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Paisajes culturales y percepciones sociales

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Paisajes culturales
y percepciones sociales
Paesaggi culturali
e percezioni sociali
Cultural landscapes
and social perceptions

Coordinación científica:
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Perception and social participation as sustainable strategies in tourism planning: the sensitivity of landscapes

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Universidad Europea de Canarias

Introduction

In recent decades, a varied vocabulary has emerged around the concept of landscape. The values, mechanisms and attributes that contribute to understanding and managing landscape emanate from various disciplines and scientific areas. Perception and participation are two of the most interesting - and complex - ways of identifying a landscape and its management needs.

The landscape is not static; we are dealing with a social and cultural construction that depends on particular places and different historical moments, where the sensitivity and value given to goods and heritage are different.

Landscapes are the result of the experiences of the communities that inhabit them, but how these landscapes are perceived also determines their transformation and management. In this sense, special mention should be made of the case of the island of La Palma (Canary Islands, Spain)¹, where between September and December 2021 a volcanic eruption, devastated a landscape with significant natural and cultural connections shattering the population's identification with it, which is being preserved

through intense participatory processes. Another case is the Montañas Sagradas de Gran Canaria and Risco Caído² (Canary Islands, Spain), a cultural landscape on the World Heritage List since 2019 and whose candidacy launched several participatory processes for the inclusion of the population in the design of the proposal and governance model. Although the objectives are different, perception and participation are not only very important channels for identifying, recovering, conserving and managing the landscapes in both cases, but also for reinterpreting them.

Strange as it may seem, perception - individual or collective - often prevents us from being able to see and identify landscapes, many of which are ephemeral and fast-changing (Hiernaux, 2007). In these landscapes, a new environmental, economic and social structural basis that will determine their very meaning is also being imposed very quickly.

Landscape management is determined by public administrations, which traditionally protect landscapes, and is based on the conception of limited physical space, a tangible place to work on. However, the meaning and interpretation of landscapes are intangible



Overview of the Tajogaite volcano (La Palma island, 2021). Photo: Elena Pérez González



Lava flows from the Tajogaite volcano have buried more than a thousand houses on the island of La Palma. Photo: Elena Pérez González



Panoramic view of the World Heritage of Risco Caído (Gran Canaria island). Source: Courtesy of Dirección Patrimonio Cultural del Gobierno de Canarias

(Nogué, 2018), and the recording and interpretation of memories and uses make this very evident in the two aforementioned cases of the Canary Islands. It is precisely this attribute regarding the content of landscapes, the immaterial, which is the current challenge to their management. So, it is in this context in which the people - the communities that live in and visit the landscapes, and even remembered assets, those that are no longer visible and used to form part of the landscape in the past - have been participating with new tools in recent years in

the development of new and innovative management formulae that are more collective and less institutionalised (Nogué, 2018). Moreover, they are also more complex.

Therefore, perception understood as another element of landscape management is associated with participatory processes around this type of asset, the landscape, and generates new actions around cultural and natural heritage. Tourism is one of the most complex activities triggering the integrated landscape management actions being

implemented in urban and rural environments - and that which has the greatest impact on the territory and ways of life. Therefore, including everyone - both tourists and locals - in landscape management is becoming a very important source of information for territorial tourism planning and an essential decision-making channel and requires the use of recording methodologies that are sufficiently powerful and versatile to be incorporated into landscape management.

Indeed, the tourism sector has proposed research approaches and projects that include citizen participation in tourism planning policies, as well as the study of citizen perception of the territory's resources and the impacts of the activity. Work of this type is extremely useful for identifying the relationships between communities, landscape and tourism (Pérez et al. 2018; Martín, García and Pérez, 2018; Pérez et al. 2017). Tourism has led to many resources acquiring heritage status, but also to an increase in their productive use with an emphasis on their economic exploitation.

If landscape is understood according to the definition of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2000) as any part of a territory and the way it is perceived by the population, it

is important to consider what might happen when the delimitations and projected images of these places are not the same as those perceived by the local population; it is also essential to think about the authenticity of the site and the need for consensus with the authority that legitimises these delimitations and images (Fuller, 2015). We assume that these perceptions are not harmonious (García, 2001) and that there are conflicts and conflicting views among all the actors linked to a landscape. The Council of Europe (2000) itself establishes that it is these actors, public authorities and populations who must jointly articulate landscape characteristics.

