

INTEGRATED CULTURAL TOURISM: NEW EXPERIENCES IN MOUNTAIN AREAS

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Tourism has for some time been viewed as providing a lifeline for mountain areas where agriculture is in decline and few alternative employment opportunities exist. One of the manifestations is cultural tourism, which, besides revaluing the heritage of a territory, can be made compatible with rural tourism. This paper analyzes integrated cultural tourism in mountain areas, including the scale, degree of embeddedness, endogeneity, sustainability and role of interactions between tourists and local people. This research is based on a survey with cultural tourists in the Pyrenees (Catalonia, Spain). They are presented in the context of the experience of tourists in mountainous areas, related to the practical operation of integrated cultural tourism. The results reveal that this cultural tourism has strong links to the natural environment in the study area but that there are existing threats to integration in the physical and social domains.

JEL Classification: L83, M1, O1

INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technologies are of great importance in understanding the development of today's tourism destinations. Their impact is considerable in the branding of tourism products in general and in the branding of destinations in particular (Buhalis and Law, 2008). The phenomenon of globalization seems to be the most important characteristic of the late 20th and the beginning of the 21st century. It is hard to find countries free of debate about globalization, and even harder to find countries free of the influence of global markets and global economic strategy, but only a few things are as vague as globalization (Albrow, 1996; Skolimowski, 1997). Globalization is characterized by multilevel function and influence attributes, by the erosion of local values,



by sharing all goods and risks, by imbalance in terms of economic distribution; but also by general cultural changes (Giddens, 2000).

However, globalization is a new chance to learn how to survive, how to attract tourists, how to let us know that they exist (McLuhan, 1962). Destinations are more complex and diverse than are specific tourism products (Ooi and Stoeber, 2010). The creation of a destination brand has to address multiple groups of stakeholders with diverse socio-cultural identities and take into consideration the intangibility and multifaceted features of a destination (Munar, 2011). Tourism in rural areas may be one of the vectors of the local development as long as it is controlled by social actors who consider how the local communities can appropriate the benefits generated. Therefore, tourism in the rural milieu must be locally based and self-managed by the residents (Hardy et al., 2002).

From this new perspective, traditional tourism in rural areas, based on the importation of programs and resources, is not an appropriate strategy to promote local development (Wang, 2000). Cultural tourism has become one of the most developed tourist products, taking advantage of the wide cultural heritage existing in these territories, and has begun to consider the potential of the local community, as well as the geographical, cultural and environmental diversity of mountain areas, thus basing itself on the interaction and integration of many different actors (García, 2003).

The main areas that research could focus on include a) the tourists; b) the local human, physical, economic and cultural resources and the ways in which they are used to develop integrated tourism; c) the attitudes of the host communities towards integrated tourism; and d) the role of the institutions that impinge on integrated tourism development (Ander and Zemsky, 2006). The overall aim of the present paper is to analyze and develop the potential for better integration in cultural tourism in the less-developed mountain areas of Catalonia, in Spain, focusing only on the first research area, namely the experience of tourists who visit the region. These research findings are based on the analysis of data collected in 2012 through interviews and surveys conducted after purposeful selection of 182 cultural tourists visiting specific mountain areas of Catalonia.

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Tourism seems to be a good example of how to destroy certain intact landscape, as mentioned above, by global interest in a particular place. Rural landscape cannot defy a massive tourist influence because it is in a special situation (Holden, 2000). There is obviously no interest in protecting nature because there are no wildlife areas, no natural parks. On

the other hand, agricultural production itself does not represent a reason for protection, despite the fact that the view of rural landscape is becoming increasingly multifunctional in Europe. Rural landscape becomes the natural and cultural heritage (Howard, 2003).

There is an emerging idea of integrated tourism, which could be in real harmony with the future of local landscapes. Integrated tourism can be broadly defined as tourism which is explicitly linked to the economic, cultural, social, natural and human structures of the mountain regions in which it takes place, and which seeks to make optimal use of those structures (McKercher and Cros, 2002). In practical terms, it is tourism with clear links to local/regional resources, activities, other production and service industries, and a participatory local community (Suvantola, 2002).

Integrated tourism can truly integrate natural, social and cultural structure, and can be a positive agent affecting mountain landscape; it can reinforce the cohesive forces of certain landscapes (Page, 2003). However, without personal and community involvement at a certain place and time, the cohesive forces are disturbed (Cawley and Gilmore, 2008).

