

Rural tourism: A sustainable alternative

M. Victoria Sanagustín Fons, José A. Moseñe Fierro*, María Gómez y Patiño

Universidad de Zaragoza, Plaza Constitución s/n, 22001 Huesca, Spain

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 11 December 2009
Received in revised form 1 July 2010
Accepted 30 August 2010
Available online 16 October 2010

Keywords:

Interior rural sustainable tourism
Aragon
Spain

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to show and share the results of the research we made in order to improve the situation of sustainable interior rural tourism in Spain. We chose our region: Aragon and we studied the case. We had to consider the financial crisis in the hope that our results would contribute to minimize it. We knew beforehand that rural tourism had been less affected than other sectors but still it was important to reach our goal.

It had to be proved that rural interior tourism could be sustainable in Spain by means of quantitative secondary data. It is well-known that tourism is the first source and activity in Spain, but due to the increase in the international sector of new exotic destinations abroad, rural tourism could be threatened and sustainable rural interior tourism could be an alternative for present and future times. We got qualitative data through personal interviews to experts and a *SWOT analysis*, *id est*, the measure and description of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, as an instrument to measure the state of the question within a theoretical framework of sustainable tourism. The results of this research have proved it. Rural tourism is existing and viable in Aragon, with important benefits for present and future opportunities.

© 2010 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In a global world where “sustainability” has been used in so many and diverse fields, “it” must be defined according to the goals of our research and the theoretical model we try to implement in our study. To begin with, the paradigm of sustainability is not only known and used but actually imposed in most areas of knowledge. In fact, there are hundreds of proposals of any type for scientific forums everywhere [1]. The paradigm we decided to use is known as the *Triple Bottom Line* [2] and it works from three different points of view, *id est*: *economic*, *environmental* and *social* fields, which in fact is the accountability that any company, institution or organisation should render, as sustainability, nowadays.

Our research on sustainable tourism is based mainly on environment as per Chan and Wong [3], as an essential input for tourist industry, but paradoxically, this activity could also damage environment, unless we refer to social responsible tourists.

We had decided to begin our research with a practical sense. That means that even taking into account many of the theoretical approaches there are in the tourism literature, would give us some personal satisfaction and could be applied to some particular territory for its improvement. That was the reason for our choice.

1.1. Object of study

We chose one region: Aragon¹ as the *object of our study*, because it had multiple facets and advantages:

- (1) It is the region where we live and work,
- (2) Possibility of being researchers “in situ”, with a deep knowledge of the region and
- (3) Final results could contribute to improve the social conditions of this region and the population, in economic terms.

Spain is worldwide known by tourism, which has been, and still is, one of the main production sectors in Spain. In Aragon has also generated a great deal of wealth [4]. Our research deepens into the study of sustainable interior rural tourism in Aragon, with the aim of developing new strategies compatible with sustainable tourism, which intends to:

- Provide optimum use of environmental resources that are a basic element for developing tourism, preserving essential eco-

¹ Aragon Autonomy includes three provinces: Zaragoza, Huesca and Teruel and is located (North) in the middle of Pyrenees (France) to Cuenca (South). With no coast, is irrigated by river Ebro, which runs west–east across the entire region through the Province of Zaragoza. Area 47,719 km², over 7000 villages. The region’s terrain ranges diversely from permanent glaciers to verdant valleys, rich pasture lands and orchards, through to the arid steppe plains of the central lowlands. Inhabitants approx. 1,500,500. Half of the population living in Zaragoza, its capital city.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +34 974 239373; fax: +34 974 239375.

E-mail addresses: vitic@unizar.es (M.V. Sanagustín Fons), jamosene@unizar.es (J.A.M. Fierro), mariagp@unizar.es (M.G. Patiño).

logical processes as a contribution to care and preserve natural resources and biological diversity.

- Be respectful with socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, preserving their cultural, architectural, life assets and traditional values, in order to get better understanding and inter-cultural tolerance.
 - Ensure long-term, viable economic activities, providing all agents with widely distributed socio-economic benefits, where new opportunities for stable employment should arise. Social services could bring a benefit for the host communities, as a means to reduce poverty or get better life quality.
- Despite the importance of the sustainable development, some difficulties have been detected in the understanding process of this concept by tourism industry [5]. That is the reason why some environmental practices have to be adopted by the tourism enterprises [6] within the sustainable tourism.

The World Tourism Organisation (WTO) has been intensely active on these issues over the latest years producing a wide list of actions and aims [7], which tackled the present day challenges for sustainable development of tourism: relieving poverty, managing natural and cultural heritage and climate change.

The results of the recent events were presented, in order to reduce and mitigate the social and environmental negative impact within the tourism sector, with illustrative cases of different countries, institutions and business that had already put into practice some steps and policies to minimize the negative impact on sustainable tourism.

2. Research goals

Our research is aimed to get three main objectives, which could bring, apart from many findings and results, many secondary social benefits for the territory studied.

