

## NEW STRATEGIES FOR CULTURAL TOURISM PLANNING:

### *Quality and creativity as tools for development*

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**Abstract.** The overexploitation of many cultural properties, and, at the same time, the lack of use and fast degradation of certain others, points out a significant imbalance in the cultural tourism market. Based on international tourism statistical data and specific case studies, this paper will analyze in depth the causes of this imbalance and their impact on heritage protection. Our aim is to help mitigate this situation by proposing new strategies for cultural tourism planning to enhance the sustainability of this activity. The following issues will be addressed:

- The need to analyze not the quantity, but the quality of heritage tourism and the mechanisms of its distribution and marketing.
- The study of the motivations and characteristics of heritage tourism consumption, going beyond the numbers to examine how they can contribute to a greater number of properties to benefit from the positive effects of this activity.
- The development of strategies that help to resolve the pressures of mass tourism in heritage by means of:
  - The strict respect of the carrying capacity and management of visitor flows
  - And the promotion of the creativity in the management of cultural destinations, integrating tourism and heritage in their cultural life and promoting intangible values that add quality to the tourist and cultural experience.

Our goal is to demonstrate how the overall analysis of these issues may improve the integration between development and conservation of heritage, not only to meet the challenges of emerging trends in cultural tourism, but mainly to keep heritage alive, diversify its uses and enhance its ability to improve the quality of life of the contemporary society.

### 1. Introduction

Heritage is increasingly being seen as a resource not only for cultural promotion, but also for social and economic sustainable development and well-being of populations, especially through its use as one of the main attractions of cultural tourism market.

The increasing numbers of international tourism arrivals, (WTO, 2001; UNWTO, 2008; WTTC, 2008) and the money visitors spend on admission fees, souvenirs, transport, food and accommodation contributes billions every year to the global economy and employs millions of people directly and indirectly (Timothy and Boyd 2003; 2006), so the efforts of both the public and private sector to attract tourism to cultural properties, and their impact in heritage management and meaning, should not be surprising. However, the optimistic data of international tourism must not lead to errors: Although visitors definitely contribute to heritage maintenance, the growth of cultural tourism has also changed the pattern of heritage enjoyment -turning it into consumption- and has favoured its economic dimension, often in detriment of its ability to fulfil the intangible needs of

beauty, harmony and culture that are only satisfied when cultural properties are visited under appropriate conditions.

Noting this general framework, a common goal of cultural heritage protection and tourism management that deserves wider dissemination is the need to promote diverse and sustainable multi-use of cultural properties by means of the strict respect of the carrying capacity and control of visitor flows and the promotion of creativity in cultural destinations' management.

The current status of the meeting of these principles will be discussed in this paper, basing in recent scientific literature and through the analysis of heritage tourism management, specially focusing on the progress made in the Alhambra and Generalife World Heritage Site.

### 2. Quality instead of quantity

The last two centuries have witnessed an increase in the homogenization of tourist sites around the

world. Everything, from historic monuments to exotic destinations, has been redesigned and packaged for mass consumption and, as a result, there has been a reconceptualization of heritage sites' history and meaning: some have been preserved and enhanced while others left to decay. This suggests that tourism is an activity with historical, social and cultural consequences much broader than those usually emphasized, that affects our understanding and perception in a way not only very intense, given the age of this activity, but also scarcely controlled (Lasansky and McLaren, 2006).

According to Valery Patin (2005: 5), today 70% of visitors to European heritage landmarks are national or international tourists. This fact provides us with an accurate sign of the enormous weight of tourism in management and decision making regarding heritage demand. Given most visitors' focus on major monuments, it also means that when we deal with the exponential growth of cultural tourism we should rather refer to mass cultural tourism, which is undoubtedly the segment of this market that has experienced an unprecedented development in recent decades, as opposed to the more culturally motivated and personal heritage tourism.

