

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Sustainable Rural Tourism in Andalusia: A SWOT Analysis

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Abstract

Currently there is virtually no field or sector that does not take into consideration the paradigm of sustainable development. Obviously, in this sense, touristic activity in general and the rural tourism sector in particular are no exceptions. Sustainable rural tourism is an emerging form of touristic activity that is taking on more and more relevance in many countries. Developed in rural areas, this alternative permits visitors to be in touch with the environment while simultaneously enjoying its cultural heritage, learning about the traditional customs and habits in the daily lives of the people living in these areas. In an attempt to diagnose the reality of sustainable rural tourism in Andalusia, its current status and potential, this study conducts a SWOT analysis on this tourism sector. The results obtained have allowed strategic priorities to be identified and have highlighted the key aspects of good governance in this Andalusian tourism sector. Thus a whole series of action guidelines are provided for both public administrations and private initiatives to permit the identification of behaviors and tendencies favorable to the demand for rural settings as sustainable spaces for free-time activities in the medium term.

Keywords: *Andalusia, Sustainable development, Sustainable tourism, Sustainable rural tourism, SWOT analysis.*

Introduction

The tourism sector has become one of the main drivers of socioeconomic development in a great number of countries and regions. In fact, according to forecasts of the World Tourism Organization (WTO), tourism is expected to be the first global economic activity by 2020, reaching 1.6 billion tourists [1]. In the international sphere this sector is subject to continual changes due to the growing number of factors involved in its format as an independent economic engine. The traditional tourism model is undergoing transformations, giving rise to multiple tourism realities characterized by their diversity in segments and products. All of this has made the tourism industry face growing levels of dynamism and complexity that oblige destinations to undergo structural adaptation to be able to go on enjoying their market share and, moreover, guarantee their permanence.

The Andalusian region, an extremely attractive destination, is also immersed in this complex scenario of continuous transformations. Andalusia is famous for being a tourist area of great singularity with different degrees of development and models of touristic exploitation, strongly characterized by its offer of sun and beach. In

fact, this region is linked to this modality due, principally, to its privileged geographical position and its almost year-round favorable climate [2].

On the international scene this traditional tourism is becoming obsolete, as clearly evidenced in Britain [3, 4], Spain [5], Croatia [6] and Italy [7]. With each passing year there is a smaller proportion of travelers moved to seek sun and the beach, with more growth now in other formats. There is a progressive demand for something more than this standard classical model; many tourists are rejecting inflexible proposals intended for mass tourism and instead seek authentic products as well as specific locations, with increasing interest in local cultures and traditions [4]. A growing number of tourists prefer new options that are not standard, a return to traditional and typical values. In short, the quest for authenticity is at a peak. [8, 9].

This new context has produced tourism offers that incorporate environmental, social and other types of parameters (climate, hospitality, quality of life, health, etc.) and that allow the idiosyncrasies of an area to shine through. All these attributes contribute to preparing for new markets a unique

and attractive touristic product, different from the rest [10, 11]. The new tourist, ever more demanding, requires products that are more personalized, and experiences within local cultures and the environment of the destinations [12, 13].

Andalusia has not remained untouched by this development and, although the Andalusian tourism offer is still linked to the most classical sector, in the last few years other alternative proposals have emerged. Today, this community does not limit itself to only offering sun and beach since not all the tourists that choose this as their destination have exclusive preference for this sector. There are also other modalities of tourism with diverse relevant demands: sports tourism, adventure tourism, nature tourism, cultural tourism, urban tourism, rural tourism, cruise tourism, congress tourism, language learning tourism and health and beauty tourism [14]. A more recent classification of the tourism sectors in Andalusia considers these others: coastal tourism, domestic tourism, cultural tourism, rural tourism, golf tourism, flamenco tourism, camping tourism, meeting and congress tourism, nautical tourism, cruise tourism, health tourism and health, beauty and city tourism [15]. Among all these proposals there is one modality, rural tourism that is the focal point of this study, especially the initiatives for sustainable rural tourism. Specifically, a SWOT analysis will be carried out with respect to this type of initiatives in Andalusia.

Sustainable Tourism

Beyond a superficial and short-term vision of the current economic crisis, the growing tendency of the global ecological footprint, the end of the era of cheap and abundant energy and the climate change are emerging with extraordinary force, totally altering some of the fragile balances that support touristic activity. We are probably witnessing the birth of a new cycle that requires the reformulation of general and specific paradigms for some major global activities, including tourism.

