

TOURISM IN THE CITY OF CÁCERES (1986-2010): A QUARTER CENTURY OF SUCCESS

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I. INTRODUCTION

With the inclusion of the «Old Town of Cáceres» as site number 384 in the World Heritage List, UNESCO recognises that the Old Town of Cáceres is a monumental ensemble of 7.8 hectares, enclosed by 1,174.7 meters of perimeter wall, which contains a structural and typological variety of Gothic and Renaissance fortified houses and palace homes owned by the nobility, as well as religious architecture such as churches, chapels and monasteries of great value. That inclusion marked, without a doubt, a turning point in the transformation of the city, with direct impact on urban and heritage dynamics.

The urban and heritage planning changes of the city of Cáceres were accompanied, during the 1986-2010 period, by other transformation processes that have turned Cáceres into a different city, whose main features are outlined below:

- Demographic changes. The population census in 2010 put the population of Cáceres at 94,179. This figure shows a marked growth of its absolute population in the period under study, which can be estimated at 36.11%.
- Tertiarisation. In the absence of a business network linked to the secondary sector, the city has reached a stage of post-industrial society in which the majority of workers are employed in the service sector.
- Accessibility. Its good income position is derived from its privileged geographical location –along the historic north-south axis that shapes the Via de la Plata, which has turned into a highway of approximately 800 kilometres (A-66)–, and from its direct connection to the two capitals of the Iberian Peninsula (Madrid and Lisbon).
- Culture and heritage as development priorities. The existence of a rich historical heritage, valuation policies related to these assets, cultural programming, promotional

activities and a gradual integration of the city of Cáceres in the tourism market have favoured an increasing influx of tourists, with a consequent promotion of the tourism industry.

In view of the above considerations, in which tourism is seen as a clear responsible for the process of change experienced by the city, this paper addresses the evaluation of the tourism process experienced by Cáceres during the past twenty five years, taking the year in which Cáceres was declared as a World Heritage Site as starting point. To do this, this paper has been divided into three main sections: the first one analyses in detail the pillars on which the tourism of Cáceres is based; the second examines the development of tourism activity (accommodation and additional facilities); and the third studies the behaviour of tourist flows.

II. CULTURAL HERITAGE PILLARS OF TOURISM IN CÁCERES

Cáceres is a city with two thousand years of history, the result of a melting-pot of civilisations, superimposed and juxtaposed on its foundational genetic pattern. As a result, the city has an outstanding cultural heritage that has collected numerous awards. This influenced the generation of tourist flows, which in 1986 were very weak. In addition to the designation of Cáceres as a World Heritage Site and Third Monumental Ensemble of Europe, there are other awards that must be mentioned, such as the *Pomme d'Or for Tourism Merit*, awarded by the International Federation of Tourism Journalists and Writers (1996); its Holy week, declared to be of International Tourist Interest (2011); and the subsequent incorporation of different assets to the list of BICs (Sites of Cultural Interest): Monuments (15), Archaeological Zone (1), Historic Site (1) and Site of Ethnological Interest (1). The Via de la Plata, as a Site of Cultural Interest, within the category of Historic Site (Table 1), could also be incorporated into this list. In total, there are 19 BICs, which represent almost 15% of all the existing assets in the province of Cáceres, 7 of which have been declared as such in the past 25 years. Moreover, it is worth noting the incorporation of Cáceres to city networks with common interests in developing specific tourism product: Network of Jewish Quarters or Network of World Heritage Cities.

Therefore, this combination of resources and recognitions is based on the cultural heritage located, mainly, within the perimeter of the city's historic site. Most tourist visits tend to gravitate towards this area, which not only benefits from most of the actions carried out in tourism policy, but also hosts many of the cultural activities that are programmed each year.

As a result of this, cultural resources have acted as a trigger to the influx of visitors and the subsequent emergence of infrastructure and facilities, in response to this new role assumed by the city since the early nineties, which has led to major changes (urban traffic reorganisation, new car parks, restructuring of public areas, adaptation of assets to facilitate sightseeing, etc.). In addition, as is to be expected, these resources have been, and are, the basis of the informative and promotional material that is distributed in tourism fairs and exhibitions.

Moreover, along with these resources, a cultural agenda has been designed including programmed activities, on a regular schedule or sporadically, which has a certain capacity

of tourist attraction. Cáceres hosts this kind of activities using its network of cultural/recreational complementary facilities and outdoor public spaces. These cultural activities must be included as an integral part of the policies that have been implemented in recent decades. As a mega-event, not without some controversy, due to the conflicts resulting from the use of the historic centre, it is worth mentioning the celebration of the WOMAD festival, which in 2011 celebrated its twentieth edition, dating back to 1992. In addition, other consolidated and well-established events include the Cáceres' Festival of Classical Theatre and Cáceres' Autumn Music Festival, together with a rich list of events (musical events, festivities, exhibitions, gastronomic events, theatre...) with much shorter history, which complete Cáceres' cultural agenda.

III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM ACTIVITY

Urban development and heritage planning have had a direct impact on the dynamics of Cáceres' tourism sector since the late eighties. Until then, tourism was only embryonic subsector of Cáceres' economy, due to the fact that urban-based cultural tourism was just emerging in Spain.

