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Cross-border tourism: Spain and Portugal, a common destination

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**CROSS-BORDER TOURISM:
SPAIN AND PORTUGAL, A COMMON DESTINATION**

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RESUMEN

Un nuevo enfoque del análisis sobre la frontera entre España y Portugal, con un territorio básicamente rural, precisa de un debate sobre los problemas del desarrollo local, entre los que se encuentran los efectos de su configuración como un destino turístico conjunto. Se presenta aquí el análisis de varios elementos para aquel debate y de los recursos comunes que pueden definir esta área como un destino turístico conjunto. Se aporta igualmente un modelo de diseño que puede servir para la planificación de este territorio con la valoración de aquellos recursos.

Palabras clave: destino turístico conjunto, territorio fronterizo, diseño del destino

ABSTRACT:

A new approach to the analysis of the border between Spain and Portugal, a basically rural territory, requires a debate about local development problems, among which we can find the effects of its configuration as a common tourist destination. This paper presents an assessment of several elements for that debate, and the common resources that can define the area as a common tourist destination. A design model is also provided, which can enable territory planning through the appraisal of those resources.

Key words: common tourist destination, cross-border territory, destination design

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper summarizes some of the main proposals and conclusions of the study *Dinámica, situación actual y análisis prospectivo del “turismo de frontera” (2000-2020), como motor de desarrollo en Galicia (Dynamics, current situation and prospective analysis of “cross-border tourism” (2000-2020), as a driving force for Galicia's development)*, project approved by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness in 2011, which had as its general objective the evaluation of the tourist potential of the analyzed territory, carrying out case studies as preliminary elements for a Cross-Border Tourism Strategic Plan.

The first diagnosis was very conclusive: natural resources, culture and heritage, made up a common territory formed by Spanish and Portuguese municipalities, probably one of the European borders with more common elements, having shared military conflicts and social and economic relations throughout five centuries.

From this perspective, it is important to emphasize that the goal of this project in the presented analysis is focused on a spatial interpretation of the use of common resources. The initial hypothesis considers the border a common natural and cultural itinerary, establishing an interrelation between territory and resources to identify as many positive externalities as possible for the design of the destination.

Producing a model for that design and putting forward accessibility elements complete the goals of this paper, which intends to provide assessment tools and specific proposals for the current reconfiguration process of the entire border with the creation of Euroregions, from the vision and the orientation towards an efficient and socially rational use of those common resources.

2. CROSS-BORDER TOURISM AS A CULTURAL ITINERARY

Since the decade of the 90's, cultural itineraries represent a qualitative change in the idea of heritage preservation and use. Gradually, the “monument” notion has been expanded, including not only an isolated piece of art, but also centers, neighborhoods, historic villages and cultural landscapes as heritage categories. Furthermore, the same has applied to the consideration of a place or group of places as an economic resource.

The conceptual debate started when the Way of Santiago de Compostela was declared a World Heritage Site by the UNESCO in 1993. Not everyone in academia accepted this decision, and several members of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), expressed their opinions, not totally opposing it, but laying out

series of univocal and well-defined concepts regulating the future use of the heritage site.

Campesino (2004:53) affirms that “los equipamientos culturales son contemplados hoy como elementos de vertebración urbana y de integración social” (*cultural resources are seen today as elements for urban vertebration and social integration*), although several years earlier, in the I Congreso Internacional de Itinerarios Culturales (*1st International Congress on Cultural itineraries*), Villar and Quintas (2001) admitted the difficulties for a Bien de Interés Cultural (*Site of Cultural Interest*) to have a relevant role in the economic revitalization of a city, such as Cuenca's fortified center, declared Conjunto Histórico (*Historic Site*) by the Spanish Community of Castilla-La Mancha in 1996. In both cases, incentives for setting up companies that provided those resources with economic value were suggested.

The debate was settled again by ICOMOS, ratifying in 2008, during its 16th General Assembly, the Charter on Cultural Routes, where, after stressing that this concept implies a value as a whole which is greater than the sum of its parts, and defining its context as natural, historical and cultural factors, it emphasizes that a Cultural Route “can be used to promote an activity of social and economic interest of extraordinary importance for stable development” (Section 4. Relationship to Tourist Activities).

Although this research line seems slightly diffuse when reviewing literature, a cultural itinerary is currently a valuable tool to enable local development, as long as its municipalities generate a common strategy and prepare horizontal cooperation networks for companies, as a base for that strategy. For the specific case of the analysis of cross-border itineraries, several approaches can be found at an international level, ranging from a very interesting general description in the work of Caccomo (2007) and a study of the territory between Germany and Holland (Westerheide, 2009), to the conflicts derived from the common tourist use of border resources, which can generate identification problems in the affected social communities (Mouille, 2003; Baducci, 2011).

Nevertheless, we can barely find studies about the Spanish-Portuguese border, besides the ones by the members of the research team that produced the study on which this paper is based (Padin, 2004; Campesino, 2008; Pardellas, 2009, 2013). In any case, the subject is relevant enough to hope for greater research interest in the future.

3. THE SPANISH-PORTUGUESE BORDER AS A COMMON SPACE

The Iberian Spanish-Portuguese border is the oldest one in Europe, ratified by the Alcañices Treaty (September 12th 1297), the longest one (1,234 km) and the largest one (138,000 sq. km), although it is also the less populated (5.8 million inhabitants).

From a geographical point of view, some authors (Campesino, 2013) affirm that the Iberian Border has been the most absurd one in two thousand years of shared history, particularly taking into account that, while that border existed, and despite it, social and cultural relations, and even clandestine economic exchanges (contraband), took place. As a consequence, nowadays the border is a historic, elastic and humanized strip of territory, with close socio-economic and cultural relations, several defensive military constructions, and defined by waterways and roadways which, throughout time, have structured settlements, relations and activities.

For all those reasons, and analyzing existing resources from the double perspective of their intrinsic tourist value and the possibility of elaborating attractive products and offers for different demand sectors, we can conclude that, for the majority of the territory, characteristics are common to both sides of the border, enabling the construction of a space defined as a common tourist destination. Those can be subdivided in differentiated and singular space-destinations, according to the features of each area (the climate and cultural physiognomy of the Miño river is not obviously the same as the Guadiana river, for instance).

4. THE BORDER AS DESTINATION: NUCLEI, ATTRACTIONS AND ACCESIBILITY

The models and approaches for space and tourist destination analysis are varied, deriving from the contributions made since the 80's and, particularly, in Europe, after the approval of the ERDF. Although the European Commission does not have competencies to regulate tourism, a high number of projects, presented to request regional development funds, had this activity as a base. In parallel, literature about destination planning has outstandingly grown, with important critical assessments, both about resource use models, and planning instruments (Campbell and Fainstein, 1996).

In this context, Dredge's work (1999) provides an interesting theoretical base, which synthesizes and restructures all of the above, with a proposal including three main assumptions as a base for its model: that tourist-generating markets and

destination regions are separate geographical entities, that the complex and multi-scale nature of destinations requires a hierarchical but flexible structure, and that the planning and design model includes a destination region, tourist-generating markets, nuclei or attraction nodes, circulation routes and gateways (1999:403).

Taking into account the information in the authors' study, it is possible to generate an assessment model for the entire border between Spain and Portugal as a common tourist space, using mainly the contributions above. This enables its application to the specific cross-border destination region, where leisure tourism would be the main activity, above other traveling reasons, such as business or visiting family or friends.

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