In this context, we will address this process, which has developed around the integration of landscape and tourism in recent years, and the perception and participation of social agents in the implementation of public policies in scenarios of models to manage the territory and its economic activity. Thus, an analysis of the perception of social agents on the Internet will be included based on the research project *Analysis of social perception in cultural landscapes* (PAYSOC) (RTI2018-096611-B) as an innovative tool for the identification of landscapes and their management. This includes an analysis of the alternative, but in-

creasingly more widespread social perception found in the virtual context of the Internet, which is having an ever-greater impact. This is contrasted information that can validate or contradict the landscape of a place, as well as the policies and actions implemented by both local administrations and private companies (Durán and Fernández, 2020). This is a way to include the perspective of the local community. We will reflect on the strategy that we are developing at PAYSOC to integrate all the visions that allow us to connect the meaning of landscapes, and the actions and elements that give them meaning, to the present and their impact on landscape tourism management.

Participation and perception in tourism planning

Tourism is a social and economic activity. It is systemic and has different types of impacts. One of the most comprehensive definitions of tourism is that it is the movement of people to destinations outside their usual place of work and residence, including the activities undertaken during their stay at these destinations, as well as the services created to meet their needs (Mathieson and Wall, 1992). This definition, therefore, implies that tourism should not only be approached by

analysing tourists, resources and activities (Acuña, 2004) but also the impacts produced by this activity, which have three dimensions: economic, physical or environmental, and social and cultural impact (Santana, 1997).

Current tourism planning includes measures to minimise negative impacts in these dimensions, including perception and participation. Perception has mostly been used to understand the relationship of the locals with tourists and their activity and the social and cultural impacts, especially regarding aspects of the encounters and relationships that occur at the destination and the ways of life of the locals, as well as in their relations with tourists (Yoong, 1973; Doxey, 1975; Santana, 1997).

Although tourism has become a fundamental activity for global economic development (UNTWO, s/f)³, it is the concerns around the environmental and social impacts that it generates that have been the most debated in recent years. This has led to tourism analysis including more sustainable and fewer economic indicators, and to the development of the concepts of sustainable tourism and tourism governance (Pulido and Pulido, 2014). Thus, in recent years, measures and

mechanisms have been designed to not only create, maintain or renew competitive tourist destinations but also to develop tourism in which decisions are taken by all the parties directly or indirectly involved in tourist activity (Valls, 2003). Therefore, nowadays, we could speak of a more community-based, sustainable, strategic and innovative approach as a pillar of the new type of tourism planning, which implies an in-depth analysis of the environment and the social agents' participation (Boullon, 1990; Acerenza, 1997; Shulte, 2003, among others).

In Spain, these ideas have evolved and been incorporated into the different strategies that have been implemented. However, it was not until 2015, with the approval of the Sustainable Tourism Charter (2015), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda⁴, that the incorporation of full participation and involvement of local communities and their populations began to be discussed with greater determination. In the Sustainable Tourism Strategy 2030, the Spanish Secretariat of State for Tourism addresses sustainability based on three components: socio-economics, the environment and territory. This plan includes social participation and the improvement of the competitive capacity and profitabil-

ity of cultural and natural values as differential aspects of destinations, and the equitable distribution of the benefits and burdens of tourism. Thus, it is not surprising that there are several key factors in the most recent strategic tourism plans: sustainability, public and private co-responsibility, and local administration (Beas, 2012), and although not all of these have been implemented, they have enabled the foundations to be laid for citizen participation mechanisms to be put into effect (Ortiz, 2014). In this sense, there are several examples of analyses, methodologies and tourism destinations that have incorporated participatory action as a tourism strategy (Jamal and Gertz, (1995); Faulkner, (2002); Alvarado et al. 2002; Palafox, (2005); Nájera, (2005); Smith and Robinson, (2006); Fernández, 2008; Albarrán, (2018); Pérez, (2018) (2018b) among others). All these positions would be oriented towards linking sustainability, planning and public participation, and encouraging attitudes of co-responsibility in the management of destinations (Serrano et al. 2020).