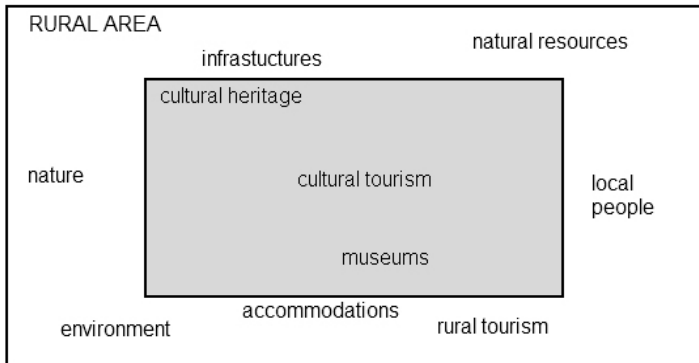
For this reason, the continued decline of rural economies is a matter of concern to both national and regional governments. Since the late 1980s in particular, tourism has been identified as providing a potential source of alternative income in mountain and rural areas. At the same time, several forms of tourism can be promoted and need to be controlled carefully so as to retain the characteristic features of the areas involved that form the basis of their attraction for visitors. One of these is cultural tourism, which is valued for taking advantage of the patrimonial resources of those territories (Wang, 2000; Kayat 2010; Cuccia and Rizzo, 2011).

Integrated cultural tourism is based on the premise that it is possible to promote cultural tourism that is closely aligned with the inherent attributes of mountain locations (Figure 1) and can contribute to develop the economy of such areas (Evangelista and Dioko, 2011). These attributes are many, but they usually include a high quality mountain environment which frequently possesses scenic qualities, traditional ways of life with a strong reliance on agriculture or fishing, distance from large urban centres, low population density and a predominance of low-density settlements with a disproportionate presence of residents in the older age groups, and the survival of older cultural and behavioural norms (Lane and Bramwell, 1994; Korstanje, 2012).

These attributes and cultural resources offer a lot of attractions that could increase the number of visitors seeking an antidote to their technology-dominated, pressurized daily lives in large cities. Clean air,

outdoor recreation, high quality food with low levels of additives, an unhurried pace of life, cultural visits, and contact with older, more traditional cultural experiences are being revalued by tourists (Butler et al., 1998; Kayat, 2010; Cuccia and Rizzo, 2011).

Figure 1. Cultural tourism in rural areas



Source: own production

Retaining control of tourism resources in local ownership, in so far as that is possible, is a means of reducing the economic drain and maintaining local influence over resource use. In these ways, endogenous forms of development are linked both to economic sustainability and to the empowerment of local individuals and communities (Page, 2003). A predominance of external ownership is recognized as resulting in major economic leakages and feelings of disempowerment. The involvement of local businesses in tourism development is therefore important and local ownership is often linked to embeddedness (Hinrichs, 2000). Embedded activities are defined as closely based on local resources, be they physical, economic, social or cultural.

Thus, the tourism experiences offered are place specific and have organic links to the local context, and these features confer distinctiveness, uniqueness, and increased competitive capacity (Alvarez, 2010). It is recognized, however, that economic success depends on a capacity to dis-embed through successful product promotion to external markets because local demand is rarely adequate to enable businesses to survive in peripheral locations (Timothy and Boyd, 2003).

The issue of scale assumes particular relevance in the context of any economic enterprise and conventional economic wisdom exerts pressure to increase scale in order to reduce unit costs. In remote rural locations,

resources are often present on an extensive scale in the form of large mountain ranges, expanses of inland waterways, and coastlines. Nevertheless, the types of developments and businesses that are most likely to contribute to the sustainability of the local economy, culture and environment are likely to be of a smaller scale (Sharpley, 1996).

Large-scale physical construction activity almost invariably interferes with the natural landscape and a large number of users can lead to deterioration in the quality of the resources and the pleasure of the experience afforded. However, to identify the most appropriate scale for development can be problematic and, in this context, considerations of sustainability arise (Suvantola, 2002).

The definition of sustainability that is perhaps most frequently used is that of the Bruntland Commission of 1987, which states that current use should ensure that the resource is passed on in an undamaged condition to the next generation (Aronsson, 2000; Fullana and Ayuso, 2002). Sustainability includes physical, economic and cultural dimensions and all three are closely related (Mc Cool and Moisey, 2001; Fullana and Ayuso, 2002). Thus, the sustainability of an area's economy may depend on protecting the physical resource base and preserving the local culture that serve as resources for tourism (Throsby, 2001).