Therefore, it must be emphasized that cultural tourism gradually gives way to the tourist culture within which, in relation to cultural heritage, there are activities and practices such as media coverage, group visits led by tour operators, the obsession with photographing places, buying souvenirs, etc. Noting this fact is important since visits to cultural heritage do not always respond to conscious or culturally motivated acts and because the increasing number of visits to heritage does not always mean that the benefits provided by heritage massive use are higher or that the quality of the experience has improved as compared to other moments in the history of tourism.

In fact, to weigh the real positive impacts that the development of cultural tourism brings to society, the total number of annual visitors is an important quantitative factor but rarely provides qualitative information: Although economic benefits can be important in those monuments that charge an entry, there are other sites (although they are becoming a minority), such as historic cities, great religious monuments or landscapes in which the entrance is free, and where such benefits do not depend on the number of tourists but rather on the characteristics of their stay and behaviour as consumers of products and services only secondarily related to heritage. As has been stressed since at least the late seventies (Kadt,

1979), the income attributable to the tourist use of heritage depends mainly on the induced spending visitors do in the local and territorial context of cultural properties, so a greater number of visitors does not always result in an immediate increase in the resources devoted to heritage protection and enhancement.

Summing up, if in the eighties and nineties the growing numbers of heritage tourists and the optimistic economic consideration of culture and heritage promised great development chances and clear benefits, we have now reached a turning point, consisting on the need to analyze not the quantity but the quality of heritage tourism and the mechanisms of its distribution and marketing. And this because is still quite evident that its growth is spectacular in relation to world famous and nationally known heritage assets and more modest beyond usual tourist circuits (AA.VV., 2007, Villafranca and Chamorro, 2007a, Salazar, 2010).

This may be provoked by two possible reasons: or marketing policies are not the best to fit current heritage needs, or it is very difficult, if not impossible, to change old tourism trends that determine that most of the tourists consider visiting the same cultural heritage landmarks. This situation, stalled for decades, points out a significant imbalance in the tourism market that have negative effects on both crowded and under-utilized cultural properties, stressing the need to analyze the motivations and characteristics of heritage tourism consumption, going beyond the numbers to examine how they can contribute to a greater number of properties to benefit from the potential positive effects of this activity.

### 3. The imbalance of heritage market and the characteristics of tourist heritage consumption

Heritage tourism is a key niche of the global tourist activity, not only because of the potential of heritage to naturally stress local particularities in an increasingly globalized world, but also because of its ability to attract different visitors and provide with diverse cultural experiences.

Culture and tourism markets and public and private investors are well aware of the commercial opportunities that this entails and experts in selling foreign assets reworked as unique and familiar products. In fact, according to Salazar (2010: 133), tourism marketers capitalise on the following assumption: "If all places on earth and their inhabitants have a culture, and if this culture is necessarily unique to a specific place and people, then its transformation into heritage cultural

assets should produce an exclusive product reflecting and promoting a distinctive place or group identity”.

Despite the emergence of this trend to enhance heritage as the most visible resource of local distinctiveness, heritage tourism imbalance is usually related to the tourist previous ideas of cultural heritage and cultural tourism destinations and to the characteristics of heritage consumption behaviour by tourist industry and individuals.

As Ashworth (2007: 36) has stressed, most of heritage tourist consumption is highly selective and tend to focus on unique, dramatic, spectacular and universally recognizable assets. Due to this simplification, heritage properties converted into tourist products are so quickly consumed that even the most famous cities with heritages and cultural activities well established and known in leisure international markets, only get to retain visitors for two or three days. Although stays can be extended by the enhancement of new heritages, the establishment of networks linking heritage properties and offering new cultural experiences and events, there is a saturation level of tourists, both in terms of their ability to spend and remain in one place, which, according to Ashworth, is also quickly reached.