Tourism has become one of the key forces of economic progress and development. Its continuing expansion as a world-wide activity, the synergies that trigger other sectors and the dependence of intact natural surroundings give it a leading role from the perspective of sustainable development. This sector has been identified, within the Green Economy initiative of the United Nations, as one of the ten that can inspire humanity in the transition toward a low-carbon, inclusive and green economy [16], which implies a

transformation toward a new social, economic and environmental model. The commitment to greener tourism can contribute to economic growth, to the reduction of poverty and the creation of employment, at the same time that it allows more efficiency in the use of resources and reduction to a minimum of the deterioration of the environment [17]. Finally it is an activity linked to the seven key issues discussed in Río+20 (United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro): employment, energy, cities, food, water, oceans and their disasters, and which can be considered as a factor in development for both countries under development and developed ones.

The Conceptual Framework of Sustainable Tourism

At present there is virtually no area or sector that does not take the paradigm of sustainable tourism into consideration. According to Romagosa [18] “the field of tourism has been incorporating this approach over the last two decades” [19-34], although this filtration process of ideas and concepts typical of the field of sustainable tourism has been slow and has not yet ended, nor has it been exempt of some difficulties [35].

Sustainable tourism is a major focus in the discussion regarding environmentally integrated tourism development [36]. However, despite the extensive use of this concept, there is no single and generally accepted definition. Over time, different definitions have been presented [21-23, 37-39] and in a relatively short time this concept has become an ideological, conceptual, philosophical axis, a process or a product, all according to the context [40]. Nonetheless, there is a conceptual problem concerning sustainable tourism.

One definition, the first proposed by the WTO, notes that sustainable tourism development is that which “meets the needs of today’s tourists and of the host regions while protecting and fomenting opportunities for the future [22]. Therefore, this type of tourism is seen as a way to manage economic, social and aesthetic needs, while respecting cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems.” Within the framework of this declaration, the WTO extends the principles of sustainable tourism development: to the conservation of natural, historic and cultural resources; to the need for the proper planning and management of the activity; to satisfying existing demand; and to the generous sharing of the profits of tourism to all of society.

After a decade, the WTO reformulated its initial proposal [27] to grant more relevance to achieving a better balance between environmental, economic and social spheres as well as to include objectives like the reduction of poverty, among other things. Indeed, a more complete definition of sustainable tourism should take into account not only the viability of tourism in the long term, but also the objective of not degrading or altering the environment of the destinations (natural and human) which could hinder the development of other activities or processes [41]. On its own web page, this organization currently defines the concept as “The tourism that takes fully into account current and future economic, social and environmental repercussions to meet the needs of visitors, industry, the environment and host communities”. It is a process of continual improvement that implies both tourism in cities and in complexes, rural zones, and coastal, mountain and protected areas. Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic and social aspects of tourism development, requiring the establishment of an adequate balance of these three dimensions to guarantee long term sustainability. Therefore sustainable tourism should [42, 43]

- Give the best possible use to environmental resources, which are a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural resources and biological diversity.
- Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserving their cultural and architectural assets and their traditional values, and contributing to intercultural understanding and tolerance.
- Ensure viable economic activities in the long term that afford well-distributed socio-economic benefits for all stakeholders, including among them opportunities for stable employment, income generation and social services for the host communities that will then contribute to reducing poverty.
- Encourage the ample and informed participation of all stakeholders in the planning and management process of destinations, as well as strong political leadership to achieve ample collaboration and build consensus.
- Ensure a high level of tourist satisfaction that encourages a greater awareness on the part of tourists about sustainability issues, thus

encouraging their participation in more sustainable practices.

Achieving sustainable tourism is an ongoing process and requires constant monitoring of its incidents, to introduce whatever preventive or corrective measures may be necessary.

In short, the interdependence of economic growth and environmental conservation can be noted implicitly or explicitly along with the need for equitable profit distribution derived from this development and these form the cornerstones for sustainable tourism development. These axes can be represented in the form of a triangle whose center shows the zone of desirable balance for the reconciliation of the three fundamental objectives of sustainable development: economic growth, environmental sustainability and social equality.

Sustainability cannot be identified with an ideal, practically utopian state. It should be seen as a process of qualitative change that guides or reorients tourism development towards achievable goals. For this reason, in continuation there is a proposal for a definition that respects the principles of sustainable development and seeks above all to be operational and useful in the planning and management of tourism activity.

Thus sustainable tourism development is defined as a process of qualitative change that is the product of a political intent, along with the indispensable participation of the local population, to adapt the institutional and legal framework and also planning and management tools for a class of tourism development based on a balance between the preservation of natural and cultural heritage, the economic viability of tourism and the social equity of development [44]. So there is a bid to reformulate the objective in such a way that will pinpoint the strategy to follow, facilitating the determination of the role played by tourism in the global strategy for the sustainability of a society [45].