Damage to either or both of these types of resource may decrease the number of tourists and therefore reduce revenue. Sustaining the physical and cultural resource base usually requires control of the types of development permitted and tourist activities promoted, and the number of tourists attracted. In this context, complementarity rather than conflict between tourism and other economic and social activities is also likely to result in economic gain and promote social and cultural benefits for local communities (Hall, 2000; Ritchie and Crouch, 2003).

The successful pursuit of most forms of human endeavour involves networking between various interests for the achievement of common aims. Networking is of particular importance in the case of rural tourism at both local and external levels (Murdoch, 2000) and also contributes to environmental and cultural sustainability (Kneafsea, 2001). The small scale of many businesses often makes networking necessary for promotional purposes between businesses and between them and agencies of various kinds at local, regional, national and international levels.

Apart from the financial benefits of tourism development that may accrue to individual businesses and to the rural economy more generally, cultural tourism in mountain areas may contribute to local empowerment and thereby to development. In particular, opportunities may be provided for new businesses to be formed and for new actors to become involved in

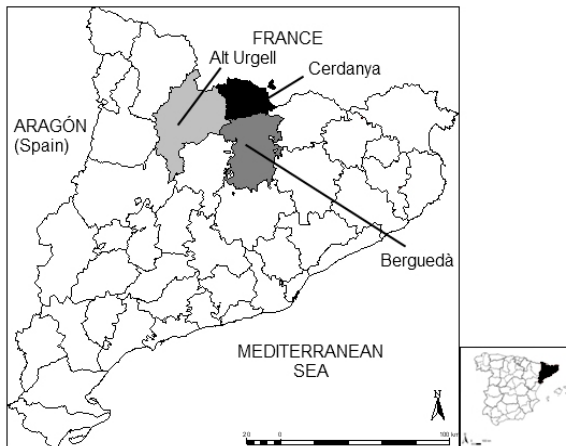
economic activities (Williams and Buswell, 2003). In addition, the demonstrated attractions of remote mountain areas for cultural tourists may contribute to feelings of self-confidence and place-consciousness hitherto absent or poorly developed (Chaudhuri, 2006).

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on a survey to some tourists in nine towns and rural villages located in the mountains in the north of Catalonia, in the regions of Cerdanya, Berguedà and Alt Urgell (Figure 2), as follows:

- a) Cerdanya: Puigcerdà, Bellver, and Llívia
- b) Berguedà: La Pobla de Lillet, Bagà, and Castellar de n'Hug
- c) Alt Urgell: la Seu d'Urgell, Organyà, and Adràll

Figure 2. Map of Catalonia



(source: own production with Miramon software)

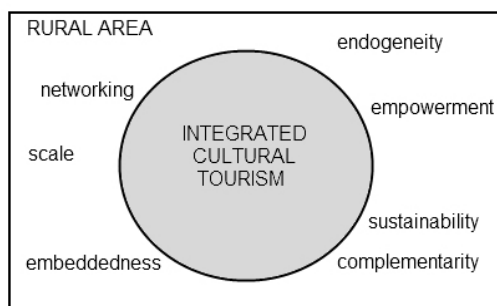
The three regions selected for this analysis are in the Pyrenees or Pre-Pyrenees in the north of Catalonia. It is a mountainous zone with small interior valleys and the sources of two of the principal rivers of Catalonia, the Llobregat and the Segre. The natural beauty and geographical situation, led to a great cultural heritage, especially Romanesque churches, and more recently to great activity in rural tourism. In the Berguedà there is also industrial tourism related to mining and the multitude of textile-factory colonies that were established in this region.

Survey was conducted at tourist offices, rural tourism houses, local museums and in one area where few tourists were present on the street, on hotel premises. Survey took place between March and September 2012 but was concentrated in the peak summer tourism season, July and August. Purposeful selection identified interview subjects based on age and group type (family, couples, etc.) that was representative of visitors to the region. Large tour groups were deliberately omitted because the focus of the study was to analyze the profile of cultural tourists in rural areas, as a form of tourism that is closely integrated with the regional and local resources base.