As a result, one of the largest perceived gaps in this field is that many heritage resources do not meet its social and economic potential due to the traditional favoring of those properties whose exoticism, resistance and unique character can attract a large audience in a highly competitive market. This provokes the unavailability to fulfill the interests of many heritage potential users and reinforces the imbalance between the current supply of heritage and the potential demand which is actually satisfied. This inconsistency is found as well in the fact that along with mass cultural tourism, also tourists with more specific and atomized cultural interests increase (albeit at a slower rate), and, consequently, the heritage tourism market segments. Although this should imply that the range of heritages offered found a demand in some of the diverse cultural tourism niches, they often fail in this sense, since these audiences are much smaller and can not maintain by themselves the whole economy of a particular place.

#### **4. Possible solutions to improve tourism effects on cultural heritage**

To improve the impact of cultural tourism is first necessary to restore the immaterial values of heritage, regardless of its economic effects. Only when these values are completely assumed by all actors concerned

in heritage and tourism promotion will be possible to correct inconsistencies, such as that the notoriety of some properties brings to ignore others who may be equally valuable to society, but do not generate immediate economic benefits. In fact, those benefits could be important if cultural properties were regarded not as miracle (and improbable) solutions to development, but as invaluable and unique resources, able to improve the quality of live of local people and therefore to attract new investments and sustainable cultural and economic activities in the long-term (Gravari-Barbas and Jacquot, 2008).

The lack of a complete consciousness about heritage values and the persistence of gaps in heritage use and enjoyment also stress the need of a networking between heritage managers, public authorities and tourist operators able to harmonize the enhancement and protection of the full diversity of heritage values and assets with the enrichment of visitors experience and the improvement of the welfare of local people.

To design strategies with this aim is very important to internalize that one of the most positive aspects of the tourist use of heritage is that the activation of their resources, by their very non renewable nature, demands a responsible use as an indispensable condition for this activity to persist over time. And that the presence of heritage throughout all territories, including those areas or regions that find difficulties to generate or maintain their development, characterize heritage as an asset that, at least potentially, can become a stimulus for the diversification of economy. In this sense, one the most positive effects of heritage tourism, that should also be promoted, is its ability to foster the conservation of hitherto underutilized properties (such as industrial, contemporary, vernacular and rural heritage), and the territorial dimension with which tourism entails heritage. This dimension helps reviving its values in space and time and encourages the creation of routes, networks and creative management models pursuing prolong the stay of visitors, restrain over loading of some properties, promote the enjoyment of certain others and improve the distribution of its economic and social benefits.

The usefulness of such a broad and shared approach has been proven, amongst many other international statistical data, in the international cultural tourism surveys organized by ATLAS since 2004, which show how dissemination of heritage values and positive economic effects of tourist use of heritage are significantly higher in cultural sites that have promoted several heritage resources, attractions and events than

in those that tend to concentrate on one or few of them.

According to the World Tourism Organization (OMT, 2001), the success of destinations that have encouraged a variety of approaches to heritage points out that heritage tourism gradually gives way to tourism combining heritage, culture and creativity, being the latter a key factor given its much more fluid and changeable dimension.

This organization also notes that immaterial aspects of culture and heritage are becoming increasingly important to differentiate heritage destinations and attract tourism, as consumers and visitors increasingly value intangible elements such as the spirit and lifestyle of a place. The emergence of these tendencies stresses the usefulness of promoting intangible values that add quality to the tourist and cultural experience and fostering the extraordinary potential of heritage within the economy of experience, in which products competition depends on their ability to raise new feelings and emotions (Martínez, 2011).

Among the various models for the promotion of heritage that meet these characteristics, stand out all those activities which, taking it as a backdrop and inspiration engine, provide with a link between tradition and contemporary creation, offering new dimensions to heritage enjoyment and cultural industries based in heritage values, including the reinvention of traditions, such as gastronomy, the creation of events, cultural and music festivals in heritage properties, as well as the use of media and design, which are indispensable to rework the city's international image and attract and retain specialized and individual tourists.

##### 5. Towards a management based on carrying capacity and quality of experience

Besides the promotion of the previously mentioned strategies, to improve the impacts of the tourist use of heritage is very important to assume that management of visitor flows can not be determined by the potential demand, but must be based on:

- Full respect of the carrying capacity;
- Conservation priorities imposed by those responsible for the protection and management of cultural properties;
- The need to maintain the quality of visitor experience.