Sustainable Rural Tourism

All business activities should be carried out in a sustainable way. However, there are some that have to be handled with the utmost of care, among them rural tourism, whose base products and services are shaped by nature and the cultural and human environment. Although not considered at first to be a potentially harmful activity, the great surge in rural tourism has today caused a questioning of its capacity to

continue growing without gravely endangering its environmental, cultural and social surroundings.

The development of rural tourism activities imply a certain risk, since the areas concerned are usually those of great ecological, cultural and landscape value. Furthermore, this activity implies certain risk factors for the zone (land use, development of infrastructures, emissions and discharges of different substances, etc.). Thus tourism activity that is developed in rural surroundings has to be properly planned and managed [46] so as to avoid negative environmental, cultural or social impacts. All this requires the adoption of a long-term approach (strategic planning) and takes into account the many ways in which tourism and the environment are interrelated, thus avoiding situations in which these activities or facilities could provoke an overuse of the zone's capacity which could consequently lead to adversely affecting the demand itself as a consequence of environmental and/ or cultural damage to the territory. Certainly, unplanned or uncontrolled rural tourism would entail irreparable damage, even greater than any other traditional tourism activity, since it has a special power of physical and psycho-social penetration [47]. The concept of sustainability applied to rural tourism requires taking the following aspects into consideration

- Strategic planning and management are the key to the successful development of sustainable rural tourism, and must be driven by individuals and organizations in both public and private spheres. However, to be efficient, priorities must be set and there has to be a work program based on short periods of time.
- In general it is fundamental to establish measurable targets and a continuous process to evaluate them and keep them up-to-date.
- Carrying out an analysis of the social, economic, ecological and cultural needs of the territory where these activities are to be carried out.
- Promoting the involvement of all stakeholders in decision-making that affects the planning, development and control of tourism activities.
- Sustainable tourism activity should generate revenues to finance activities to conserve and preserve the environmental and cultural heritage of the area (financial and political interdependence between conservation and tourism), as well as synergies that lead to long term growth of the rural economy as a whole. It

represents, then, an alternative to achieve the necessary balance between the development of touristic activity (economic) and the conservation of the environmental and cultural assets that make up its base. [48-51].

- Education and the training of visitors, businessmen, workers and the local population is fundamental in order to create a collective awareness about sustainability and to reinforce the commitment of all the parties involved with respect to protecting and preserving local resources, which is what the activity of sustainable rural tourism depends on.
- The minimization or elimination of negative external factors for human, natural and cultural resources in the zone of reference. In this respect, ongoing assessment of the impact of tourism activity on these resources is essential. To do so, we recommend the use of indicators that enable the quantification of impacts to thus be able to conveniently adjust the development of activities in the zone.
- Respect for local culture and traditions, as well as for the character of the place and its original orientation, always trying to avoid the introduction of non-native elements. In this case, sustainable rural tourism represents a way to evaluate its conservation [52-54].
- Adoption of an integrated approach to development, oriented toward society, the economy and the environment and based on the implication of all the stakeholders along with local associations and collaboration. This is all indispensable to achieve sustainable rural tourism.
- Given the multifunctional character of rural areas, in some cases sustainable rural tourism is considered to be a key element in rural development [55-57]. However, it is essential to balance this sustainable tourism offer with other alternative uses of the environment to avoid possible conflicts.
- Implication and participation of the whole rural community. This circumstance is vital for two reasons. In the first place, to avoid conflicts and tension that could appear if the tourism model used is not compatible with the wishes and objectives of the local community, which could happen if the interests of external groups end up dominating and controlling the activity. In the second place, local residents undoubtedly have the moral right to be involved in the

development of an activity that derives benefits and costs for the community itself. This is especially true in rural areas where the local population frequently has a “symbiotic relationship” with the environment. However it is not easy to integrate a tourism activity in a rural community without giving someone a cause for complaint, since the development of this activity can represent both opportunities and also threats. That is why there will be a greater likelihood of success if the local community is involved in the decision-making process and these same individuals perceive that sustainable rural tourism will be truly beneficial for them.

- The creation of a well-defined tourism product. Potential clients demand quality in a tourism activity destined for them (in person attention, in accommodation and other installations, etc.). Continuing improvement in customer service leading to an increase in their level of satisfaction could undoubtedly encourage some people to consider repeating their experience in the future.
- Highlighting the need to encourage reflection and dialogue about how to diversify local economic activity in order to avoid absolute dependency on the tourism industry.

