning, with special emphasis placed on aspects such as the wealth and diversity of the landscapes in the territory.
- b) References to the unique, special or even exceptional nature of the landscape in the area that the program is intended to address are also relatively common.
- c) One part of the content of the programs that is hardly ever missing is the consideration of landscape as a tourism resource, with the consequent inventorying of landscape resources for their exploitation by tourism.
- d) In direct relation to what has just been stated, it is no surprise that some plans propose the promotion of new types of tourism in the area in question based on the tourism resources that are detected and inventoried.
- e) In some programs landscapes can be observed to be considered a quality factor as well as a factor in the destination's tourism competitiveness, especially in places where greater attention is placed on landscape-related aspects and which recognize the increasingly evident relationship between landscape quality and tourism success.
- f) In other respects, there is no lack of specific references to urban landscape in the programs, both in terms of the landscape values that the urban environment presents, and in terms of the conflicts produced in said environment as a result of tourism development.
- g) Finally, a SWOT analysis can be observed in almost all the analyzed programs to identify Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats regarding the relationship between landscape and tourism activity.

Concerning the attention and treatment given to landscape in the proposals section and in the financial programming in the analyzed documents, three types of program can be distinguished:

- a) First, there are programs in which financial allocations to landscape actions and projects exceed the attention paid to landscape in the information and diagnostic evaluation sections. This is the case in the majority of the analyzed documents (almost 60%).
- b) At the other extreme are programs which, despite offering a sophisticated conceptualization and a detailed characterization of the landscape, devote few financial resources to landscape actions and projects. In these cases it is evident that, despite the discourse of the documents, there is little real commitment to or engagement with the landscape (25% of the analyzed plans).
- c) Finally, some programs are at a midway point between these two positions, and devote financial resources to landscape actions and projects on a par with the attention paid to landscape in the information and diagnostic evaluation sections (slightly over 15% of plans).

To complete this presentation of the article's main results, reference will be made to the types of landscape actions and projects to which most financial resources have been devoted by the analyzed programs. These are as follows:

- a) The heading under which the greatest financial resources are allocated by a long way is the so-called "embellishment of the surroundings and access routes to resources of tourism interest", with almost 10% of the total budget of the programs (just over 87 million Euros). A range of actions and projects come under this heading, from improvements to access routes and thoroughfares in towns and villages, to the recovery of architectural and traditional urban elements, including the illumination of buildings and urban settings, removing wiring and cabling, and burying urban waste containers underground.
- b) Second in order of funding, reference should be made to the heading "deployment of tourist routes", with a total allocation of over 25 million Euros (almost 3% of the programs' total budget).

This is a type of action aimed at creating tourism products that consists of designing routes or itineraries around resources of natural, historical, cultural or any other type of interest that make it easier to interpret the landscape in which they are located, whether this landscape is natural, rural or urban.

- c) The third type of landscape action to which large sums of financial resources are allocated in the analyzed programs is what is referred to as "landscape recovery and treatment". This is, precisely, one of the few that expressly include the word "landscape" in the title. Almost 17 million Euros were allocated to this in all, which is almost 2% of the plans' overall budget.

Of the six stated thus far, this is the action that is least well defined, as a very wide range of actions come under this heading; in short, it includes any landscape-related project that does not come under any of the other headings, where the content is more clearly defined. Projects under this heading include creating or improving recreational and leisure areas, parks on the urban periphery, green corridors, urban parks and gardens, seafront promenades, riverside walks, and treating degraded spaces near natural or populated areas, etc.

- d) Another heading under which a major amount of the financial resources is allocated to landscape actions is that which is aimed at the "creation and recovery of landscape observation points", with a total investment of almost 12 million Euros (1.26% of the analyzed programs' overall budget).

The objective of this line of action is clearly defined in the wording of the heading itself and is aimed at both the creation of new observation points and the improvement of existing observation points. The majority of the analyzed plans envisage some proposal of this type, due to the special utility of these facilities for observing, enjoying and interpreting the landscape.

- e) "Adding value to green routes" is another of the actions that most clearly involves the landscape, as it entails recovering and refurbishing the routes of former railway lines (and other types of tracks and lanes) to be used for sport, recreational and educational, and, to a large extent, tourism activities. A total of 11.6 million Euros has been allocated to this action in the analyzed documents, 1.26% of the programs' total budget.

- f) The last significant type of action as far as financial importance is concerned is aimed at “setting up and improving the tourist signage system”, and to this 8.8 million Euros have been allocated, 1% of the programs’ total budget. Almost all the programs set aside economic resources under this heading as problems are observed to exist that are common to most of the areas subject to planning, such as inexistent or insufficient signage, an inconsistent design, the existence of signs that are confusing, their visual impact, etc.

Finally, the following can be highlighted as the main conclusions obtained during the course of conducting the research:

- The close yet, at the same time, conflictive relationship that exists between tourism and landscape, in which the latter constitutes the most important resource for the development of tourism activity, and is also a core factor in the competitiveness of tourism destinations in light of the new trends in demand.
- Despite the foregoing, the negative impacts of tourism activities and facilities on landscape have evidently become widespread, along with the very scant tradition of addressing the topic of landscape in the planning of destinations, either to profit from its potential as a resource or to prevent or reduce any impacts.
- However, in recent years and most especially since the application of the commitments that the European Landscape Convention has laid down for signatory States (Spain officially ratified the Convention in 2008), landscape has increasingly been considered to be a subject that public Administrations need to address, and this trend is slowly, but surely, being incorporated into tourism planning.
- The Andalusian Autonomous Community Administration’s tourism policy has incorporated the landscape into its planning documents since the past decade, albeit with high and low points caused by the crisis in the financial budget; with the text emphasizing the most significant precedents that culminated in the Andalusian Sustainable Tourism Strategy, on which the research focuses.
- It can be seen from the methodological point of view that, despite the inherent difficulties in the limited definition with which the concept of landscape is still used in administrative language, with a methodology such as that proposed here it is possible to reach definite conclusions as to how landscape should be incorporated into the various phases of tourism planning: the intensity of treatment, the focuses used, preferred thematic content, the amount of financial sources allocated, and the typology of the specific actions proposed.
- Finally, and by way of conclusion for the future, the incorporation of the landscape in tourism planning would undeniably appear to be a trend that is irreversible in the medium-long term. This is not only a result of the implementation of the legislation to which European States have committed themselves, but is also due to the intrinsic requirements of the tourism sector, which cannot ignore the major importance of landscape quality as a factor for destinations’ competitiveness in a scenario of growing competition between destinations. This reality opens up a window of opportunity for the use of tourism, a sector that is a demonstrated generator

of revenue and employment, to establish itself, along with the heritage, esthetic and identity values of the landscape, as a major argument to support the adoption of public policies to promote the conservation and improvement of territories' landscape quality.