

THE SHAPING PROCESS OF A TOURIST DESTINATION AND THE EFFECTS OF TOURISM POLICY IN THE REGION OF MURCIA

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The aim of this research work is to present and delve into the process of shaping the Region of Murcia as a tourist destination, through the analysis of its tourism policy. For this analysis, the following factors have been mainly taken into account: the placement of the tourism department within the regional government, the strategic planning and the efforts performed in regional tourism policy. This process materializes through the policy's different phases of evolution.

Tourism is a productive activity that is associated to the region, and that leads to the development of diverse economic activities (Vera, López Palomeque, Marchena y Antón, 2011). These activities translate into a long process of incursion into the area, which has caused, in some cases, qualitative and quantitative productive facets, and in others, has negatively modified the stage and the properties that were initially defined it as a productive structure. This modification has been delimited by three types of factors: spatial, environmental and socio-economic and political (Vera et al., 2011).

Tourism research directs part of its interest into analyzing the power of transformation possessed by tourism itself, and the consequences that it has within an area or territory. The need to rapidly transform according to new circumstances, either endogenous or exogenous, has brought to light the vulnerability of said productive structures. To this we should add the economic scenario the country has gone through in this new century, subject to substantial change due to two opposing circumstances: a starting phase of rapid growth, marked by significant structural changes, and a second phase of important economic regression. A current situation with two different facets that exhibit the processes of transformation and significant changes in the carrying out of the economic activities related to tourism. The transformation of the territory has marked the value that tourism activity has had, starting with the dynamics of its creation and its contribution to the development of the local economies.

From this perspective, research is focused on the study of tourism policy, as it is defined as the instrument that influences the factors of development of regional tourism, the stage on which to act upon. The need for this analysis comes mainly from the idea

that the decisions made by the public institutions influence the scenarios and affect part of the process of defining a region as a tourism destination. As the main idea of this shaping process, an analysis of the evolution of tourism policy that is divided into different phases has been conducted. These phases have been mainly established after taking into account two of the most relevant instruments responsible for the organization of the regional tourism policies. The first of these are the organizational instruments that have suffered important changes produced by the political and economic development of the region, which have resulted in a governmental map that is sprinkled by the constant modification of its membership, denomination and by the departmental re-organization in the public government as far as tourism is concerned. From 1982 to 2013, the year in which the study is finalized, the tourism department has changed up to 10 times. To this, we can add the other instrument: the strategic plans, which are highly relevant in the shaping of a destination and the development of its tourism policies. The present research study is shaped within this framework, following the structure proposed by Velasco (2004) in his study of Spanish tourist policy.

For the study of the shaping process of a tourist destination within a regional framework, the changes in the management of tourism policy at this scale, as well as the shaping and the development of its instruments, have been taken into account. This is why we have mainly analyzed the changes of ministry suffered by the department of tourism, the implementation of strategic plans that governed the decisions on tourism matters, the tourism facts and the state of the economic and social activity of the Region of Murcia. Taking all of this into account, a process that is divided into different phases has been shaped, according to the changes in the regional tourist policy.

Therefore, a division of five phases of tourist development is established, which will be detailed now: 1st phase: Pre-1982 phase; 2nd. Initial phase, 1982-1994; 3rd. Cooperation phase, 1995-2001; 4th. Momentum phase, 2002-2007, and 5th. Re-structuring phase, 2008-2013. This article analyses each of these phases, presenting the more relevant aspects related to the public management of tourism and the behavior of the supply and demand of tourism in the Region of Murcia.

It should be noted that the evolution of the phases analyzed has defined the shaping of the process of tourism development in the Region of Murcia. Their definition has been inspired by the auspices of the tourism policy based on the organizational instruments as defined by the placement of the tourism department within the public regional government, the regulatory instruments and those referring to the development of strategic plans for the development of tourism. These phases allowed us to have a view of the regional historical landmarks, which served us to understand the state of the tourism sector in the Region of Murcia.

The phase previous to 1982 has defined the model of regional tourism, which was based on the development of coastal tourism and the vacation (secondary) home, with a seasonal demand that was concentrated around the Mar Menor area, and a limited connection to the international markets, which are aspects that are still found today in the region. During the initial phase (1982-1994), a governmental framework of planning and regulation started to materialize, at the same time that the offerings were diversified, under the auspices of state and European programs. The regional tourism policy found its greatest development

in the cooperation phase (1995-2001), and later in the momentum phase (2002-2007). The deployment of the instruments of regional tourism policy in these two phases exemplifies the intention of making the Region of Murcia a tourist destination. The diversification of the offerings, the advertising strategies, the creation of public-private structures of cooperation, the development of strategic plans and the qualification of the resources and infrastructures coincided in these phases. But also, differences were found in the last momentum phase, as the effect of the favorable state of the regional economy began to intervene in the productive transformation of the region through the construction of urban housing developments associated to the game of golf, the regional-interest projects and the creation of new offerings. It is in this scenario that the re-structuring phase came to be (2008-2013), born from a situation that was the opposite, due to the economic crisis. The considerable reduction of the budget created a phase of uncertainty within which tourism planning did not fit. Tourism policy without clear planning was limited to the dissolution of governmental structures and the development of advertising and innovation acts in light of the negative demand figures recorded due to the crisis of national tourism.

The result of this analysis shows a shaping process that is threatened by various signs, such as the different phases created by the changes of the public management of regional tourism as well as tourism policy, and the continuous changes of membership of the tourism department within the regional government. This last could have generated scenarios of uncertainty and renovation, as there was a lack of a clear strategy that could be used to define a true regional tourism model. In fact, this is still true, as in the year 2014, the tourism department was transferred to the Ministry of Industry, Tourism, Business and Innovation, resolving to once again promote the already-used brand "Quality Coast. Region of Murcia". Later, there was yet another change in the year 2015 with the creation of the Ministry of Economic Development, Tourism and Employment.

Likewise, to this instability of institutional membership of regional tourism, we should add the inadequate management of the regional tourism brand, the lack of a true management of the tourism policy that should have been based on an adequate strategic planning that was agreed upon by the different actors, whose aim should have been the organizing of the policy's instruments. This planning should have succeeded at establishing common strategies among the different regions, so that they truly coincide on the same aims related to the development of tourism in the Region of Murcia. The dissolution of the Tourism Consortiums or their leaving from the public government, leaves a panorama of uncertainty and gives us a glimpse of the policies that were followed, based on the development of various fronts at the territorial and institutional scale, establishing scenarios of efforts on planning and budget (Cebrián, 2006). Presently, the debate is still open, and it is necessary to create a new scenario for regional tourism policy, in which the past should not be forgotten as the future is defined.