Therefore sustainable rural tourism is that which develops in rural areas and presents the characteristics of sustainable development, that is, an integrated tourism in rural, cultural and social areas based on true consideration for rural areas, the local population and local products. Thus sustainable rural tourism harmonizes the interests of the activity itself, of the environment and of the local community, managing in the best and most compatible way those ecological, socio-cultural and economic elements. Lane emphasizes that “the concept of sustainability in rural tourism should be formulated so as to consider obtaining different objectives, and should not be based solely on the implementation of a narrow-minded conservation ethic only to promote nature [58].

Strategic Analysis and SWOT Analysis in Sustainable Rural Tourism in Andalusia

This section aims to carry out a SWOT analysis of sustainable rural tourism in this community.

There are several factors that have a direct or indirect influence on rural territories and their population: those which are expressed through threats and opportunities in the case of externally

influenced factors; or in strengths and weaknesses, if these factors are characteristics of

each territory or community that develops the activity of sustainable rural tourism. Consequently the SWOT analysis shown in continuation leads to an appreciation of the potential of this type of tourism.

Weaknesses (Limitations that Prevent the Rural Zone from Coping with a Threat or Taking Advantage of an Opportunity)

- The image of the “sun and beach” destination which still accompanies tourism projection in Andalusia.
- The lack of environmental awareness and conscientiousness on the part of a great number of the local population, who lack basic general knowledge about sustainability and its implications.
- In rural zones, the population decreases because it is common for young people, who traditionally have higher educational levels, to move to other places with better job prospects. As a result, people who remain in rural areas tend to be the older generation (aging of the rural population).\
- There are various issues related to the quality of the environment in rural areas: promotion of a type of agriculture that pollutes rural areas (pollution of subterranean areas mainly due to the presence of nitrates, problems caused by the presence of arsenic, problems due to surface water pollution, etc.); overexploitation of aquifers due to poor farming practices; low levels of wastewater treatment; poor solid waste and farm waste disposal ; alteration of ecosystem conditions (impact on local fauna and flora habitats) and loss of biodiversity; problems of deforestation, erosion and desertification due to fires and other practices (in some areas the proliferation of sports using mountain bikes, all-terrain vehicles, motorbikes, etc., not only disturb the peace of the environment but also affect the environment by causing serious problems due to erosion).
- The incorporation of environmental management practices in the productive process of the area is generally poor.

- Inadequate training of workers and entrepreneurs in the sector. This lack of training adversely affects the quality of the service perceived by the customers, who are

becoming more and more demanding (lack of variety in training programs).

- There is an evident lack in management-related issues. In fact, in some territories, there are not enough high quality establishments with levels to create a product image. Furthermore, illegal accommodation is a non-controlled offer that harms clients' perceptions about the quality of these services.
- There is usually a lack of coordination between the actions promoted by the tourism sector and the rest of the sectors in this activity.
- In general, tourism development in rural areas tends to be characterized by the lack of planning and control in activities, which can lead to the abandonment of traditional activities, degradation of natural areas, different types of pollution, the loss of the native culture of the area, an increase in delinquency and drug use due to the influence of tourists, increased cost of living, etc.
- A comprehensive outlook of the rural tourism destination is lacking.
- Specific policies for the proper use and management of rural heritage are missing.
- Due to tourism activity and the influences it plays, there has been a progressive loss of cultural identity in some areas (traditions, identification with the region, new habits, etc.).
- As in other sectors, more entrepreneurs are needed.
- Some traditional crafts are maintained thanks to the contributions of ever-shrinking groups of artisans, with a clear tendency towards disappearance (pita, rope, bulrush, brass, leather and saddler types of craftsmanship).
- There is a lack of awareness in the local population about the potential of their own resources.
- The revaluation of land due to the expansion of tourism.
- The unequal distribution of profits generated by the tourism activity among community members.

- Signs of excess capacity in the supply of rural accommodation. Despite the lessening demand, supply has continued to grow at a strong rate, giving rise to supply gluts in some areas of

Andalusia, with the negative effect of penalizing occupancy rates.

- There is a lack of adequate marketing among the population in these areas with respect to the advantages of sustainable rural tourism.
- Limited diversification in the rural Andalusian economy, which is still greatly dependent on agriculture.
- Lack of experience in the marketing of this tourism modality. There is a generalized tendency to confuse the existence of resources with the availability of a product. The result is the offer of a "unstructured product" which has limited marketability possibilities because of the difficulties in obtaining access to traditional tourism distribution channels. In this sense, the degree of technological innovation incorporation is very low in this sector which further complicates the propagation of the offer.
- Many of the promotion activities for sustainable rural tourism in Andalusia are watered down before reaching the target audience that normally has no previous knowledge to judge it by. Furthermore, international markets with higher purchasing power are very far away.
- Limited development and promotion of indigenous breeds and local plant species.
- There is a great imbalance in public service supply in the territory, and it is concentrated principally in the larger municipalities.
- Limited access to financing for small and medium-sized companies in the sector.

