METHODOLOGICAL PROPOSAL TO IDENTIFY, CLASSIFY AND EVALUATE THE TERRITORIAL RESOURCES OF INLAND TOURISM. THE PROVINCE OF ALBACETE

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There are many proposals to define tourism and different approaches to it. Tourism transversality brings complexity to its definition, as well as providing an unquestionable wealth, and showing its territorial, economic or social impact. Within a specific spatial field, resources, consumers, businesses and administrations act in the tourist system. Its changing character and its adaptability to new situations and scenarios in the postmodern society should be noted, too. As a result, tourism is conditioned by the market segmentation, the sustainable development, the new technologies or consumer changing profiles, among others. New forms of tourism business have been incorporated, where the Internet appears as a privileged channel of relationship between consumers, destinations and businessmen, with a growing role in marketing. Within this context of change, a large and growing group of tourists has emerged that focuses on rural inland spaces, as an answer to different motivations than those provided by traditional destinations. There are new scenarios and new modalities where culture, heritage and landscape become commercialized, thus boosting rural, health, sports, cultural or eco-tourism, among others. Rural areas have shifted from a production-oriented role to a multifunctional one, where tourism is more and more prominent.

Tourist land resources have become main actors in this process of change. Industry trends in relation to the recovery of rural areas have increased the role of resources, which constitute the raw material of tourism and tourism services, closely related to a growing interest in nature, landscape, historical and artistic heritage and local culture.

The bodies responsible for strategic planning in rural areas have decisively opted to introduce tourism as an opportunity and economic alternative. There are several reasons for this interest; rural tourism generates employment (although moderately), helps to improve local heritage and renews productive structures. One of the tools used is the protection of high environmental value areas. Another one, more common, comes from the support, primarily financial and as a means of economic diversification, through programs *Proder* and

Leader. A significant portion of these aids has gone to tourism, which has been understood as an activity with towing capacity on other economic sectors. Throughout this process, local actions groups have been the main actors, although regional and local administrations have also played an important role. The result of their activities is especially evident in the increasing number of accommodations.

In Castilla-La Mancha, the combination of factors (existence of tourist land resources, local actors, institutional initiatives, consumers or host infrastructure) has allowed the growth of rural tourism. Strategies from different areas of government (regional, provincial and local) have had a special impact, designed to shape and improve the tourism sector at different scales. They have been introduced with a clear interest in boosting tourism, but from structures and proposals insufficiently coordinated. The conjunction of all the above factors shows that inland destinations have become more important, especially the rural tourism ones, which has pushed Castilla-La Mancha to the fourth place in the list of tourist visitors.

The province of Albacete is the most dynamic area of rural tourism in Castilla-La Mancha. Rural areas in this province have traditionally had a strong orientation towards the primary sector production, a certain presence of small and medium industry, end consumer-oriented, and a tertiary sector relying on the traditional retail trade, public administration and transport. These are the main generators of employment, in an area characterized by low population density, and a majority of older people, especially in the mountain regions. Correcting regional unbalances has been traditionally considered as a priority. Tourism has had on this stage a minimum impact until just a decade ago, an impact which was characterized by a double profile. On one hand, there has been a prominent *hidden tourism*. This type, opaque to statistics, has as its main characters seasonal migrants returning to their places of origin. On the other hand, a regulated infrastructure of domestic tourism has been shaped, with a clear orientation towards rural tourism. There has been a parallel increase in demand, too.

The province of Albacete has assumed an undisputed role in rural tourism at regional level (it accounts for 30% of accommodations). Between 1996 and 2009, lots of rural houses have started to operate in the province. Distribution within the territory has been uneven, though, mainly concentrated in less populated municipalities and especially in the mountain areas, which have congregated most of the beds of rural accommodation. Most are found by the main water courses in the province. The province of Albacete has a series of tourism assets, acting both individually and jointly, which has facilitated a boom in rural tourism. The presence of these resources explains the development of an ever-growing tourism that spreads through the territory on a selective basis, moving from a new logic and transforming the traditional ways of life and the economies of some municipalities. There is a close relation between rural tourism and territory. The landscape shows a double component –natural and social–, with an undoubted impact on tourism, which is closely related to the geographic regions of Albacete: La Mancha, Almansa Corridor, Sierra de Segura, Campo de Hellin, Sierra de Alcaraz, Campo de Montiel or Manchuela.

The identification, classification and prioritization of resources have received attention in this proposed method, in order to identify the tourism assets of this province, essential in the formation of products and destinations. The working methodology has allowed us to distinguish the main resources from the complementary ones or tourist attractions. Work is

structured in three stages, identification, characterization, and finally ranking and resources association.

Category of tourist resource (tangible and intangible) has been given to those which have the ability, individual or in combination with others, to attract visitors for pleasure or tourism. From the methodological point of view, the data obtained for each of the resources have resulted from field work, later supplemented with the search of bibliographic and documentary information. To organize the work, a summary sheet has been used (first stage of the methodology), which has identified resources at municipal level. The second stage is aimed to know in detail the characteristics of each resource in relation to the tourist use. Another summary sheet with different fields has been designed in order to obtain comprehensive information. The inventory and classification has been organized into four groups: a. - natural or scenic resources; b. – monumental-historical resources, technical, ethnological and art c. - crafts and culinary resources; d. – Folklore, festivals and events schedule. This classification has been adapted to accommodate the reality of the territory of the province of Albacete. The file is organized into eight sections: identification of the resource, intrinsic character, resource character based on its tourist use, resource potential and additional information, description, related equipment, and finally, observations. A valuation method has been used to assign a final weight which can identify its relevance within the set.

To obtain a ranking and grouping (third stage of the methodology) some sections were selected that enable to assess the skills and ability to benefit from each in relation to all. Ratings have been assigned to each, taking into account qualitative aspects. On the other side, a method has been established, capable of assigning a final weight to each resource within the collection. The application of this methodology has given a final score from 0 to 100 for each resource; later, they have been arranged and grouped into four categories: 'very high' value, which includes those who have scored above 70 and 'high' value, which include those between 60 and 70. These first two classes were given the title of 'territorial tourism assets'.

Within the natural or scenic resources, a total of 174 resources have been identified, where 21% of the total has been listed under the category of tourist assets. Within the 471 historical and monumental resources, technical, ethnological and artistic resources, 26% appear as tourism assets. Finally, among the Folklore Festivals and events schedule resources, a 21.5% of the 157 has the status of tourism assets.

The proposed methodology allows us to identify tourist land resources and to distinguish between heritage resources and tourist assets. In natural resources, one of the most important aspects is the role that water landscapes acquires. In most cases, these are located in mountain areas, especially in the Sierra de Alcaraz and Sierra del Segura, in the southern part of the province of Albacete. Heritage resources, mostly related to small rural and urban villages which have kept some examples of architecture, often appear located in historic sites which had a certain importance at different times.

Therefore, a diffuse and heterogeneous scheme appears in relation to the location and type of resources, but with a greater presence in rural spaces, which have been able to give an answer to a growing demand and to offer a considerable amount of accommodations.