A majority of these tourists had spent at least two days in the area and the remainder were either day-trippers, return visitors or, in a small number of cases, on the first day of their visit with specific plans in mind. The survey was short (approximately 10 minutes) in order to maintain the flow of questions and answers and to capture the maximum amount of information possible within a reasonable length of time. The information was later transcribed and then analyzed as an Excel file using both quantitative and qualitative techniques.

Survey results were analyzed using the headings proposed by Cawley and Gillmor (2008) of scale, endogeneity, embeddedness, complementarity, sustainability, networking and empowerment (Figure 3), keeping in mind the competitiveness indicators of tourist destinations in Mazaro and Varzin (2008) and in Narváez and Fernandez (2009).

Figure 3. Integrated cultural tourism and factors



Source: own production from Cawley and Gillmor, 2008

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The profiles of surveyed people is showned in detail in the next table (Table 1).

Table 1. Surveyed profiles

		Total	%	Cerdanya	Berguedà	Alt Urgell
Participants		182	--	76	55	51
Gender	male	87	47.80%	37	25	25
	female	95	52.20%	39	30	26
Age group	< 20	15	8.24%	3	7	5
	20-40	56	30.77%	22	15	19
	40-60	79	43.41%	35	27	17
	> 60	32	17.58%	16	6	10
Educational level	high	63	34.62%	26	15	22
	medium	106	58.24%	46	35	25
	elementary	13	7.14%	4	5	4
Employment	civil servant	16	8.79%	8	3	5
	professional	13	7.14%	5	4	4
	administrative	28	15.38%	10	13	5
	commerce/retail	14	7.69%	7	4	3
	business, other	15	8.24%	10	2	3
	student	19	10.44%	6	9	4
	housewife	42	23.08%	14	12	16
	pensioner	27	14.84%	13	6	8
	unemployed	8	4.40%	3	2	3
Residence	same region	143	78.57%	55	45	43
	rest of Spain	31	17.03%	17	8	6
	rest of Europe	8	4.40%	4	2	2

Source: own production

More women than men were surveyed (52.20% and 47.80%, respectively), ranging in age from younger than 20 years (8.24%) to over 60 (17.58%), with the majority between 40 and 60 years old (43.41%). Educational levels were mostly medium (58.24%) and high (34.62%), and most (95.60%) were employed, more than half of them in professional or civil service occupations. In addition, some 95% were Spanish nationals (78.57% from Catalonia and 17.03% from the rest of Spain).

The most important survey results are shown in Table 2 and Figures 4 and 5. For the cultural tourists who visit these mountain areas, the most important factors on a five-point scale are the cultural resources (4.17), general tourist activities (4.05) and cultural activities (4.02). The principal

financial contribution of this tourism (Figure 5) is in shops (4.64 of 5) and bars and restaurants (4.45 of 5). The principal threats for these tourists (Figure 6) are the lack of sufficient car parks (4.48 of 5), poor signage (4.39 of 5), and the degradation of the environment (4.18 of 5) and natural resources (4.05 of 5).

