

MANAGEMENT OF THE TOURISM-CULTURAL ATTRACTIVE OF MAJOR HERITAGE SITES. THE CASE OF PATRIMONIO NACIONAL

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I. HERITAGE LANDMARKS IN CULTURAL DESTINATIONS

The museums and monuments that can be visited as well as their surroundings are the foundation on which certain cultural destinations are built. They become an element of differentiation which, for decades, has granted them a competitive advantage over other sites. At present, development and success of these destinations is directly linked to the management of their heritage landmarks, which from a touristic point of view is the result of the actions carried out by the various stakeholders (Merinero y Pulido, 2009). This confirms the importance of managing each of these resources, as well as the need to establish collaboration among the different actors.

The influence and attraction of heritage landmarks means they require special adaptations depending on their tourist function. In fact, over the last decade, many of them have modified their mission and purpose and have adapted to the needs of supply and demand to become a mediator between these two elements (Chinchilla, 2007). These changes have entailed a series of substantial modifications in the organization and management of the assets that make up the tourism-cultural attractions. They have become increasingly open to collaboration with other institutions and have begun to apply a more business-oriented logic, which allows them to face three major challenges: 1. Ensure conservation of the assets under their responsibility; 2. Guarantee a quality visit adapted to the needs of a growing and specialised demand, and 3. Defray the high costs involved in the conservation and consolidation of an attractive and varied cultural offer that can at least cover costs even if it does not actually make a profit.

On the international level, the major cultural landmarks have assumed these three challenges after rethinking their missions. Thus, in the last twenty years many of them initiated a transformation process entailing physical and institutional changes. They have become outright cultural institutions thanks to their ability to bring all of their resources to bear on the

process of bringing culture and economy closer together, especially in countries with market-driven economies where culture is considered just one more economic sector (Chatelain, 1998). These changes have streamlined management and made the organizations ever more complex, and have required changes in their legal and administrative status, essentially the establishment of foundations and associations, to allow more autonomous management (Ballé, 1996, Gomboult, 2003). Thus, the main landmarks have more flexible organisations and they are managed as cultural enterprises, with budget management taking on an important role, especially at a time of crisis such as the current one.

Although the relationship between cultural and tourism agents is very close, it should be noted that until just a couple of decades ago culture specialists were not aware of the importance of the tourism market or, specifically, of the impact their actions have on the municipalities where they are located. It is being increasingly recognised that a fluid relationship among actors favours development of the destinations, and their own activities as well. For heritage and cultural agents must also strengthen their contact with their respective surroundings, as a result of their need to increase their revenue and therefore be closer to the public.

So far the relationship with municipal stakeholders has been more or less symbolic, with some local authorities starting to join the boards of foundations in charge of heritage management, which gives us an idea of the importance of these entities. The problem lies in the fact that this relationship is usually limited to this sphere only; no practical bonds or collaborative work are established. Proof of this is that despite the fact that museums are playing an increasingly important role in the development of the territories where they are located, sound joint actions between cultural institutions and local authorities are still missing from social inclusion strategies (Ballé, 2003) and efforts to consolidate tourism destinations (Troitiño y Troitiño, 2008).

II. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

On the national level, the most outstanding are the royal public property assets managed by Patrimonio Nacional. Their monumentality and symbols have favoured, since the late 19th Century, their consolidation as essential tourist resources in the configuration of destinations such as Madrid, Aranjuez, La Granja de San Ildefonso, Palma de Mallorca and San Lorenzo de El Escorial, which makes Patrimonio Nacional an object of study and the core topic of this article.

In recent years, Patrimonio Nacional has shown that it has assumed its role as one of the main Spanish cultural institutions and has searched for strategies to improve and modernise its actions. It could be said that it aims to take things to the next level and use cultural events to combine conservation and public visits with financial profitability. This is based on three basic premises: 1. beyond the museum attractions themselves cultural resources can be made financially profitable or self-sustaining by organizing new activities through a management body; 2. establishing a complementary quality cultural programme reinforces the heritage destinations and generates a higher number of visitors, and 3. the activity favours economic development of the municipalities involved through the earnings generated by cultural tourism.

We have therefore carried out a study of the actions of Patrimonio Nacional related to tourism and its cultural programme, as well as a comparative and systematic analysis –*benchmarking*– of other top cultural, national and international institutions such as the National Museum El Prado or the Thyssen Museum, among others.

III. PATRIMONIO NACIONAL: THE MANAGEMENT MODEL OF A MULTIFACETED INSTITUTION

Patrimonio Nacional was founded in 1940, as an indivisible legal entity, with the purpose of managing and administering the assets of the Royal Crown (movable and immovable), both civil and religious, located in different provinces. It is in charge of managing assets belonging to the State that are “encumbered for the use and service of the King and members of the Royal Family to fulfil the high representation attributed to them by the Constitution and Law”. A valuable heritage whose recognition and appreciation have influenced the rise in tourism occurring in the municipalities where they are located, in particular tourism linked to visits of the “heritage sites” (García y Mínguez, 2005). Overall, these heritage landmarks receive around three million visitors a year, but the distribution of these visits among the different sites is uneven, which causes major problems from a single management perspective.

The heavy seasonality of visits, the problems of conservation derived from the influx of visitors, the high tourist pressure in some areas and the fact that it is a living and multifunctional heritage, are some of the problems faced by Patrimonio Nacional, an institution which is also making great efforts to maintain a novel and active cultural agenda, including an ever greater number of activities, most of which are free of charge. This is possible because Patrimonio Nacional receives over €121,000,000 annually from the General State Budget to cover its operation.