Firstly, it is an attempt to get a SWOT analysis of rural tourism in Aragon (Spain), using as referential experience the seaside tourism

as and main type of tourism activity developed in Spain. A SWOT analysis on rural tourism cannot be made without considering the seaside tourist phenomenon, as said before. The 60s and 70s based its success on the apparition of the “sun cult” and its consequent massive occupation of the coastal areas [8]. This classical beach tourism has become obsolete, evidence of it is the available examples in Great Britain [9,10]; Spain [11], Croatia [12] or Italy [13]. Following Sedmak et al. [14], the emergence of new overseas destinations, increased the interest in previously neglected rural and urban destinations. The technological revolution made the competitive struggle for traditionally intra regional European tourism more severe, eroding European seaside resorts market share [15]. From an upper level, Public Administration is developing a strategic plan to develop rural tourism as a tool to reach the public policies and economic aims. From a lower level, it is the demand in itself, what requires more than a classical model based on sun and beach. Politicians reject inflexible and non-authentic products developed for mass tourism. They also show opposition to these localizations paying more interest to ethnical heritage and tradition [10]. New values and characteristics are demanded by tourism that tries to avoid an average or standard level. They look for a return to the traditional and typical values different from the new ones, they ask strongly for original values and authenticity [16,17].

Lately, new tourism products have appeared, incorporating some environmental, natural and social parameters as climate, countryside, sands, sea, landscape, infrastructure, hospitality, life quality standard, lifestyle, health and idiosyncrasy of the area [6,18]. All these attributes create a unique tourism product, absolutely different from the rest [18]. The tourism market specially started to demand more customized products and experiences within local cultures in environmentally “responsible” destinations [14,19].

Secondly, our study examines how and which is the perception towards tourism and rural tourism. To reach this aim, we have taken information given by expert people who manage tourism in the region, and we have used too secondary data.

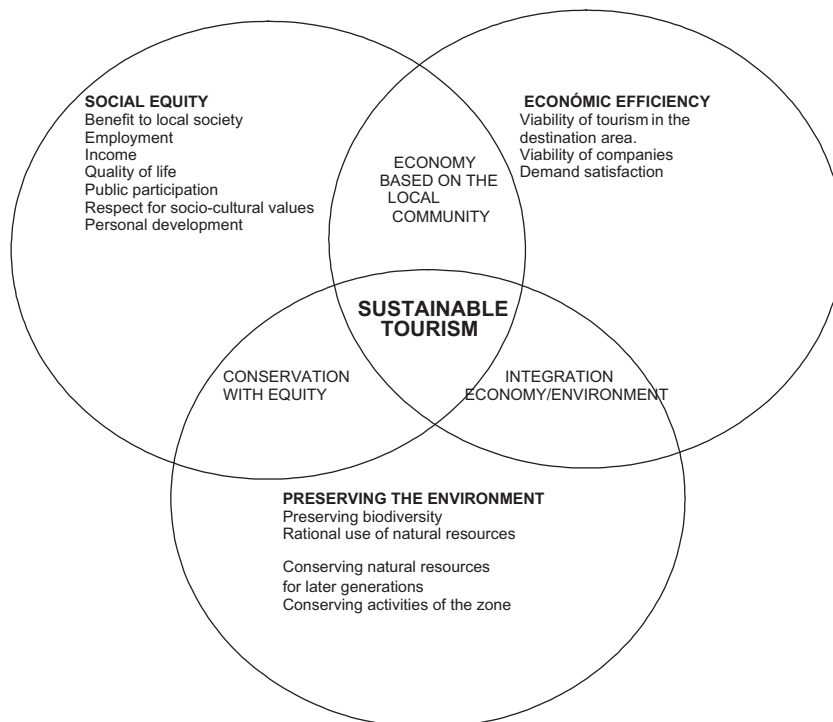


Fig. 1. Sustainable Tourism Model. Source: Drawn up from Hall (1998) [30].

Thirdly, our research aims to study the role of sustainability as the most important paradigm in our days, concerning a socio-economic activity like tourism, as we have remarked in Section 1.

Despite the growth either in general tourism, or rural tourism, and despite the vast amount of subsidies tourism has received, and the political will of improving this challenge, our approach to present a SWOT analysis on rural tourism tries to lighten and open the way of improvement.

The rest of this article is structured as follows: first, description of the methodology used, including specifications of the data collection, measures, and chosen method to analyze the data. Second, the results are provided on the basis of research literature review and the whole collected data; third, and finally, the conclusions and consequent discussion indicate the usefulness of this research and prescribe some limitations as well as diverse lines for future research.