The rise and fall of participation and perception in tourism. A path under construction

The tourism sector, in particular, suffered the effects of a severe

economic recession caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Spain has taken multiple actions to reboot this activity in the international context and devised a roadmap for reactivating what is a fundamental sector for sustainable development, both nationally and internationally (UNWTO, 2020).

In June 2020, the Government of Spain published the Plan to Boost the Tourism Sector: Towards Safe and Sustainable Tourism, based on socio-economic and environmental sustainability and the co-responsibility of companies, workers and the public sector. In this sense, if tourism activity is considered to be a continuously developing systemic and transversal activity in which different actors participate, and if communities are considered to be the main managers of their natural and cultural resources, the vision of a shared strategy of tourism excellence - based on competitiveness and sustainability criteria - to meet all these objectives is seen as a challenge in today's tourism activity. In this context, landscapes promote the development of very diverse tourism experiences and products, offering countless proposals and diversification at tourist destinations. Culture, nature and heritage are linked to landscapes and new leisure and tourism offers.

Gaps became apparent in sustainability policies and their implementation in the wake of the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, although sustainability was deferred in the early stages of the pandemic, in the economic recovery it has been positioned as an opportunity and administrations are providing tools and resources to prevent any undesired impacts and generate destinations with high sustainability standards. The promotion of sustainable and inclusive tourism is one of the priorities identified in the public policies of the last two years, thus meeting the need for social participation tools and local community actions that facilitate management in small, new destinations with strong identities to develop public and private policies in the field of tourism. There is no doubt that the social dimension is very important for achieving these objectives and, so, the incorporation of local communities into the planning process is recommended. Other key actions in the most recent public policies include urging and requiring private companies to work on the ecological transition, the social cohesion of their tourism products, the territorial cohesion of destinations, digitalisation and gender equality. Co-responsibility is sought as an action. However, how co-responsi-

bility can be implemented is not so obvious. Nonetheless, it will help to activate processes that make the compliance and also non-compliance of all the actors - people and institutions - that form part of the tourism system effective. What is especially interesting about co-responsibility is that it does not fit exclusively into a legal context or classic traditional administrative responsibility; co-responsibility is about establishing better communication between communities and tourism activity. People must take responsibility for their rights and participate in decision-making that affects the quality of their resources and their way of life. But what are these processes that could enable communities to have a voice in policy decisions and allow them to participate in preventing and correcting any undesirable impacts of tourism development? One thing is certain: tourism that is not sustainable and does not take into account the social perception and decisions of its main stakeholders, the people, is not sustainable tourism for any organisation, public or private. Co-responsibility favours sustainability and co-responsible management obliges managers to include everybody, both residents and tourists, in the design of tourism strategies (Pérez, 2020). The importance of these actions is the

opportunity that they afford communities and all individuals to acquire knowledge - and above all, awareness - of tourism activity, its evolution, how it affects the territory and the relationships established between all tourism stakeholders.

Participation has been a constant in Spain since 1978 thanks to articles 9 and 23 of the Spanish Constitution, although this has not guaranteed effective participation. At present, participation is associated with public management and decision-making processes, and cases such as the volcano on the island of La Palma (Canary Islands, Spain), or the case of Las Montañas Sagradas de Gran Canaria and Risco Caído (Canary Islands, Spain), are examples of this. Although participation channels and mechanisms are promoted, they are linked to occasional, partial consultations at specific times, with little follow-up and no continuation. In fact, as observed in the fieldwork for the PAYSOC project, in the particular case of Risco Caído, participatory actions have been disengaged and relegated to agents who have little or nothing to do with the governance model established for this World Heritage site, with tourism making way for a perception far removed from the reality of the territory and generating new activities not only through

the images projected by the institutions but also by visitors. In this sense, when faced with a clear conflict of heritage intervention and of uses impacting on the definition of the territory, various authors state that participation should be used to solve any possible conflicts in a participatory governance model. In the management of landscapes, in the management of the area affected by the volcano and in the Risco Caído landscape, it is necessary to find a consensus, to define the roles and responsibilities of each participating agent and to be very clear that participation must be civic, not limited to political or social participation, as this would help to prevent any conflicts (Corpas, 2022; Yáñez, 2012; Quintero, 2020; Durán and Carrera, 2017, among others).

