

TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN GRANADA TROPICAL COAST LOCAL GOVERNMENT VISIONS

Jesús Alberto Espinosa Arias

Universidad de Guadalajara. México
jesuse@cusur.udg.mx

Francisco de Asís Rodríguez Martínez

Universidad de Granada
fcorodri@ugr.es

Coastal tourism remains predominant in Spain even though sun and sea tourism has been massive, heavy use of resources and strong seasonality. It has created congestion during summer months, saturated beaches, inadequate services, difficulties in mobility, heavy traffic, noise pollution and poor services provision. A big concern in Spanish coastal tourist destinations refers to the decreased number of days of stay and average spending by tourists.

This may be due to several circumstances:

- 1) Tourists have changed their travel habits and motivation
- 2) Changes on tourist information access due to use of information technology and communication.
- 3) Spanish coastal tourism model has been based on meeting basic needs of tourists.
- 4) High tourism Environmental Impacts when developing coastal services.
- 5) New emerging destinations with environmental, landscape and price advantages have become a strong competition to Spanish tourism locations.

In order to improve Spanish tourism position, prior studies in Spain presented diverse strategies and recommendations targeting appropriate land use planning, environmental management, recovery and restoration of natural areas, improving quality services, supply diversification. Referred studies were based on sustainability, local development and governance (Pulido Fernández, 2011; Pirelli del Amo, 2011; Vera Rebollo, López Palomeque, Marchena and Anton Clave, 2011; Santos Pavón, 2010).

Tropical Coast of Granada includes 17 municipalities in a 787 km² area and a population of 128,029 inhabitants. Nine municipalities are strictly coastal and eight are non-coastal. Main regional political, economic and demographic city is Motril with 60,887 inhabitants (AA.VV., 2011). Characterized by warm climate with mild temperatures in the

winter months with year-round tourism. A coastline of 72 km, where 34.7% are beaches and 62.3% are cliffs, ravines and valleys a particular diverse landscape. Big issues in communication infrastructure require attention: Concluding the Mediterranean motorway (A-7) to connect with the province of Malaga and Almeria, completing the highway to the coast (A-44) and its link with the A-7.

Three areas with different levels of tourism development (Arias Sánchez Escolano and Espinosa, 2012) were identified. The most developed part is part of the west coast includes municipalities of Almuñécar, Motril and Salobreña, this area registered 87.47% of tourism on the coast, Almuñécar is a municipality with most traditional and tourist category where tourist town is located. Main beaches are located in Almuñécar with larger areas and better access to the coast. In this area there are significant historical heritage sites as castles, Roman aqueducts, museums and towers. Motril is a commercial and passenger port with a marina and a golf course. The largest amount of infrastructure leisure and entertainment (aquarium, water park) is located there. There are several natural protected areas and tropical fruits are grown. It has the “Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) Chirimoya Costa Tropical” unique product in Europe.

The second major area the eastern part, includes municipalities of Gualchos, Lújar, Rubite, Polopos, Sorvilán and Albuñol. There the supply of tourist accommodation is very new, 1,428 spaces of which 74.15% are camping places.

This area has limitations that impede development, which are:

- a) The rugged topography of the land that forms a steep coast;
- b) Inadequate communication and integration with the western part; and
- c) Strong competition for the limited space available between tourism and greenhouse crops that have a strong presence in this area. Greenhouse crops is the main economic activity but incompatible with tourism, due to the high water pollution, pollution waste and landscape alteration it produces.

This area has a special feature by having coast and mountains, the lower part features coastal towns (traditional fishing), while the upper part is the low Alpujarra, a historic region of great culture and heritage, seeking to be recognized as a world heritage site. A long tradition making “wine of the coast” flourished in the eighteenth and nineteenth century is still present in this area.

The third area is formed by non-coastal towns of the interior, includes municipalities of Otívar, Lentegí, Jete, Ítrabo, Molvízar, Los Guájares, Motril (western part) and Albondón (eastern part), here the supply of tourist accommodation it is almost nonexistent, with an offer of 143 spaces. Its main economic activity is based on fruit agriculture of tropical fruits at the accidental municipalities, while in Albondón rainfed crops and vines are grown. This area has great tourism potential for its natural resources, such as natural park of the Sierras de Tejeda, Almijara and Alhama, or saw the Guájares, and nature active recreation as canyoning, paragliding, hiking areas, mountain biking and other outdoor activities.

General Catalogue of Andalusian Historical Heritage includes 54 sites from natural and cultural heritage and seven natural protected areas in Costa de Granada. An extensive network of trails in virtually all municipalities, a rich culture that manifests itself in different parties, in a diverse gastronomy and quality are also present. A unique production like cherimoya and tropical fruits (avocado, sapodilla, mango).