Despite the many benefits of the institution and, in particular, the resources it manages, in recent years the Spanish economic crisis and, specifically, the current public deficit have made it clear that its resources and potential are not being sufficiently leveraged. These could be improved by using a more efficient management model that is less dependent on individuals and allows continuity of strategies regardless of political cycles. Actions such as concerts, shows, conferences, workshops, educational programmes..., would help turn these spaces into reference cultural facilities, while positioning these assets in the international arena, all of which would directly favour development of the towns where they are located. Thus, and without requiring a major financial effort since Patrimonio Nacional already offers an annual programme free of charge, it could design a public access cultural programme adapted to the economic standards of other national and international institutions. This is something which would obviously help mitigate two of the essential problems faced by the institution: the loss of visitors, and therefore of revenue, and the heavy seasonality of these visits in some assets, especially those located in the Royal Sites. The seasonality problem has been addressed in the tourism management plans prepared in Aranjuez (Tourism Revitalisation Plan 1999-2001), San Lorenzo de El Escorial (Tourism Excellence Plan 2003-2005) and La Granja de San Ildefonso (Tourism Revitalisation Plan 2005-2008). All three sites needed to design complementary cultural activities that, aside from attracting and consolidating audiences already familiar with the place, also help reduce agglomerations at certain times of the year and the week.

IV. MANAGEMENT OF THE TOURISM-CULTURAL ATTRACTIONS AT HERITAGE LANDMARKS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

In order to design a realistic and profitable cultural agenda for Patrimonio Nacional, we had a look at other Spanish and European institutions. For each cultural element selected we identified and analysed the activities comprising its cultural programme, the traffic received and the rates established for each one, classifying activities into four groups; visits to the museum or monument, temporary exhibitions, complementary museum cultural activities and educational activities.

From this analysis we obtained the following ideas: 1. Patrimonio Nacional, as a whole, receives a high influx of visitors, due to the historical and cultural relevance of its resources and also because some of its assets are major tourist resources. 2. Despite the economic crisis, in the last four years the number of visitors to the main Spanish museums is on the rise, indicating the general public's interest in heritage and culture, but also that the institutions are acting to enhance this response. 3. A major part of this overall growth is due to the cultural programmes, comprised of activities that are considered singular and which in some cases are part of an annual agenda. Compared to other European countries, this trend is still limited in the case of Spanish museums and heritage landmarks where the most frequent activities of note are temporary exhibitions. 4. The complementary museum activities programmed (concerts, conferences, meetings, workshops, educational activities...) are still modest in Spain and, on the contrary, have been decisive in the management of certain European institutions such as Versailles, which has created an agile and flexible structure that is in charge of managing events and can optimise the administration and costs for improved profitability.

The funds received from the General State Budget have allowed Patrimonio Nacional, for decades, to offer cultural activities free of charge. Some of these were only available by invitation from the institution, making them elitist in nature, which may in fact have limited access of interested parties. A simulation conducted in the "Economic Study on Cultural Activities of Patrimonio Nacional", concluded that the institution was failing to receive between €1,150,000 to €1,500,000 a year, figures which in this context appear incidental but which in fact evidence the possibility of establishing other management models. Achieving this revenue would require a very interesting cultural promotion policy, where the way the visit is marketed and the channels for advertising or publicising activities would play an essential role. These tasks can have a direct impact on the destinations and must be done in collaboration with other stakeholders involved in their creation.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The current situation, marked by competitiveness and an increasingly discerning public, has forced heritage and cultural institutions to undertake major changes or at least rethink their missions and management models, as well as reflect on what society is demanding, which is authenticity and experiences. This is seen in the different management structures and strategies, which are highly diverse and therefore generate major differences among destinations with tourist attractions.

The dynamic nature of the specific institution analysed, due to the fact that it is public and linked to the Crown, is a major handicap which, far from being used as an attractive resource for visitors, is considered a limiting factor for organising activities and managing these sites. There is a belief that this relationship prevents including sponsors or the participation of living artists; an idea which is not subject to any regulations and is based on individual perceptions and decisions. Indeed, one of Patrimonio Nacional's major weaknesses is that the management is personality-driven. Without a doubt it currently needs to reconsider its management strategies, which cannot be decided individually, or even internally, but rather require the consensus of all the stakeholders managing the destinations where the assets are located, and with the regional authorities in charge of establishing tourist actions in their area.

Furthermore, Patrimonio Nacional as a stakeholder in many important tourist destinations, such as Madrid, San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Aranjuez, La Granja de San Ildefonso or Palma de Mallorca, must make the most of the potential available to create new cultural activities that favour higher awareness of the cultural resources it manages so they may be enjoyed by a greater number of visitors. This implies designing quality cultural activities, as well as establishing rates for each one of them that provide new revenue to guarantee the conservation of the assets. This, far from limiting access to them, should lead to socialising their acceptance, since sub-market prices adapted to different visitor groups will provide the whole population with an opportunity to visit and will lead to building their loyalty. In addition, access to heritage should reinforce the learning process and increase appreciation and respect.

These kinds of measures add value to heritage assets, directly contributing to the local economic development of each destination and reinforcing their mission as cultural public institutions, while generating a new interest among the population. However, to be able to undertake this restructuring it is necessary, first of all, to conduct an internal transformation that entails assuming the need for changes that improve management, second, to recognise the limitations of a management model based only on subsidies and, third, to implement a modern legal structure, such as a Foundation or Association, that is public in nature but under private management, that facilitates the creation of new activities and new alliances. The structure chosen must also permit the efficient execution of the marketing tasks required by the cultural activities and should be adapted to the needs of today's society.