Threats (Factors in the Macro Environment that could affect the Capacity of Areas to Respond adequately to their Markets)

- The economic crisis that reduces the chances of visitors and amounts of tourist spending.
- There are still people who see sustainable rural tourism as an alternative reserved for higher social strata and incomes (luxury).
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- Deterioration in the quality of the environment (episodes of environmental pollution, desertification, loss of forests, etc). In addition, climate change is seriously threatening the survival of some fauna and flora species, with the consequent loss in the biodiversity of the region.
- The uncontrolled influx of visitors to national and nature parks, archaeological excavations or historic sites could lead to their harm. In the concrete case of parks, the irresponsible behavior of visitors could lead to the damage of natural ecosystem conditions. Other acts, graffiti or the plundering of historical sites for souvenirs affect these sites and archaeological remains.
- The introduction and involvement in the rural environment of cultural elements foreign to them ultimately displace and annihilate the local native population. If the activities and local traditions are allowed to be adulterated or excessively commercialized, this could lead to a progressive decay in local cultural heritage and a loss of identity for the rural population. Imitation on the part of the inhabitants of the area of certain patterns of tourist behavior could lead to a loss of their own cultural values and traditions. All this could provoke, in this area, the loss of all its initial appeal as a tourist destination.
- Certain agricultural practices affect essential environmental elements (by occupation and degradation of vegetation and of the wetland soils, water courses, steep river banks, or cattle routes).
- The population decline in rural areas and the abandonment of these areas by the younger population due to a lack of future expectations. This augurs in many cases that the ethnographic heritage in certain areas is about to disappear, and there is also a lack of generational relay in agriculture and livestock activities.
- The process of the changing use of land as it is redirected toward urban uses. The messy and unsustainable urban growth occurring in many rural areas of Andalusia is cause for concern.
- The consumer is becoming more demanding about the quality of the services being provided.
- There are doubts about the consolidation of sustainable rural tourism as an economic activity in these areas.
- The lack of strategic vision in this sector that integrates agriculture, sustainable development and touristic activity transversely.
- Possible conflicts between initiatives and projects in sustainable rural tourism and investment projects in other activity sectors.
- The arrival of foreign investors whose pretensions include different objectives, aspirations and expectations than those of the local communities. Although at macroeconomic level this could be positive, it is clear that the “displacement effect” is neither good nor recommendable if the aim is to generate endogenous development processes. Hence it is very important to promote models where the role of local institutions is relevant, even if it means ruling out the cooperation of foreign investors.

Strengths (Internal Aspects of the Rural Zones that allow them to avail themselves of an Opportunity or React to a Threat)

- In general there is a strong tradition of tourism in the region which has accumulated much experience in the tourism sector.
- The region has a rich environmental, monumental, cultural and social heritage (climate, quality of life, nature areas, traditions, etc.) located in rural settings. It has a variety of natural, historical and monumental settings with great potential.
- There are more associations in rural municipalities, although even more have to be promoted. The collaboration between them and their neighbors is essential to foster the development of this form of tourism.
- Rural populations are generally recognized for being great hosts and very hospitable, open and welcoming.
- Today the level of education of the young people in rural areas has improved and environmental issues have been incorporated gradually into their educational programs.
- Harmony and balance of tourism with agricultural activity. The distribution of agricultural tasks changes in different seasons

of the year. This allows farmers to reconcile them with sustainable rural tourism in peak periods. Focusing much of this demand in periods that do not coincide with the busiest periods of agricultural activity allows agricultural workers the opportunity to develop both activities, and thus complement farm income.

- The development of agriculture as a traditional activity of rural populations gives them an extensive body of knowledge that can be transmitted to visitors. Currently it is worth highlighting that the growing prominence of agriculture and ecological farming in Andalusia links these differentiating characteristics to the natural attractions of rural origin and also to related chores and sustainable procedures.
- Little dependence on weather conditions for many of the tourist activities typical of rural areas. This characteristic is of great importance from the point of view of employment since it can give it a more stable character than other tourism modalities enjoy. This would favor the creation of small and medium-sized business oriented to employment in crafts, the cuisine typical of each area, etc., thus giving rise to a significant potential for new jobs for the local population.
- Availability to develop activities during the whole year. This reduces the seasonal character of tourism activity as a whole, since the average stay is the only variable that provides higher indicators in tourism in rural areas than in tourism in general. Although in rural settings the number of days of average stay is lower than the mean, nonetheless sustainable rural tourism is characterized by flows of visitors who have short stays, especially on weekends all year round, although the peaks are in summer and Holy Week.

