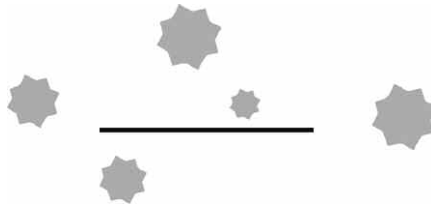


Extended abstract

*Determining factors of rural tourism
in protected areas as a promote
for rural development in Spain*



***Francisca J. Sánchez-Sánchez,
Ana M. Sánchez-Sánchez***
University Pablo de Olavide, Sevilla, Spain

DOI: 10.4422/ager.2021.04

ager

Revista de Estudios sobre Despoblación y Desarrollo Rural
Journal of Depopulation and Rural Development Studies

Highlights:

1. Uneven impact of rural tourism on rural development in economic and social aspects.
2. Determining factors of rural tourism: tourist-labor efficiency, tourist occupation, resources and stay.
3. Need to develop environmental management models for the integration of protected areas.
4. The rural areas located on the coast are the most benefited by rural tourism.

Abstract: The objective of the work is to characterize and study rural tourism in protected areas as an economic option for local development. Factor Analysis, Cluster Analysis and Discriminant Analysis are applied, identifying three determining factors of rural tourism: Tourist-labor efficiency, tourist occupation, resources and stay. The tourist flow between coastal areas and nearby rural areas favors the integration of rural tourism, producing a positive impact on labor and tourism aspects of rural areas. It is necessary to achieve the integration of protected areas in the rural environment, so that a rebalancing of the territory takes place and for tourism to function as an element of social and territorial development and improvement, without neglecting the conservation of natural resources.

Keywords: Tourism; Development; Protected areas.

Francisca J. Sánchez-Sánchez. ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5325-3667>

Correo electrónico: fsansan@upo.es

Ana M. Sánchez-Sánchez. ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6591-954X>

Correo electrónico: amsansan@upo.es

Extended abstract

1. Introduction and justification

Protected areas are fundamental elements for guaranteeing the conservation and diversity of natural spaces, offering an ideal environment for the sustainable development of certain economic activities, including tourism.

In Spain, there are some 900 protected natural areas of which 15 are national parks and 132 natural parks. The increasing prominence of protected areas requires the conversion of these spaces into active instruments of sustainable development, making it necessary to develop environmental protection tools that favor the relationship between sustainability and tourism, with this relationship contributing significantly to local development and having a significant economic and social impact on the rural environment (Butler, 1999, 2011; Sharpley & Roberts, 2004; Su, 2011 and Troitiño et al., 2005).

Rural tourism is a sustainable tourism modality that does not require large volumes of visitors, nor extensive infrastural developments (Simao & Partidario, 2012). It is a commercial activity that integrates the needs of both tourists and the areas in which it is developed, without neglecting the protection and promotion of ecological resources, biological variety and cultural integrity (Marzo-Navarro et al., 2015). Carrying out tourism activities in natural spaces in rural areas necessarily implies a commitment to their maintenance and protection (Gussa and Toledano, 2011; Muñoz, 2008; Romero et al., 2011) as a way of guaranteeing the future of these areas, given that the economy of the environment relies to a large extent on rural tourism (Brunet & Alarcón, 2008).

2. Objectives, methodology and sources

The objective of the study is to characterize the tourism sector in Spanish rural areas noted for their high value of environmental protection and quality, analyzing its impact as an economic alternative for rural development. Relevant factors for the

sector will be determined, as well as its impact on local development. A territorial grouping by tourist areas will be established according to the factors that define them.

The following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Tourism is an activity that has a positive impact on the development of rural areas located in natural settings with protected environmental resources.

Hypothesis 2: Rural areas located on the coast are the ones that benefit most from rural tourism.

The data for the study come from official statistics published by the INE (Rural Tourism Accommodation Occupancy Survey (2017)).

The unit of analysis is Spanish tourist areas. The analysis focuses on national and natural parks as the most relevant type of protected area. The study considers 55 tourist areas in Spain.

Nine variables are available for the 55 touristic areas grouped into three thematic areas: Labor Market, Tourism Volume and Resources.

Statistical techniques of Multivariate Analysis (Factor Analysis, Cluster Analysis and Discriminant Analysis) are used for data analysis.