So the question is Why Costa Tropical Granada has not been developed for tourism? Semi-structured interviews were held with the mayors of 17 municipalities at Coast of Granada region, in order to learn from their perspective on tourism situation, challenges and possible solutions. Interviews were conducted from March 2012 to September 2013. Questions in the interview included attraction identification, tourism challenges, potential attractions, possible solutions; type of visitors, foreign population, municipal and inter-municipal cooperation, tourism development and planning vision, actions for increasing tourism opportunities.

Interviews were fully recorded (except two), transcribed and reviewed by the interviewer. Transcripts of the interviews were processed with the program of textual data analysis *Alceste* education plus 2014 version. *Alceste* Software was used to analyze interviews: speech was classified into two main groups; the first is formed by two management related classes (class 2) and territorial development (class 3), while the second block is formed by tourism (class 1). The diversity of the coast as a tourist attraction (sea, climate, mountains) is recognized.

It is appreciated that the supra-organisms such as the joint board of the coast are a figure of great importance in the area, as well as perform the function of services such as water and garbage collection, mayors identified it as the primary instance for tourism planning, agreeing with the assertion Vera Rebollo, et al (2009) and Cebrián Abellán, (2006) on importance of supra-organisms in small municipalities for the development of tourism.

Meanwhile Riera Figueras, Hass, Amer Capdevila and Villaplana, (2005) states that the associations are supra-local entity of greater presence in Spain, as they are born as a local institution with voluntary intermunicipal cooperation.

Commonwealth leadership is more important than the council or rural development groups to develop tourism on the coast of Granada. However several mayors expressed problems of integration, coordination, lack of long term vision and lack of leadership on partnership, this is not just a matter of the coast, several authors refer to the lack of coordination between administrations at different levels as one of main challenges for Spanish tourism development (Pulido Fernández, 2011; Pirelli del Amo, 2011; Vera Rebollo, et al, 2011 Anton, 2004).

Diverse tourism challenges have been identified and willingness to address them is presented. The Commonwealth was identified as a key stakeholder for tourism development since governments participate there and it is part of its responsibilities to promote development initiatives. Commonwealth is perceived as the leader when relating with other social or private stakeholders. Successful experiences on public policy for tourism sector in coordination among various public authorities have been documented in Spain. One example of these is the Regional Park of Sierra Espuña in Murcia (Cebrián Abellán and García Marín, 2009), where the integration of the joint board of the Sierra has been a major coordination among various public and private stakeholders. Other example is the case of administrative consortium "La Manga" as a new kind of leadership local government assume (Mirra García Marín and Marín, 2011). These examples could guide and facilitate the transit of the Commonwealth towards integration and common vision of tourism development on the coast of Granada.

Mayor's speeches reflect the relevance of agriculture as an important local economic activity which needs to be planned for, especially in crops under plastic, to avoid impacts on other areas such as tourism potential. In this sense the Spatial Plan of the Costa Tropical of Granada is useful tool because it is the guiding document for sustainable growth (Sánchez Escolano, 2011). However in municipalities that have cliff areas this instrument does not include potential development projects, issues that will need to reconcile in the near future.

Profile of residents is retired from northern European countries and weekend visitors are younger people who perform activities such as biking, hiking, rafting and more. Tourism opportunities lie in rural tourism activities, wineries and products with designation of origin. These activities are seen as an incentive to work that represents the countryside lifestyle and it is often unprofitable to the producer. New initiatives are finally emerging such as visiting farms and tasting tropical fruits, agro-tourism or visiting the process of packaging of agricultural products.

The coast of Granada has natural and cultural resources to develop tourism and recreational service provision, approval of plan of arrangement allowed to do so in a more sustainable way and is located at the juncture of making a sustainable management plan is a useful tool for this, there is also the view of some mayors to order the territory to diversify activities and not rely on agricultura or second home selling, etc.

Association of municipalities of the coast of Granada is relevant to provide pooled water and garbage management and it is recognised by mayors as the planning agency for tourism development in the region. A determining factor is the lack of planning, a common vision and leadership, differences in integration and vision of the commonwealth are reflected, but there is a willingness to solve, which is proposed as a more favorable future.

For harmonious development of the commonwealth it is important to head the planning process and allow government leaders to emerge, as it is proven that governments are the drivers of the new forms of administration. Some rural tourism projects begin to emerge such as visits to farms, gardens or greenhouses as part of operating a farm segment, or activities such as visiting wineries, hiking, canyoning, cycling can give positive results, but require proper planning.

For the tropical coast of Granada the Mediterranean motorway (A7) conclusion is highly relevant to connect the coast with the provinces of Almería, Málaga and Granada capital, to be able to compete with other provinces. It has not been a reality in 30 years it has been on plans.

Further research with a more extensive and comprehensive approach to the coast of Granada is needed in order to enhance land use planning and decision-making.