The theoretical focus, which is the base for this work, suggests clearly that we are working in favour of the tourism consolidation, from the point of view of sustainable tourism, understanding sustainability, as mentioned previously, to maintain the three dimensions that define it at present: environmental, economic and social. Obviously, within tourism sustainability, it is necessary to explain that social sustainability refers to preserving and “*méttant en valeur*” the historical and cultural heritage of the region. The Sustainable Tourism Model (based on the *Triple Bottom Line* referred in Section 1) can be seen in Fig. 1, and it works with each and every single aspect. In addition to social sustainability, there also must be environmental sustainability, as tourism requires an environment that must be attractive enough to be visited. However, the development of it usually contributes to its deterioration or destruction. The concept of tourism is largely bound up to the environment, unlike what happens in other sectors which makes it impossible to carry out tourism activities without taking that into account.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection

Methodologically, we decided to use quantitative and qualitative data. For the first one, we sought the secondary literature on the state of the question of Sustainable Tourism in Aragon, through an analysis of statistical documents and *ad hoc* previous studies. The reliability of these sources were assessed by scrutinising them, avoiding any possible alteration, competences, skills and knowledge of the writers, and the theoretical framework in which they were undertaken, the political climate and the purpose for which they were written, in order to be objective enough for our best choice.

The sources for the secondary data were databases and documents published by some Spanish institutes and research centres like:

- Statistics Institute of Aragon.
- Chambers of Commerce in Aragon.
- Aragonese Employment Institute.
- FUNDEAR: reports on the economic situation in Aragon.
- Ministry for Development.
- Ministry of Finance.
- Department of Economy, Finances and Employment of the Government of Aragon.
- Town Councils of Zaragoza, Huesca and Teruel.
- Other secondary sources.

For the primary qualitative data, we made a quest. This quest was based on personal semi-structured interviews. As respondents

1. Your personal assessment regarding tourism in their area (PTZ.1)
 - 1.a. Tourist offers alternatives (PTZ.1a)
 - 1.b. Alternative economic activities (PTZ.1b)
2. Tourism snow (PTZ.2)
3. Rural tourism (PTZ.3)
4. Culture Potential (PTZ.5)
5. Sports tourism asset (PTZ.6)
6. Travel health and body care (PTZ.7)
7. Promotion of tourism (PTZ.8)
 - 7a - Identification with the term ARAGON (PTZ.8a)
 - Major strengths and positive aspects of Tourism (FTA)
 - Major weaknesses and problems of Tourism (DTA)
 - Perception of Tourism Future (PFTA)

Chart 1. Chart of Analysis 1.

we chose 15 technical and political responsible people of Aragon's Tourism Institutions to ascertain their own perceptions, opinions, attitudes and values towards our main objectives.

The interviews were focused on the general perception of tourism and specifically on respondents' ideas on rural tourism as well as other relevant tourism aspects.

The scheme of the interviews was based on open questions lead by the interviewer. The key issues were focused on: perception of tourism in general terms, perception of tourism in their specific area, in particular terms, like the main strengths and positive aspects of tourism in Aragon; major weaknesses and problems of tourism in Aragon and their perception of future Tourism in Aragon.

3.2. Data analysis

A *Discourse Analysis* [28,29] was made to the texts given by the interviewees as responses. We followed the scheme described below, whose main line has a close correspondence with the questions asked to the respondents, that gave us some significant findings whose results will be further exposed and analyzed (see Chart 1 below).

4. Findings and results

This case study on Aragon, could contribute to expand the existing literature on sustainable rural tourism, in the line of the *triple line sustainability* in rural tourism [2]. These findings, which can be used as key explanations for the three fields referred above: *economy, environment and social*, which is the focus of our research, could add some literature to the field of sustainability in different issues: economy; environment; social and cultural; human factor; sense of hospitality; the pride of being Aragonese; slogans as methods of persuasion; and cuisine.

4.1. Economy

In the present context of a global and financial crisis, rural tourism houses and businesses are still experiencing the trend of better economic times, unlike what happened to mass tourism that fell sharply. In general terms, guest-nights in hotels fell by 1.2% in 2008 in Spain, compared to the previous year [20]. The declining profit margins in mass tourism have been still reduced due to

the moment economic situation, as a result of loss of uniqueness and exclusivity, ecological degradation and poor product quality [14].

Less investment is needed for the rural area than for mass tourism, either because of smaller size or because of lower prices, so the profit is more immediate and the risk is smaller too.

This economic approach is really complex, due to the process of topping up incomes. Originally these incomes were an additional source of incomes to compensate unpredictable farming incomes. Nowadays that these farming incomes have nearly disappeared and tourism incomes have become the only incomes, the situation could become crucial. According to most interviewees, the viability of rural tourism lies on the fact of being compatible and complementary to traditional activities, not being a substitute to previous incomes. The benefits are generally summed up as a Triple Bottom Line for the host community and for the land itself and for the tourist, which implies a sequence of interrelated benefits [21]. These benefits help to define a long-term framework of sustainable tourism [22,23]. The decline of the agriculture income has made rural tourism a viable and justifying economic activity in rural areas.