3. Results

Three factors explain 87.871 % of the total variability. The 43.913 % of the total variability is explained by the first factor, strongly associated with 3 variables (travelers, overnight stays and employed personnel). It is labeled as Tourism-Labor Effectiveness. The most important areas in terms of the factor are in the north of Spain, being Balearic Islands (Mallorca Island); Pyrenees; Navarrese Pyrenees; Asturias (Costa Verde) and Aragonese Pyrenees.

The second factor explains 27.499 % of the total variance. It is strongly and positively related to 3 variables (degree of occupancy per vacancy, per room and per weekend vacancy). It is labeled as Tourist occupancy. The most relevant areas in the factor are: Aiako Harria Natural Park, Canary Islands (Island of La Palma), Balearic Islands (Island of Mallorca) and Taburiente National Park.

The third factor explains 16.458 % of the total variance, labeled as Resources and Stay. The most relevant areas are Malaga (Costa del Sol), Canary Islands (Island of La Palma), Taburiente National Park and Canary Islands (Island of El Hierro).

Through the Cluster Analysis we have determined areas with similar characteristics regarding labor and tourism aspects for the extracted factors. The optimal number of clusters is 5.

The territorial groupings obtained show that the tourist areas located on the coast stand out in all the factors that determine rural tourism, proving that in Spain the complement between coastal and rural tourism has a positive impact on both types of tourism, establishing a connection that allows them to coexist.

4. Discussion

It is clear that the touristic areas located on the coast are the most relevant in all the factors that determine rural tourism. The traditional tourist in Spain complements coastal tourism with rural tourism, allowing the revitalization of destinations traditionally oriented to sun and beach. Baños and Rico (2016), Cánoves et al. (2016) and Gil (2019) establish a relationship of complementarity between coastal and inland areas, establishing in our study a result that extends that of those authors, since the positive connection is determined, allowing both types of tourism to coexist.

The factors that characterize rural tourism in protected areas are determined by tourist and labor efficiency, tourist occupation, resources and tourist stay. These factors have an impact mainly on economic and environmental aspects. This impact is unequal according to the tourist area, with few protected areas located in national or natural parks standing out in any of the factors. The economic impact fundamentally favors job creation (Sánchez and Sánchez, 2018; Long, 2011; Andereck and Nyaupane, 2011), while environmentally it can have a negative impact, given that high occupancy can lead to overcrowding of spaces, environmental damage and intense use of resources (Huybers and Bennett, 2003; Almeida et al., 2016; Ramseook-Munhurrin and Naidoo, 2011). In line with Flores (2008), our results show that rural tourism is an important activity for the development of some rural areas since it diversifies the local economy and contributes to dynamize the labor market; however, this incidence is not relevant in protected natural areas.

5. Conclusions

In Spain, rural tourism has an unequal impact depending on the tourist area. Protected natural areas are not a particularly useful instrument for sustainable development. The institutions carry out excessive protection of these territories, which is hindering a greater tourist impact on the local development. It is necessary to make rational use of the resources of rural areas, developing models of environmental management with the aim of making better use of protected areas in economic, environmental and socio-cultural aspects. The new situations obtained from the aggregation of new scenarios should be aimed at territorial rebalancing so that tourism can act as a factor for social and territorial improvement. Protected areas should be areas that help to dynamize resources by favoring innovation, especially those located in areas with difficult economic and social situations.

A complementary and positive relationship has been established between coastal and rural tourism. It is possible to integrate rural and coastal tourism, expanding the tourist offer and making available important natural resources and unique enclaves, which will allow strengthening coastal tourist destinations, which are saturated and fundamentally oriented to the sun and beach product, taking into account the development, quality, competitiveness and sustainability of these places.

Rural tourism cannot be considered as the complete solution to the economic and depopulation problem of the rural environment, but it can serve as a means of promoting these areas.

For rural tourism to have an effective impact on its environment, contributing to its revitalization, it is essential that the Institutions become involved in the development of rural development strategies, which help in the renovation and improvement of fundamental services, without neglecting the conservation of natural resources.

6. Future directions

For future research, it is worth considering a more in-depth analysis of the sector to study the characteristics of tourism demand in the rural environment, with the aim of identifying whether it is sustainable tourism or whether it favors the development and quality of life of the local population. It would also be interesting to extend the study to other European countries, considering additional variables,

especially those that take into account the environmental impact, both locally and globally, in order to achieve sustainability.

Another possible line of research is the study of the role played by women entrepreneurs in the rural tourism sector, as well as their contribution to local development.