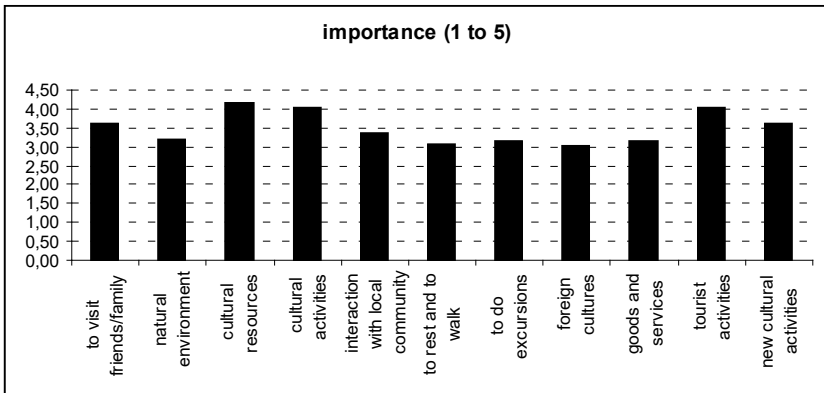
Table 2. Main survey results

Length of stay			Importance (1 to 5)	
1 day	15	8.24%	to visit friends/family	3.61
2-3 days	39	21.43%	natural environment	3.18
4-7 days	59	32.42%	cultural resources	4.17
over 7 days	69	37.91%	cultural activities	4.02
Travelling group			interaction with local community	3.35
individual	5	2.75%	to rest and to walk	3.07
couple	36	19.78%	to do excursions	3.16
family	95	52.20%	foreign cultures	3.04
friends	46	25.27%	goods and services	3.15
Accommodation			tourist activities	4.05
second home	28	15.38%	new cultural activities	3.62
rural house	92	50.55%	Threats (1 to 5)	
hotel	6	3.30%	unfriendliness	2.37
friends	34	18.68%	personal service	2.61
family	22	12.09%	prices	3.25
Transport			traffic	3.63
car	156	85.71%	parking	4.48
motorcycle	12	6.59%	signposting of the accesses	4.39
bus	6	3.30%	planning tourism	3.17
train	8	4.40%	train connection	3.57
Number of visits			access infrastructure	3.27
first time	20	10.99%	public services	2.18
second time	48	26.37%	secondary roads	2.06
3 or more times	114	62.64%	cultural attractions	2.17
Holidays in the region			cultural activities	2.42
exclusively	47	25.82%	environment	4.18
part-time	135	74.18%	natural resources	4.05
Origin			restaurants/hotels quality	3.35
same region	42	23.08%	Financial impact (1 to 5)	

rest of Catalonia	79	43.41%	accommodations	3.73
rest of Spain	53	29.12%	bar/restaurants	4.45
rest of Europe	8	4.40%	shops	4.64
			local employment	4.18
			Maintenance of local businesses	4.25

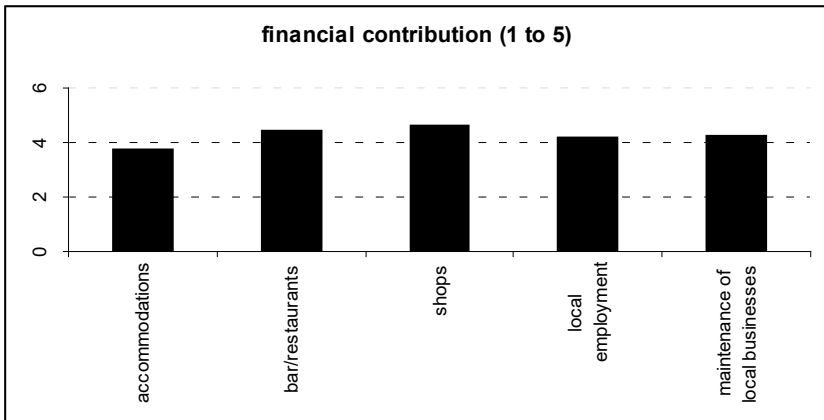
(source: own production)

Figure 4. Importance of the tourist factors



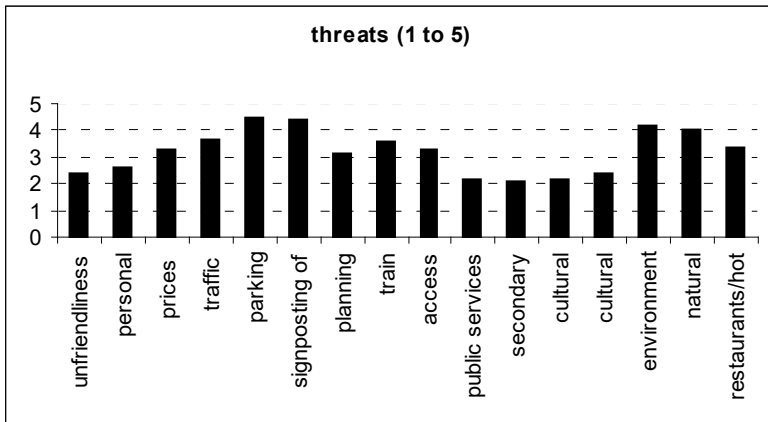
Source: own production

Figure 5. Importance of tourist financial contribution



Source: own production

Figure 6. Threats detected by the tourists



Source: own production

Scale

If cultural tourism is environmentally sustainable, it must be conducted at a scale that does not undermine the resources on which it is based. In this context, the current scale of cultural tourism in the area seems appropriate. Cultural tourism activity is small in scale, with the exception of localized concentrations (principally La Seu d'Urgell, a regional capital). Most of the tourists came as couples (19.78%) or small groups of family and friends (77.47%).

There was considerable variation in the lengths of stay reported, from very short (8.24% only one day) to longer holidays (37.91% more than a week), but with a bias towards week-long or shorter sojourns. In addition, the length of stay varied to some extent according to the season and the associated holiday leave available to travellers.