According to secondary quantitative data, we could observe that, recently, the Aragonese Pyrenees had started to receive a large number of foreign tourists; data from 2008 for rural tourism [24] show that the number of guest-nights made by foreigners was 52% up on the last year, compared to 6.33% in the rest of Aragon. To this subject, we wonder if it could be concluded that the effort in promoting Aragon abroad was having the expected results and effects, given that these data show that the amount of foreign tourists had basically only been increased at the Aragonese Pyrenees, but not in Aragon as a whole.

With regard to the average night-stay specifically in rural tourism houses, the leading province in Aragon is Teruel, with a year-to-year variation of 3.32%, as against 0.76% in Huesca and a fall of 5.13% in Zaragoza, as shown in the table below. The average year-to-year variation in rural tourism accommodation by provinces shows a reduction of 0.20%. Teruel and Huesca have a better year-to-year variation than the rest of Spain, being Teruel a really notable case in the country as a whole, being placed behind such well-established tourist destinations as: Granada (14.84%), Malaga (12.91%), Seville (11.50%), in the first, main block, and provinces such as Burgos (8.18%), Lerida (7.15%), Murcia (3.67%) and Tarragona (3.77%), in the second block. It is apparently the support given by all social agents in Teruel for Quality Rural Tourism has undoubtedly thrown very good results (Table 1).

4.2. Environment

“Environment” is an emergent issues in 21st century. It is impossible to conceive a business project in tourism sector without taking them into account. Rural tourism actors are conscious that the main ingredient for success is environment. Everybody is con-

scious everywhere that one must be respectful and careful with environment. One should preserve Nature as original as possible, which is the same as keeping authenticity or diversity. These two terms have turned out to be important factor for tourism resort choice. Unspoilt, autochthonous, natural environment has turned out to be the most important authenticity element [14]. Rural tourism is growing and developing as an integral part of the environment, in a sustainable way, keeping the identity of the locality and recovering lost activities, such as subsistence farming, rural tourism is in the country, not in the town.

Environmental benefits include support for preservation of landscape and stimulus for the preservation, protection and improvement of the natural environment. In this sense, new environmental regulations have been put into practice to preserve the environmental assets, and, according to our interviewees, local governments are working hard in this area to adopt these new laws in order to control the use of the landscape and to reduce the damage caused not only by intensive visitor use (ski-ing, hiking, rock-climbing, or riding), but by vandals who abuse Nature and enjoy destroying beautiful places and landscapes, with no other motivation than pleasure.

4.3. Social and cultural

In our 21st century society, large hotel chains or leisure centres are rather similar and lacking of identity, without the special added value of the landscape or environment. That is the reason why rural environment reveals itself as exceptional, showing the value of reality, far from the standard or international large-scale hotel chains. Country people find a source of incomes to complement traditional ways of agriculture and livestock. Furthermore, people living in these natural areas benefit from the increase in demand for services and infrastructure that is arising in any kind of rural areas, and which are a benefit to them all the year round. We should point out the special role played by women in this sense in rural areas caring rural houses [25].

It is really gratifying to note that, in our interviews, for critical points most interviewees report the same problems and suggest the same solutions, as a sign that we are touching the sensitive issues. For rural houses, they all consider that the houses should be accompanied by traditional activities: They all agree that authenticity must prevail, with an offer of handicrafts and farming activities.

The perception of respondents is valid for the social reality of tourism in Aragon and, on our opinion, for any rural house in the world. It has to be remembered that the primary system of rural houses in Spain, named originally “farmhouses” in northern Spain, came from the Nordic model. The original philosophy was that due to the lack of hotels, or infrastructure capable of accommodating and feeding tourists visiting the area, farmers could convey and rent some rooms in their farms for tourists. The scenario was real, and some casual or occasional tourists did not interrupt or alter the everyday activities of the farmers, but allowed the tourists to stay there, sharing all the conditions that country people had, including the landscape, architectural, gastronomic or any type of cultural heritage of the region.

In Aragon, this philosophy for accommodation in farming houses has not been followed except for some few cases in the mountain area of Pyrenees and pre-Pyrenees. The rest of Aragon, which is the dry Aragon, and due to the abandonment of farming and migration of its inhabitants to the cities, have implemented the system always like a perversion of the original philosophy. For Aragon, subsidies and tax incentives have only served to restore some rural houses, which otherwise would have gone to ruins and have turned into small hotels or inns, with more or less success which have nothing to do with primary system, where

Table 1
Survey on tourism rural accommodation average night stay (in number of days).
Source: National Statistics Institute, Spain [24].

Provinces	Average 2008	Average 2007	Year-to-year variation (%)
Burgos	2.41	2.23	8.18
Granada	4.41	3.84	14.84
Huesca	3.65	3.62	0.76
Lérida	3.09	2.88	7.15
Málaga	4.58	4.06	12.91
Murcia	3.23	3.12	3.67
Sevilla	3.03	2.72	11.50
Tarragona	2.98	2.88	3.77
Teruel	3.32	3.21	3.32
Zaragoza	2.70	2.85	-5.13

neither live longer than weekends, or if they do, have already abandoned farming and traditional activities of the region. Hence the claim for authenticity, absolutely justified by the experts interviewed, expressing the need of seeking authentic alternatives.