Participation serves to analyse the perception of participation itself. It also serves to analyse democracies, the quality of citizenship, the management of institutions, to work with the different arenas⁵ of realities, the construction of realities and their incorporation into governance models, and the great challenge is to find indicators for this. The reality is that there is a lack of in-depth methodological analyses of perception vs participation, especially if the complexity of the register is taken into account, of

how perception is recorded through participation.

Perception and participation in landscape tourism management. An existing sensitivity in the reality of the virtual

As mentioned in the previous paragraphs, the European Landscape Convention (2000) takes participation into account. The tools and ways to make this happen, to protect, manage and improve the landscape in Spain, have been described in the work by Rafael Mata Olmo and Daniel Ferrer (2021), and participation has been included in the regulations on the implementation of public administration policies. Once again, as in the case of other regulations - such as historical and cultural heritage laws - the diversity and treatment of landscape throughout Spain is palpable at both state and autonomous community level. This work concludes that the law maintains that landscapes should be protected for their significant values, their heritage value; that urban legislation includes landscape as an aspect to be considered in land classification and that it should be a preferential object in special plans and municipal planning catalogues. Landscape is an inspiring concept, but it has not yet been incorporated

in the way that the European Landscape Convention proposes. However, although Mata & Ferrer (2021) recognise that landscape is being considered as an integrating and participative way of reading the territory, only in the final paragraph do they mention that landscape management requires platforms and networks of citizens, institutions and technicians. Whether it 'suffers' from tourist activity, is a destination, is a complementary resource or the main attraction, a landscape is a social space in which different cultures are connected. However, these relations are very asymmetrical (Pratt, 1991). Moreover, this occurs in a geographical context with a specific regime that may be more or less distant from tourist areas and more or less linked to tourist activity.

The complexity of managing a landscape comprises all the previously explained arguments. As an activity that is capable of transforming the meaning of goods, tourism forces us to pay greater attention to the management of the territory and its resources and their uses. Identity is also included in the definition of landscape. Perception, individual or collective, is based on the self-perception of residents and their position with respect to the landscape and its components.

These components are values, attitudes and spatial organisation itself, and they must all be taken into account (Mata, 2012). These are the ingredients that make up the landscape arena (Stendardi et al., 2020), a place where tourists, residents and public administrations all come together. As Stendardi et al. (2020) state, this relationship is uncertain and it is as essential to understand each agent's perception of the landscape as it is to understand the views and projections of the agents that interact with the landscape through the Internet.

Therefore, landscape-based tourism activity generates discrepancies and conflicts. A study carried out in the north of the island of Tenerife (Canary Islands, Spain) on the perceptions of the local community and tourists of a landscape that is at the same time both a protected landscape and a tourist resource revealed a process of transformation of the landscape and its natural and cultural assets that has been driven by the tourist phenomenon, thus generating a context, a specific contact scenario. This work explains that the meaning that the community attributes to the landscape is strongly connected to identity, which conflicts with the legislation of the administration, which has imposed new uses



Coast of the municipality of Buenavista, in the north of the island of Tenerife. Photo: Elena Pérez González

associated with tourism and more protectionist regulations. These new regulations have contributed to the loss of some traditional landscape uses and encouraged new uses linked to tourism. Authors conclude that tourism is an additional fundamental agent in landscape management and state that both perception and participation must be included in tourism planning. When it is understood in this way, planning promotes learning strategies and the assumption of responsibilities by locals and visitors (Stendardi et. al., 2020).

The sensitivity around landscapes and the recording of this sensitivity, which is already complex in itself, becomes even more complicated when the landscape is not only constructed by expert and not-so-expert agents, but also by people - including tourists - who interact through the digital world. That landscapes have a presence in the virtual world is a reality, and this reality is generating an even more complex arena than that described in the previous paragraphs. In this digital arena, spaces are created to communicate any topic related

to this - and other - typologies of goods, whether cultural or natural. This arena is both powerful and striking. The interaction between virtual visitors and the landscape is generating a complicated world in which opinions, images, debates, congratulations and complaints are mixed and portray multidimensional contexts. Imposing co-responsibility for landscape management in this context is very difficult. Those who manage the official digital channels have a great responsibility here. The academic and research world is also contributing to this by fostering co-responsibility built on research results; landscape analysis on the internet is based on social relations and, as such, social relations can be investigated.