III.1. La evolution of tourism supply

The last 25 years have been crucial in the development of the city's hotel network, in contrast to what happened in previous decades, in which a slow growth rate is observed. Therefore, the tourism situation that Cáceres shows in 2010 is the result of the events over the last five decades, according to the following growth stage proposal:

- Initial stage, which corresponds to the time period 1986-1995. During these nine years, the first four-star hotels are set up in the city, with the opening of four establishments in 1990, 1991, 1992 and 1995, using as reference the proximity to the Old Town and its inclusion within the limits of the Historic Ensemble.
- Consolidation stage: 1996-2005. This period is characterised, from the point of view of supply, by the completion of projects already initiated and the gestation of new projects that would eventually be opened to the public in the next stage. Again, the four-star hotels play a leading role in the reinforcement of tourism supply over this period, albeit at a slower pace than in the previous stage. In this regard, it should be noted that during the 25-year period studied, the five-year period in which tourism supply growth was most significant coincides with the time period 1990-1995. Thus, the Historic Ensemble constitutes an advantage in attracting the opening of new hotels.
- Diversification stage, beginning in 2006. In this time period, the supply of the city of Cáceres diversifies in three ways: firstly, the range of hotels categories represented in Cáceres is completed with the opening of two five-star hotels; secondly, other types of accommodation that did not exist at earlier stages, such as holiday apartments (14 establishments with a total supply of 75 beds) experiences good progress; and, thirdly, in 2008, the first large-capacity hotel is opened within the Historic Ensemble.

III.2. Complementary facilities

In addition to hotels and extra-hotel accommodation, in the last two decades, the city has been provided with most of the complementary facilities that are currently operating. The existence of these facilities is a determining factor of the development of tourism activities within the urban environment, with consequent impacts regarding average stay at the destination, tourist satisfaction and diversification of its attractions. The provision of facilities linked to the Historic Ensemble is particularly significant in the city of Cáceres, and especially within the walls, although there are other facilities located in different parts of the city. In the provision of this type of facilities, public administrations have played a major role, being responsible for implementing most of them in the last two decades. In this regard, investments within the framework of the Tourism Excellence Plan were crucial (2.7 million euros, jointly financed by the local, regional and national administration).

IV. BEHAVIOUR OF TOURIST FLOWS.

The strengthening of the supply would be meaningless without the consolidation of tourist flows. The main consequence resulting from the presence of tourists is the number of overnight stays, which is thus reflected in hotel and extra-hotel occupancy levels. Unfortunately, the lack of data on tourism demand in the city of Cáceres has been a sad reality until the INE started to consider it as a disaggregated tourist spot in its 2003 surveys. Therefore, a number of variables compiled by the INE and related to occupancy rate and tourism demand have been selected in order to help understand its current reality:

- Occupancy rate by bedplaces in hotels. Over the last five years, which coincides with the diversification stage (2006-2010), the hotels' occupancy rate has decreased from 45.99% in 2006 to 41.30% in 2010, a performance which could be explained by two reasons: the context of national crisis and the sustained growth in supply. This occupancy rate, however, is higher than that at provincial level.
- Number of travellers staying overnight in hotels. In recent years, the number of overnight stays in hotels shows a clear decline. The number of travellers registered has decreased from 226,977 in 2006 to 215,490 in 2010, which implies a loss of travellers on this type of establishments, which dominate this city. Similarly, there has been a reduction of overnight stays, from 372,324 in 2006 to 341,574 in 2010. The distribution of the number of tourists throughout the year showed fluctuations which do not exactly correspond to the highest occupancy rates, due to the fact that the number of overnight stays per tourist varied from one month to another.
- Origin of travellers staying overnight in hotels. The origin of travellers staying in hotels reflects the predominance of domestic tourists as compared with foreign tourists, in line with the dynamics observed in Extremadura and most inland areas of Spain. During 2010, 10.54% of travellers were population living abroad, who were responsible for 10.14% of overnight stays. Their place of origin was mainly European (European Union) and, particularly, Spain's neighbouring countries (Portugal and France), to which other traditional European tourism-generating countries, such as

Germany and the United Kingdom should be added. On the basis of these data, it must be noted that, without a doubt, tourist flows in Cáceres are highly dependent on the domestic tourism demand.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research that has been carried out, it can be concluded that Cáceres' tourism development has been encouraged by the progress experienced over the last twenty five years, since the designation of Cáceres as World Heritage Site. In 1986, this UNESCO declaration added to its previous recognition as Historic Site and Third Monumental Ensemble of Europe, which contributed to enhance a rich historical heritage that was far from integrating in the tourism market, despite its good condition, diversity (medieval, Renaissance, Baroque and Enlightenment town) and specificity (the predominance of the ensemble over the individual elements). From that moment on, there was a gradual growth in tourism supply, which was observed not only in an increasing number of hotels and bedspaces, according to a pattern that considered the proximity to the walled area of the Historic Ensemble, in line with its unquestionable capacity of tourist attraction, but also in the provision of new cultural facilities, located mainly within the walled area. This growth in the number of hotels may be divided into three stages, in which a sequence is observed which covers the basics first, to evolve later towards consolidation and finally, towards diversification. In this context, different historic buildings were renovated for public use of different nature: accommodation, exhibition and meeting spaces, museums, and local, provincial and regional government offices, resulting in a new landscape in the Historic Ensemble.

These changes led to a favourable environment that pushed the number of tourists' staying overnight in hotels up to 200,000, although a decrease that must be related to the economic crisis and a high dependence on domestic tourism was observed. The analysis of hotel occupancy confirms the strength of short-stay tourism, mainly linked to weekends, in accordance with the most significant consumer type (national) and the main way of access (by road).

In short, tourism growth in Cáceres has had a number of direct and collateral effects which have brought benefits to the city's economy (investment and employment), culture (increased activity), renovation (investments in heritage) and image, which still have a long path that you should be walked in the following years.

Within the nearby future, no longer than 2020, Cáceres must consolidate as a cultural tourism destination of the World Heritage, which will require addressing bottlenecks related to its peripheral position with the arrival of the AVE train service between Madrid and Lisbon, and initiating to the joint commercialisation of tourism products that connect conferences, events and historical-artistic heritage with a complementary offer of nature, ornithological, gastronomic and inland sand-and-sun routes.