Social costs can be derived from rural tourism development as rural areas are quite prone to adopt new values and ideas that in some cases can damage the idiosyncrasy of the place and population.

4.4. Human factor

For reflecting on human factor involved in tourism services in Aragon, it is convenient to make reference to Louart [26], who defines human factor in terms of a person in charge of a task or service, in this case, the *tourist service* [31]. In fact, he suggests that the concept of staff reveals a culture that perceives people as individuals that exist only within an impersonal group. Each person brings the energy required to carry out the tasks belonging to their job. The job is the most important point, and people are serving the job. In addition, he defines human resources as the recognition of the economic value of the person beyond the limits of the job. The person stops being considered as a servant of the job, to be considered as a source of economic value.

Therefore, we are not referring here to the average Aragonese people, or to the personality of an anonymous man or woman of the region, but to those people serving tourism.

This nuance is a key point in understanding and explaining that if, in some way, the economic resources invested are not providing the expected results, or required expectations based on the investment, this could be attributed to the human factor.

Historically, in Aragon, there has not been a great tradition of service. Tourism service is a new phenomenon that has taken the Aragonese population by surprise. Tourism as a resource (their properties and heritage) and an element of profit-making is a new concept that has to be learnt and assumed over time.

Aragon has not been in the sector for more than 50 years, and still needs time to change its image, outlook and work. Aragonese people, at tourism services, have to reflect on the new concept of hospitality, the meaning of it and its implementation.

4.5. Sense of hospitality

The sense of hospitality is a very sensitive and complex subject. It is delicate relationship where psychological tension is present, due mainly to the fact that both, guest and host, have to maintain their own dignity.

There are people who think that, to be a good host, you have to become a slave, which is absolutely distanced from truth. Good hosts reinforce their dignity and personality, show their generosity and demand what they deserve in turn from guests. If it is a difficult relationship, it is also very advantageous and convenient when the right balance is reached.

In the opinion of Derridá [32], “hospitality, (...) is not simply welcoming a stranger at home, at one’s own house, one’s nation, one’s town, although this could also be so. In the moment I become accessible and give a “welcome” to another person’s otherness, I am in the position of host. Even war, rejection and xenophobia mean that I must deal with other people, and, therefore, I am open to others. Closing is just a reaction to the prior opening. From this point of view, hospitality comes first. To say that it “comes first” means that, even before being myself and exactly who I am. The arrival of the other must have established this relationship with myself. In other words, I cannot have a relationship with myself, with my “being at home”. The arrival of the other has preceded my own self. (...) To a certain extent, I am a host of the other, and this condition of host in which I am now the guest of the other, because I

have taken him into my house, (...) this situation of being a host defines my responsibility. When I say, “Here I am”, I am responsible to the other. “Here I am” means that I am the other’s prisoner (...). It is a situation where there is tension. This hospitality is everything but serenity and easiness. I am a prisoner of the other, the other’s host, and ethics and moral have to be structured round being a host”.

This is why when Aragonese people (in tourism services) have become fully aware that they will not lose their dignity or identity through hospitality. It is precisely then, when they will be able to talk about a real and total feeling of Aragonese identity, capable of representing the purest Aragonese sentiment.

4.6. The pride of being Aragonese

The feeling of identity, or the sense of belonging to a land or lifestyle, is not a question of genetics, but a question of culture, of something apprehended or learnt. In this sense, like Rogers and Rosenberg [33], we think that men and women, collectively or individually, do belong to a single social reality sanctioned by culture from their inner selves and beings. Therefore, personality and behaviour of each Aragonese person are conditioned by culture.

Identity is the distilled brew coming from being aware of differences, and culture does not develop itself unless it is enriched by means of social contact: inter-cultural exchanges build up the culture [34]. As far as the Aragonese people working in tourism exchange cultural values, their identity will be enriched and dignified. If human beings are basically “differentiating entities”, and we do agree that differences only appear when there is a cultural exchange with others. In this sense, a famous anthropologist from the USA [35] said that “it is characteristic of the mind that mental processes are caused by contrasting differences, not by means of imposition or impact. The difference is immanent in the subject and events”.

Personal and identity differences make each autonomous region or province a “differentiated entity”. When Aragonese people choose their own slogan, they feel it their own, a differentiating element with reference to others. Most autonomous regions, when choosing their advertising slogans for tourism have chosen their own differentiating mottos. This is the case, for instance, of Basque Country: *Our way: The Basque country!* These sentences are really no more than slogans used to differentiate one autonomous region from another and focus onto their differences. In this specific case, the slogan inform of the pride that Basque people feel being Basque, which allows them to face the tourism market with great pride of their own identity and their way of doing things, which reinforces their own lifestyle and character.