Opportunities (Macro Environmental factors that, if Harnessed Properly by the Zone, can Provide Certain Advantages and / or Benefits)

- The habits and values of people are changing. One thing to highlight within this process is the new sensitivity shown by many to what is involved in sustainable rural tourism. The urbanization process, the system of living and working in a city, all of this determines the need and wish of broad sectors of the

population to enjoy rest periods outside their normal surroundings. They especially look forward to activities in a rural/natural and traditional setting. Ultimately, the growing interest in nature and the culture in rural areas is experimented by urban populations who have been deprived of this knowledge and experience due to their own urban life style.

- Regarding this last comment, more and more people are now seeking active and personalized tourism, focused on recreation and free time activities mainly in rural settings.
- The apparent saturation of traditional destinations. In the case of the “sun and beach” offer, many of the products and services offered are very similar. However the authentic taste of rural areas opens up an opportunity to offer something different to satisfy customers who are seeking different experiences with a unique flavor.
- Increased awareness in rural communities about the fact that their own development does not rely on exogenous factors, but on the mobilization of local resources through the implementation of diverse economic activities.
- The greater awareness among rural inhabitants about the possibilities inherent in sustainable rural tourism as the generator of demands for infrastructures and support services, in addition to its capacity for creating different types of favorable synergies.
- Public policies to promote development in rural areas. Community initiatives, such as LEADER I and LEADER II programs, and PRODER have permitted the implementation of a set of rural development programs aimed at: achieving sustainable and endogenous development in rural areas; the strengthening and diversification of their economies, of the activities in the field of agriculture and related sectors, as well as crafts; the maintenance of the population; also a rise in the incomes and well-being of the inhabitants and the promotion of the conservation of the area, its rural heritage and natural resources. In this context, it is necessary to highlight the growing interest of the government in the development of sustainable rural tourism. This interest is mainly due to the need to seek solutions for rural people to enable them to resolve the economic difficulties they face. In this line of action, cooperation is essential as well as dialogue and the coordination of the various economic and social agents and institutions,

- whether at local, provincial, regional or supranational levels.
- Sustainable rural tourism can contribute to the rehabilitation and conservation of monuments, buildings and historic sites, since these are all of interest to tourists. Therefore their
- recuperation and conservation are important and can also promote the creation of schools and craft workshops, and the social and employment benefits that these would create for the community.
- The progressive incorporation of the rural population in the development of activities related to rural tourism, which serve to supplement and diversify traditional production activities and promote other innovative initiatives.
- Evolution of the population pyramid. The type of population is a variable that directly affects tourism demand. Currently the population is aging progressively and there is increased life expectancy, and this situation is expected to continue for several decades. The population pyramid of 2010, along with the projected population pyramid for the year 2025, show that the top of the pyramid is broadening and there is a tendency to inversion (it is larger in the part that corresponds to ages over 65). This can be advantageous for the tourism sector since the groups with greater economic stability, adults and seniors, are and will be much more numerous than in previous decades.
- On the other hand, early retirement of many workers at a young age along with other labor achievements has raised the possibility of a greater enjoyment of free time, and tourism is one of the possible alternatives which can put this free time to good use.
- Another outstanding aspect is the change in the demographic structure in rural areas, since sustainable rural tourism promotes the maintenance and, in some cases, the increase in population as well as the non-inversion of the population pyramid. Young people are finding new opportunities for work, thus reducing emigration to more developed zones.
- The possibility of using renewable energies in the infrastructures located in these areas.
- The progressive spread, in both urban and rural populations, of a greater awareness and sensitivity with respect to environmental issues.
- Sustainable rural tourism can stimulate the sense of cultural identity in residents who see the great regard held by tourists for the historical and cultural heritage of the area. In this sense, this form of tourism can help revitalize this heritage which could otherwise be lost. As a result, this encourages the territory not to lose its identity.
- The evident improvement that transportation and communication routes have undergone in recent years.
- The creation of new jobs. Sustainable rural tourism can offer employment opportunities, especially to the young and the women in the area. Employment is not only linked to rural lodgings, hotels, and restaurants, but also to supply services such as agriculture, fishing, crafts and manufacturing.
- Tourism employees can open horizons in their work formation and start training in the applications of new technologies, which promotes the development of local human resources. Some of these qualifications and skills are transferable to other economic activities.
- In recent years there has been an increase in the level of disposable income which means that a larger proportion of family income is potentially available for holidays and travel. In general a higher level of disposable income leads to an increase in the demand for tourism.
- Income redistribution. The incomes in a country are not distributed uniformly either in space or among different segments of the population. Sustainable rural tourism can help to balance incomes since there is a transfer between more developed areas (that generate tourists and investing) and more under-developed areas (that receive tourists and investments). Tourism requires investments in infrastructures (accommodations, public services and the offer of complementary services related to health, free time, sports, etc.).