These issues were discussed in depth in a seminar held at the Alhambra (Granada, Spain) in February 2006, which discussed the different approaches to tourism impacts of some properties inscribed on the World Heritage List. Among them, the Great Wall of China, where the main challenge was the control and monitoring of visitors

flows through a management plan, which had lacked so far despite being one of the most visited heritage sites in the world; Pompeii, that receives more than 10.000 visitors daily and had launched a virtual tour of areas that are not accessible for conservation reasons; or Stonehenge, that had carried out a project to replace the highway that crossed the site, given its negative impact on its conservation conditions and environment. (Villafranca and Chamorro, 2007a).

The final result of this Seminar was the drafting of a Declaration that included some interesting and innovative proposals, such as the need for nominations to the World Heritage List and already inscribed properties to periodically report on the number of visitors, their growth forecast and how this will be faced from management. In our opinion this requirement should be mandatory, given the exponential multiplication of the number of visitors caused by nominations and the many heritage sites which are not prepared to counter and avoid their possible negative impacts, turning the World Heritage statement, which theoretically should ensure the international shared protection of properties, in a threat to the outstanding universal values that led to their nomination.

Despite the large theoretical consensus on the importance of these indicators, unfortunately we have to emphasize that there is a persistent conflict between heritage managers and private tourism stakeholders on whether or not to use them, which has meant that only specific cases, such as those mentioned above and a few others, including the cities of Oxford, Bruges, Venice, Carcassonne, Luxembourg, the gardens and palaces of Versailles and Berlin-Brandenburg, and the Alhambra and Generalife have implemented strategies for the management of visitor flows based on the strict respect of carrying capacity.

Finally, the Declaration also stressed the need to recover the emotions and knowledge that should be provided by the meeting between man and heritage and suggested the following strategies to improve the quality of experience and the relationship between cultural properties and tourism impacts:

- Establish stronger management structures appropriate to the specificities of each property and able to encompass the macro and micro scale.
- Focus on heritage contents of interpretation, while allowing individual visitors live their own "unguided" experience.
- Deepen the global perception of the monument and its cultural and landscape environment.
- Cooperate with all stakeholders involved in the enhancement of heritage and tourism, offering



alternatives to facilitate both management and visits through various types of tickets, public transport, heritage networks, etc.

- Control heritage's image through its legal protection and foster its economic sensible use as a new resource that must reverse in conservation.

## 6. The Alhambra and Generalife management approach

The Alhambra and Generalife World Heritage Site, which is the most visited cultural property in Spain, offers a very remarkable example of the positive effects of creative, diverse and sustainable approaches to heritage, which have been able to restrain the overloading of the monument and the pressures of mass tourism.

The key to success has been based on the establishment of measures designed to balance visitor access rights with the maintenance and preservation of the Alhambra, on the development of a modern protection concept, that go beyond the historical-artistic area of the site to encompass the preservation and enhancement of its surroundings and landscaping dimension, and on a new and dynamic view of the relations between the Alhambra and the City of Granada, that has expanded the present tourist offer and interpretations of the monument.

Especially outstanding among these initiatives, are the studies that have established the carrying capacity of the monument as the main guideline for the current management of visitor flows. Most of these measures were adopted as early as 1993, within the Special Plan of Protection and Interior Reform of the Alhambra and Aljares (AA. VV., 1999), and were prompted by the ever-increasing number of visitors and the desire to minimize their negative impact on the site and on the quality of the experience, closely linked to the sensory and aesthetic perception of the monument, which had progressively deteriorated due to overcrowding. This Plan served to regulate access by setting specific time slots, offering the possibility of reserving tickets in advance, limited the number of people allowed at the same time in Nasrid palaces (the most fragile area of the palatine city), while extending both visiting hours and the type of entries, and has also expanded cultural activities and visitor studies. These measures have provided several benefits to both the tourist industry and the monument conservation: They put an end to the seasonal nature of the visits, allowed prior planning of the visits to the Alhambra, provided the convenience of regulated access, personalized attention in a number of languages, improved the distribution of various

types of visitor and increased the economic impact of the monument on the whole of the city of Granada (Villafranca and Chamorro, 2007b).