4.7. Slogans as methods of persuasion

The fact that each region has its own slogan, as it has already been mentioned above, is not by accident, or involuntary. It tries to give a perfect description of the identity in question. In other words, any slogan is an attempt to persuade of the acceptance of some particular idea by means of suggestion [36]. To this end, Zaragoza: has used some: *The Zaragoza experience!* (it informs of the services and facilities offered by the city/province). *Water!* (it informs of the natural resource that Zaragoza possesses and manages, not only for human consumption, but also for leisure, pleasure and therapy. The best illustration for it was the International Fair EXPO-AGUA 2008,² or the multiple spas that the region has in its territory.

² This International Fair took place in Summer, 2008 in Zaragoza (Aragon-Spain). Water as sustainable resource was the general theme.

The other province, Huesca has chosen something different: *Magic!* (it informs of the magical or pleasant effect it has, tinged with fantasy, as well as the real life being magical in Huesca) and *Everything is in your reach!* (it suggests that anything is possible there, everything is within reach, and provides endless and potential opportunities, all available there).

On the other hand, Teruel has decided to use the slogan: *Teruel does exist!* (expressing their great sorrow because of the Teruel existence ignorance. It shows a feeling of wish for knowledge and recognition. Teruel feels that people do not know their existence or identity within Aragon. They feel forgotten or marginalised). What they do intend is to express their demand for their own identity. This necessity and wish have given rise to the social and political movement “*Teruel Existe*”.

4.8. Cuisine

As far as interior tourism is concerned, gastronomy and cuisine are a productive basis for satisfying tourists. Today or yesterday, everywhere, a good cuisine is always an attraction for tourists who look for any type of pleasure and personal satisfaction. In this sense, cuisine in the 21st century probably occupies a prime position, in a very different way as it was in past centuries. While, in ancient times, there was a subsistence economy, food was a necessity for survival; today we have an economy of abundance, and cuisine is regarded as a joy and delight for the senses. Tourists carry away in their minds and memories what their eyes saw and their palate tasted. The well-being sensation of fine meals is so persistent as to be a sufficient reason for tourists to return, as well as having had a comfortable and family hostage, not only according to the words of Derridá [32] but also according to our interviewees. At this point, Aragon must find its back-path to its most sublime and historical dishes. Let us remember that the Regulations for the Royal House of Aragon established in 1343 by King Pedro IV with recipes and provisions already existing at the time [37], shows that Aragon has had its own cuisine for centuries, and there are wonderful recipes for both, ordinary people and members of and royalty which is languishing in darkness and must be put back onto our tables. When travellers arrive in Aragon, they do want to taste and enjoy Aragonese dishes, not international food.

5. Conclusions and discussion

After the study of Interior Rural Tourism in Aragon, and after the discourse analysis of the interviews, [28,29] we decided to elaborate a SWOT model for reaching the advantages and disadvantages of the Rural Interior Tourism in Aragon. From this discourse we could take four different positions: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, which we can show here as conclusions for this case study.

5.1. Strengths

We have seen that the offer of rural interior tourism allows people to get a quiet and peaceful experience with low cost and healthy challenges, according to client's wishes and extent. We have observed people's satisfaction with lifestyle, trying to imitate it afterwards, because this is a holistic perspective of high quality standard of life.

We have noted that the attraction of seaside tourism over-crowds population in seaside tourism coastal resorts, which reduces life quality of tourists, while rural areas are not overcrowded at all. This is the opposite situation, as they are “depopulated”. Nowadays, our society demands healthy products and services. Interior rural tourism is the best way of preserving

Nature, landscape and environment as well as improving human state of healthiness. Over the last two decades, the new generation of citizens (urbanites), born and bred in large cities, has come to appreciate the positive image of countryside and return to the beauties and values of Nature [8]. Following Urry's [16] concept, a “new consumer” has emerged from the citizen who has lost his /her roots [17].

This sort of small business (rural farms our houses) gives the opportunity to the owner to get an extra income keeping the authentic resources. On the other hand, it is preserving all the countryside habits, values and lifestyle. This rural houses model is similar for most countries, and it is very close for example, to the model of *B&B (bed and breakfast)* offered in the Scottish and Irish countryside. Following Cánoves et al. [8] farming families are still at the stage of adapting to modern European agricultural practice.

Other strength is the role of women within the family managing rural tourism throughout Europe [27]. Women have been and are one of the main bases to develop sustainable rural tourism despite the fact that some conflicts could arise eventually [25].

In other words, women and sustainable tourism, as a joint-venture could collaborate to minimize the financial crisis, as most incomes from this rural tourism came through womens' effort and collaboration.

5.2. Weaknesses

Weaknesses identified in rural interior tourism are: complex of inferiority of Aragonese population; the absence of opportunities for rural population and the corresponding decrease of inhabitants in rural areas compared with urban ones. The lack of essential infrastructures, like communication means: roads or Internet access, are a crucial problem that constrains development possibilities in these areas.