- Sustainable rural tourism can stimulate the development of local companies dedicated to this activity. Opportunities are provided for local capital investment, jobs, corporate profits, and in more general terms, to promote local initiatives. If companies are owned and managed by the people in rural areas, profits are more likely to remain in the area.
- Sustainable rural tourism can generate local tax revenue which can finance improvements in infrastructures and community services (schools, medical centers, libraries, parks and recreation facilities, roads, etc.).
- Sustainable rural tourism can open new markets for local agricultural and fishery products, handicrafts and other manufactured goods. Also it promotes the development of the retail sector, creating specialty shops and shopping areas. Finally the new tourist facilities directly contribute to the promotion of local construction industry.
- Sustainable rural tourism also provokes changes in institutional structures and in the roles of their members. New elements (young people and women) are given access to local government institutions where they traditionally have not participated previously. In turn, the greater social and cultural awareness leads to the creation of diverse socio-cultural associations.
- This form of tourism can reinforce the perspective of gender as it considers the family as a whole.
- The ability to promote agricultural and farming development with traditional crops and species and local breeds.

Conclusions

The study here presented has the main objective of analyzing sustainable rural tourism in Andalusia. To do so, a SWOT analysis has been carried out. The results obtained have allowed strategic priorities to be identified and have highlighted the key aspects of good governance in this Andalusian tourism sector.

In a tourism market characterized by its dynamism and subject to constant change, the tourism sector in Andalusia is facing, inevitably, the need to respond to the new characteristics, values and requirements of the demand, in order to procure its position and longevity.

From the results obtained, we can conclude

- The changes in tourism practices can lead to great benefits and can stimulate advances toward greater sustainability within the chain of tourism supply and in other sectors.

Green innovation can lead to the creation of more jobs, to reducing environmental impact, to reducing costs and to increasing the competitive advantages of companies and destinations, while enhancing visitors' experiences.

- Given the weaknesses found in the traditional tourism model, public and private initiative must promote such change. Andalusia has to reconfigure its tourism proposals if it wants to reinforce its competitiveness in the future. The definition of competitiveness in this setting is closely tied to three objectives: development, inclusion and conservation.
- The need for the pairing of tourism with sustainable development should be stressed yet again even though the arguments in its favor involve a double perspective: the ecological, preserving the natural environment is absolutely necessary to allow the subsistence of all the living beings that inhabit the planet; and the business economy aspect, in the sense that harming the environment means in this setting to "kill the hen that laid the golden egg". In the tourism sector, economic development and environmental protection go hand-in-hand and should not be considered as conflicting goals, but as aspirations that can and should reinforce each other mutually.
- To ensure the sustainability of the resources and the preservation of the patrimony in Andalusia, there must be an investment in innovative activities. Markets provoke preferential movements and habits in the choice of destination, which is why private initiative and public administrations must analyze and implement new formulas to capture the interest and loyalty of tourists in general, and of the most profitable in particular.
- There is a glut of tourists in certain areas of Andalusia, which might involve, among other consequences, instances of environmental degradation. This means that there should be a more balanced offer, beginning with publicity, fairs and expositions to publicize unknown rural locations to the tourist, since the tourist