Similarly, the fostering of the scenic dimension of the palatine city has led to the formulation of a new integral model of strategic planning, culminating in the Alhambra Master Plan for 2007-2015, which is structured through four strategic lines: preservation-conservation, sustainability, cultural landscape and digital society. They include key strategies to foster protection and sustainable management of the Alhambra's landscape resources, activities related to the control of the commercial exploitation of its image, the use of certain spaces for holding events and audiovisual productions, etc., which have enriched the appreciation of the values of both the Alhambra and other monuments of the City of Granada (Villafranca and Salmerón, 2010). Among these activities, the creation of several thematic itineraries that do not focus in the visit to the Nasrid Palaces, the Alcazaba and the Generalife, but in areas generally closed to the public in the Monumental Complex and other selected places in Granada city, must be stressed. This programme comprises five different tours starting in the Alhambra, from where it goes down to the historic part of Granada city passing through the Albaicín quarter:

- The Alhambra and Charles V: The Emperor's dream.
- Women in the Moorish and Renaissance: Private spaces and spaces of interrelation.
- The Christian City: A new politic, social and religious order.
- The conquest of water: The landscape of water in Moorish and Christian Spain.
- The palatial city and its area route.

The implementation of these and other innovative activities have been able to diversify the use of the monument and to ensure the comprehension and dissemination of its rich and diverse heritage values, while promoting its sustainable development. Besides, they have successfully reoriented visitor's flows and extended overnights in Granada, also revitalizing many outstanding cultural properties that were neglected up to now as a result of the huge attractiveness of the Nasrid Monument and the lack of an effective collaboration between the Alhambra Council and public administrations to promote the city's heritage resources as a whole.

### Conclusions

Although the Alhambra case is highly representative of a positive and harmonized management of heritage and tourism when a cultural property is able to support tourist demand itself, we have to be conscious that most of historic sites and towns are rarely profitable sustainable development resources in themselves, but rather ancillary contributions of tourism destinations whose success depends on an effective coordination with other urban tourism or cultural activities.

The promotion of creativity and intangible values that add quality to the tourist and cultural experience and the integration of tourism in the cultural life of the place - treating tourists as citizens, and not as mere heritage consumers - are even more important in these cases than in well established tourist destinations.

But they are not enough.

Fragment and specialize tourist supply, not trying to attract a large number of visitors, but to what marketers call the "target audience" of each place is also essential. The key issue is draw from heritage those values that rooted it in its social and cultural context, avoiding at all costs it's distort to try to adapt it to the expectations or the dominant stereotypes.

Besides, managers and stakeholders must bear in mind that heritage demand is strongly influenced by the tastes and fashions prevalent in a society in constant transformation, and therefore, the success of an initiative that has managed to attract a certain niche of cultural tourism will not even be enough to

ensure sustainable and durable development based on heritage: The needs of a rapidly changing demand must constantly be met, trends correctly anticipated and heritage resources differentiated if success is to be maintained in the context of a cultural and tourist market which is not only fragmented but in continuous flux (Ashworth, 2007).

These are not easy tasks and perhaps they should remind us that although heritage is important for tourism, this does not necessarily have to be equal to the inverse: as we have address in the Alhambra case study, there are many possible uses of heritage able to enhance its values, both for tourists and local society, without making it dependent on the market flows or putting it into situations that may threaten its integrity and authenticity.

For all the above mentioned reasons, it is finally necessary to stress how encourage creativity in cultural property management is not only important to mobilize a greater number of people around heritage and met emerging trends in cultural tourism market, but mainly to keep heritage alive, diversify its uses and deepen the analysis of interactions between conservation and development that can help us to define more accurately, but also to encourage and expand, the role that heritage has, or might have, in the evolution of contemporary society.

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