In these rural interior areas there are lots of micro-businesses that are not interconnected, not only because of the scarcity of infrastructure. It means no cooperation and information interchange what creates loneliness and sadness, and a very strong feeling of being ignored, excluded, or not being taken into account.

Human resources in rural area have not been enough trained to be capable of offering the right and proper supply for more exigent and exquisite customers. The low levels of education in rural areas has always been a problem that nowadays could be solved by means of Internet (if possible) and specific training programmes using on-line technologies. But this realistic possibility faces the above mentioned problem of inferiority syndrome which makes it difficult or rather impossible to be solved.

5.3. Opportunities

As opportunities, new leisure activities are appearing everyday. Public Administration strives to improve the quality of life in rural interior areas. The webs, on-line training are essential tools to get efficient and creative professionals in this sector.

These complementary activities provide not only economic profits, but also social benefits, helping to maintain the house and family heritage, as expressed by Cánoves et al. [8]. Sometimes, this type of rural tourism is giving the local population a good reason for staying there instead of moving to cities. Rural houses owners do know that in a global world, where all the products and services are similar in most cities and countries around the planet, that the authentic atmosphere of rural areas is an differentiation opportunity that has to be exploited and developed in order to offer a different product for customers that are looking for unique experiences.

While depopulation process in rural areas are creating some conflicts from a sociological point of view, it could turn into a tourism opportunity, as leisure activities are directly connected with

pure environment, which gives tourists the impression that they are enjoying a wild, unexplored and unique scenario for practising any type of adventure sport, which is really interesting for Tourism Industry and Tourism Management.

While exotic international tourism, mainly with coastal resorts, is spreading all over the world, a different type of authentic native tourism could cope with competence and financial crisis, too, as this is a type of tourism extremely cheaper than the exotic international one.

5.4. Threats

Threats are also present. Tourist activities depend on users' preferences that can change rapidly. While seaside tourism development without control could create huge holiday resorts and artificial villages with no identity – just for enjoying holidays – because they are not alive or realistic, and they are empty the rest of the year. Spain has suffered this problem, and coast line has been completely destroyed by blocks of apartments and huge hotels, without green or natural areas. This massive urbanization of the coast has derived in more pollution, and has destroyed the sea wild life and the attraction of the seaside. On one hand, Tourism authorities are worried because this could also be a threat for rural interior tourism. On the other hand, they know that tourism resources and incomes are extraordinary important for the national Economy, and Nature and Rural areas have to be preserved if they want to exploit it in the future.

For years, “*sun & beach*” tourism model, was a political, financial and social chance and challenge in Spain. Nowadays, this model is being questioned as we said before and incomes have decreased drastically, and the fear is to care that this massive model is not repeated in rural inside tourism.

5.5. Discussion

According to our research, the findings in Sections 5.1–5.4, our proposal is to initiate a deep theoretical and practical reflection on sustainable tourism. This kind of sustainable tourism that cannot be menaced by massive tourism, that allows native population to live in natural landscapes, that they love and care, where they could host educated and responsible tourists. Sustainable tourism is the only type of tourism that can offer authentic countryside lifestyle, where they can relax themselves and enjoy Nature and country lifestyle, not in artificial tourism theatre created for exploitation, but a real scenario, where life is realistic and Nature can be preserved by the same local inhabitants and hosts at the same time.

Some aspects have to be discussed yet, as most weaknesses and threats should be retaken into consideration and further study in order to suggest and implement new solutions and opportunities for them. This gap which has not yet been filled is offering a new research field that could be continued by future researchers. Sustainable Tourism deserves and requires to be taken into consideration not only for the benefit of Tourism Industry, but also for the wellness of humanity, as far as sustainability is concerned.

As final conclusion, rural interior tourism is nowadays a way for tourism not only to be enjoyed and exploited, but further studied too as a sustainable alternative. Its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats have to be further developed and implemented which is a challenge for future research.