- visits the most publicized places and, therefore, the most crowded ones.
- The control of the non-legitimate offer for rural lodging has to be a priority concern, despite the legal and technical difficulties involved, given the evidence of excess capacity. Despite lower demand, the supply of this type of lodging has multiplied, showing signs of overcapacity in some areas of Andalusia, which negatively penalizes occupancy rates.
- The seasonality of the demand could be reduced by letting other communities know the offer linked to this type of tourism in Andalusia. It would be a question of taking advantage of those local and regional holidays, included in the calendar of the rest of Spanish regions, and thus being able to make better use of resources.
- Although the supply of basic tourism services is growing, complementary aspects are scarce and recently created, highlighting the lack of a specific offer adapted to the demand for markedly rural areas.
- The natural resources in rural areas are valued more and more highly, creating conditions apt for visits to towns, parks, mills etc. The environmental quality of these areas is a key factor when determining the competitive level of a tourist destination of these characteristics. Therefore, considering sustainable development to be a central focus is critical in the design and implementation of Andalusian tourism strategy.
- The demand for sustainable rural tourism can be increased, although this requires the support of government (improved infrastructures, especially roads) and of the local population: businessmen, associations, cooperatives, etc. Their combined efforts can provide further development for rural zones, reducing the risk that some ranchers and farmers run by dedicating 100% of their income to farming activities. The diversification of incomes would be probable due to the tourists who choose rural areas as their target destination
- The change in tourists' expectations helps to shorten the socioeconomic delay experimented in rural areas and makes the endogenous development of these areas viable. To do so it is necessary to apply a strategic approach to the sector that transversely integrates agriculture, sustainable development and tourism, so that the rural setting is not saturated nor is the environment degraded, and at the same time both wealth and employment are generated.
- Training and awareness-raising are the unachieved challenges of sustainable tourism. Neither travelers nor owners nor business managers are educated in this respect and despite the existence of resources and expectations, what are lacking are initiatives on the part of groups and organizations.
- One of the main challenges for sustainable rural tourism in Andalusia is still marketing itself and actual contact with the market, which would require productive and commercial networks.
- It is essential to support initiatives that promote generational hand-over in rural areas and that allow measures for necessary restructuring and modernization in order to improve competitiveness and environmental sustainability and promote initiatives that can enable the diversification of economic activities, in order to give rise to new job creation (especially for youth and women) and the generation of wealth.
- Ecological agriculture and livestock could represent one of the most interesting alternatives for the agrarian sector in general, and rural Andalusian areas in particular, depending on the degree to which farmers and live stock breeders in the region are capable of linking this type of activities with the requirements of those tourists who express a preference for sustainable rural tourism. It is a demand that is growing and comes from those segments of the population that are increasingly involved in and concerned about environmental issues.
- One of the opportunities Andalusia has at her fingertips is to progressively extend its network of protected nature areas. This would allow, from an environmental point of view, an improvement in levels of protection which would help preserve the biodiversity of this community from the perspectives of rural development, increasing its tourism potential and its capacity to generate alternative employment. In this sense, it would be

recommendable for agrarian and forest areas to receive additional funding to offset in part the limitations of use they are subject to.

- The offer for sustainable rural tourism in Andalusia has grown significantly in the last decade, thus favoring the development of some territories, although it is still plagued by many shortcomings. Among these we can highlight: in business, the lack of training for businessmen and rural tourism workers; the atomization and fragmentation of rural tourism business, which makes it difficult to take some of the decisions that are vital when running a business; deficiencies in the marketing of destinations, a consequence of other shortcomings (lack of training, lack of

knowledge and insufficient amount of resources due to a lack of critical judgment); and lack of sales, or at least not fulfilling expectations. To this has to be added the low productivity of tourism companies, the limited supply of services that generate a certain added value (which has given rise to an excessive offer of imitating products, where the tourist finds no distinguishing element aside from the price) and some poorly consolidated business and public networks.

From a territorial point of view, perhaps the greatest deficit is the lack of a consistent territorial model, as well as mimetic behavior that begins to be found in coastal areas, which leaves some of these rural destinations clearly wide open to danger. The absence of initial planning and the speculative reaction to exponential increases of demand, not always touristic, is leading to undesirable situations which, at the very least, are far from ideal for this type of tourism. In this sense, all of the stakeholders involved in general

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and especially government and local businessmen ought to demonstrate greater commitment to territorial values and should seek formulas of cooperation in order to achieve competitive tourism development, not only in volume but also in the quality of what the tourist experiences and the sustainability of the tourism activity itself.

Finally, the challenge of sustainable rural tourism from the point of view of promotion and marketing lies in an increase in international market share, which is at this time practically nonexistent in many Andalusian rural areas. This requires generating a differentiated offer, based on the personality of each territory and which responds to those segments of demand that are becoming more and more reduced and specialized. By the same token, it is necessary to count on technology to make the offer for sustainable rural tourism get to the potential customers and improve their chances of booking.

Getting the tourist product to the consumer is an arduous task. Nonetheless, once this has been achieved, it will mean an appreciable complementary source of income for the inhabitants of rural areas. Coordinating and planning all the initiatives in tourism material, addressing new threats and weaknesses that arise, fostering environmental sustainability and providing a differentiated and competitive product that meets the needs of an ever more experienced and specialized demand, are all the objectives that the rural population has to keep in mind in order to improve their current situation, not only economically but also socially, expanding as well as retaining a sector within the broad spectrum of the tourist market that will help create wealth, while benefitting all those concerned in rural society.

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