Christine Hine (2004; 2005) is representative in this sense in the field of virtual ethnography, as are the works of Ardévol et al. (2003), Heredia (2005), Meneses (2014), Mosquera (2008), and Pink et al. (2015), among others. They all focus on virtual ethnography and, particularly, on the subject of landscapes (for example, Durán, 2012) and highlight research focused on this traditional ethnographic methodology that investigates online social agents and the documentation that exists on the Internet. The initial results of the PAYSOC research project point to

the great usefulness of this method of analysing social perception, which can easily be contrasted with the information offered by other channels. However, at the same time, the data also show that other information extracted from the networks is good support for incorporating social assessments into landscape characterisation. It also has the advantage that this methodology makes it possible to obtain a broader knowledge of social agents and, therefore, to record their perceptions, identify agents whose perceptions of landscapes are more influential, and adapt to the fast-changing world of social agents' demands in this type of context⁶.

Tourism is, precisely, an activity that has a powerful influence and ability to modify perceptions of a destination on the Internet; in our case, of a landscape. Returning to the examples previously cited in this text, both the landscape in La Palma ravaged by the volcano and the Risco Caído landscape in Gran Canaria are places in a geographical, social and economic context whose main economic engine is tourism; and when a landscape is on the Internet, it can be modified by the different forms of interaction established on the Internet. Thus, communication between tourism

managers and potential visitors or, indeed, tourists is a transversal agent between these social agents. Through its different spaces, the Internet influences not only the way that travel is organised but also its associated expectations, experiences, preferences and disappointments. Thus, a dual path of actions has been generated through communication: a digital life and a life full of projected expectations and personal relationships that generate links and new identities, and this, in turn, has effects on social perception: a process of collective construction of landscape interpretation.

The impact of tourist activity on landscapes, on this type of property, is unquestionable and there is a need to understand the perception of the impact and its causes. Work is being done on this and virtual ethnography mechanisms are working together that will make it easier to incorporate landscape management into tourism planning as a social construction in the identification of tourism resources and their uses. The perception and definition of the roles of all the agents involved in tourism activity will enable better, more equitable and sustainable governance models. Tourism is very dynamic and this methodological approach of ana-

lysing perceptions will improve the management of the resource that is the landscape from a multivariate anthropological perspective and from the analysis of the landscape in cyberspace.

This new research, which includes the recording of perception through different participatory means, such as the method developed by the PAYSOC project, is changing how landscapes and their resources are managed. In the past, the vision of experts was predominant. Now, experts work on analysing how people relate to the landscape, how it affects them, how it benefits them, and whether they are aware of it or want to conserve it. These data have opened the door to more diverse, sensitive and inclusive landscape management (Pérez 2021) and use, extending to areas such as urban planning, tourism and sustainability.

Notas

1. The Directorate General for Cultural Heritage of the Government of the Canary Islands is using social participation actions in a pilot project on the island of La Palma to develop strategies for the prevention, protection and safeguarding of cultural heritage assets in the event of emergencies, risks and natural disaster. Through inter-administrative coordination, the Cultural Heritage Recovery Plan aims to develop protocols for action, evacuation, dissemination and cataloguing that can be extrapolated to the rest of the Canary Islands.
2. In: <https://riscocaido.grancanaria.com/es>.
3. According to the latest UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, international tourism increased in the first five months of 2022, with almost 250 million international arrivals recorded. This means that compared to the 77 million arrivals recorded between January and May 2021, tourism has recovered to almost half (46 %) of the 2019 pre-pandemic level. In: <https://www.unwto.org/es/taxonomy/term/347>.
4. In <https://www.unwto.org/es/turismo-agenda-2030>.
5. Arena is an anthropological concept that focuses on a territory - in our case a landscape - and what happens in that particular place, with its own characteristics, situations and encounters, to help explain related issues (Flores, 2021).
6. Official meeting of the PAYSOC research team in Seville in April 2022.

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