References

- [1] Sanagustín Fons MV, Puyal Español E. Algunos puntos de relación entre la gestión de la calidad total y los procesos de desarrollo rural en el entorno aragonés. Breve reflexión teórica. In: Infestas Gil A, Sanagustín Fons MV, editors. Hacia una nueva empresa. Salamanca: Amarú Ediciones; 2003.
- [2] Elkington J. Towards a sustainable corporation: win-win business strategies for sustainable development. California Manage Rev 1994;36(2):90–100.
- [3] Chan ESW, Wong SCK. Motivations for ISO 14001 in the hotel industry. Tourism Manage 2006;27:481–92.
- [4] Paniagua A. Urban-rural migration, tourism entrepreneurs and rural restructuring in Spain. Tourism Geographies 2002;4(4):349–71.
- [5] Hobson K, Essex S. Sustainable tourism: a view from accommodation business. Serv Ind J 2001;21(4):133–46(14).
- [6] Perelló M, Larrinaga C, Lull A. Las empresas hoteleras de Baleares ante el medio ambiente: un análisis de sus posicionamientos. Annals of Tourism Research en español 2005;7(1):171–94.
- [7] World Tourist Organization. Sustainable development of tourism, policy guidelines and tools; 2009.
- [8] Cánoves G, Villarino M, Priestley GK, Blanco A. Rural tourism in Spain: an analysis of recent evolution. Geoforum 2004;35:755–69.
- [9] Agarwal S. Restructuring seaside tourism – the resort lifecycle. Ann Tourism Res 2002;29:25–55.
- [10] Gale T. Modernism, post-modernism and the decline of British seaside resorts as long holiday destinations: a case study of Rhyl, North Wales. Tourism Geographies 2005;7:86–112.
- [11] Priestley G, Mundet L. The post-stagnation phase of the resort cycle. Ann Tourism Res 1998;25:85–111.
- [12] Vukonić B. The “new old” tourist destination. In: Apostolopoulos Y, Loukissas P, Loentidou L, editors. Mediterranean tourism. London: Routledge; 2001. p. 64–71.
- [13] Mazzette A. Il turismo in Sardegna: vecchi problemi e nuove prospettive. In: Savelli A, editor. Turismo, territorio identità. Milano: FrancoAgnelli; 2004. p. 67–78.
- [14] Sedmak G, Mihalic T. Authenticity in mature seaside resorts. Ann Tourism Res 2008;35(4):1007–31.
- [15] Agarwal S, Brunt P. Social exclusion and English seaside resorts. Tourism Manage 2006;27:654–70.
- [16] Urry J. The tourist gaze: leisure and travel in contemporary societies. London: Sage; 1990.
- [17] Urry J. Consuming places. London: Routledge; 1995.
- [18] Mihalic T. Environmental management of a tourist destination: a factor of tourism competitiveness. Tourism Manage 2000;21:65–78.
- [19] Carey S, Gountas Y, Gilbert D. Tour operators and destination sustainability. Tourism Manage 1997;18:425–31.
- [20] National Statistics Institute, Spain. Hotel Occupancy Survey; 2008.
- [21] Canoves G, Villarino M. Rural tourism gender and cultural conservation in Spain and Portugal. In: Swain MB, Henshall Momen J, editors. New York: Cognizant; 2002.
- [22] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Tourism strategies and rural development. Paris: OECD; 1994.
- [23] Roberts L, Hall D. Rural tourism and recreation: principles to practice. Wallingford: CABI Publishing; 2001.
- [24] National Statistics Institute, Spain. Survey on tourist accommodation: rural tourism; 2008.
- [25] Sanagustín Fons MV, Puyal Español E. Mujer y turismo rural: algunas relaciones conflictivas. In: Aportaciones al desarrollo rural sostenible. Diputación Provincial de Huesca, Huesca, Spain; 2002. p. 223–33.
- [26] Louart P. Gestión de recursos humanos. Gestión 2000, Barcelona; 1997.
- [27] Hjalager AM. Agricultural diversification into tourism: evidence of a European Community development programme. Tourism Manage 1996;17:103–11.
- [28] Jakobson R. Análisis de Lingüística General. Barcelona: Seix Barral; 1981.
- [29] Dijk van. Teun: La ciencia del texto, Barcelona: Paidós; 1992.
- [30] Hall CM. Historical antecedents of sustainable development and ecotourism: new labels on old bottles. In: Hall CM, Lew AA, editors. Sustainable tourism a geographical perspective, Longman, London; 1998.
- [31] Louart P. Aportes para la construcción de Procesos de Desarrollo Local, Barcelona: Gestión; 2000.
- [32] Derridá Jacques. “On hospitality” Interview in *Staccato*, TV programme France Culturel produced by Antoine Spire, 19.10.97, translated by Cristina de Peretti, Francisco Vidarte, in Derrida J. <<http://www.jacquesderrida.com.ar/textos/hospitalidad.htm>> [retrieved 19.04.10].
- [33] Rogers CR, Rosenberg RL. La persona como centro. Barcelona: Herder; 1981.
- [34] Todorov T. Cruce de culturas y mestizaje cultural. Gijón: Júcar; 1988.
- [35] Bateson G. Una unidad sagrada. Pasos ulteriores hacia una ecología de la mente. Barcelona: Gedisa; 1993.
- [36] Brown JAC. Técnicas de persuasión, Madrid: Alianza. Techniques of Persuasion, 1984. From Propaganda to Brainwashing, Harmondsworth. Middlesex: Penguin Book Ltd.; 1963.
- [37] Gómez y Patiño M. La nueva cocina aragonesa (I). La Comarca, Calatayud, 2 Enero; 2004. p. 22.

Glossary

FUNDEAR: Aragonese Economic Development Foundation
 SWOT: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
 WTO: World Tourism Organization