For example, the spring tourists interviewed during Holy Week were staying for three or four days, while those interviewed in mid-summer were on longer holidays. It appears that average tourist stays could be extended as a method of increasing revenue while controlling numbers. Some progress has been made in extending the cultural offer, local fairs, and holiday weekend activities.

Endogeneity

Several features of the tourists' experiences pointed to local ownership of tourism-related resources. It was known that many of the rural tourism houses were owned by local people, as were most of the hotels. More than half of the tourists interviewed (50.55%) were staying in rural houses, 31.77% were staying with family or friends, 15.38% in second homes and only 3.30% were in hotels.

The tourists mentioned interaction with local people as forming an important and distinctive feature of the holiday experience; the importance of this factor was 3.35 on a 5-point scale. In particular, the opportunity of staying with the family owner of the accommodation was a distinctive feature of the holiday experience they felt should be protected. Less interaction with local people as a result of increasing commercialization was viewed as a danger and a loss to the captivating effects of cultural tourism.

Embeddedness

The features that formed the attraction of these destinations for tourists were highly embedded in aspects of the physical, social, economic and cultural environment. The principal reasons cited by tourists for their visit were to see cultural resources (4.17 of 5) and cultural attractions (4.02 of 5), to visit family and friends (3.61 of 5), to view the scenery (on a 5-point scale, the importance of natural environment was 3.18, of walking and resting was 3.07, and of excursions was 3.16).

Almost two-thirds of the tourists (62.64%) were making at least their third visit to the area, although a majority of them were not familiar with all or even most of the cultural attractions. More than half of these tourists were Catalan (66.49%) and more than 23% were of local origin or had personal local connections. Less than one-third (29.12%) were from the rest of Spain. Only 10.99% were first-time visitors. Notably, more than a quarter of the tourists (25.82%) intended to spend their holiday exclusively in the region.

Sustainability

Sustainability involves economic, cultural, social and physical dimensions (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003). On a five-point scale, the tourists reported that they contributed to the sustainability of the local economy

through expenditure on tourist activities (4.05), goods and services (3.15) and through employment creation (3.18). Some tourists felt that an appreciation of foreign cultures was one of the benefits of tourism for local people (3.04 of 5 points) and none felt that there were any adverse effects. Several tourists referred to a capacity to increase the economic and cultural sustainability of tourism in the local area by extending the activities and developing additional products based on the cultural resource base (3.62).

A variety of threats to the sustainability of cultural tourism in mountain areas were identified and some tourists expressed fear about a decline in friendliness (2.37 of 5 points); worse level of personal service (2.61); declining quality in restaurants and bars (3.35); rising prices in accommodations, restaurants, shops and museums (3.25); insufficient parking lots for cars (4.48) and too much traffic (3.63) because the great majority (85.71%) of these tourists were arriving by car. There were also concerns about the deterioration of the cultural monuments (2.17), cultural attractions (2.42), environment (4.18), and natural resources (4.05).

Complementarity

Complementarity in the protection of the landscape and its resources and their use for tourism is central to the sustainability of tourism in mountain areas. Complaints relating to cultural activities and the traffic and parking in the towns point to the need for greater complementarity between tourism planning (3.17 of 5 points) and traffic control (3.63), including signposting of the access to museums and the town centre (4.30). In the case of the Cerdanya, complementarity between rail and bus schedules is also required (with 3.37 of 5) in order to facilitate the use of public transport by tourists who do not have access to private vehicles.

Given the seasonal nature of tourism and the relatively small number of tourists outside the larger population centres, complementarity in the use of tourist cultural and natural resources is desirable. The tourist information office provided good examples of the effective cross-use of local resources in these areas, in response to the need to reduce state support because of the current financial crisis. They are now serving as information points, booking offices and sales outlets for local products.

Networks

The concept of networking is central to notions of integrated cultural tourism development in mountain areas and operates in a variety of ways both horizontally and vertically (Larsen et al., 2007). The evidence in this regard from the tourists was positive. There was considerable evidence of the existence of strong links between the cultural tourists and local people. Such networks are a product of close family links, friendships, and other well-established relationships, and are instrumental in attracting repeat visitors to the region.

Many of the tourists were closely integrated into local communities through family relationships and friendships and repeat visits, which resulted in repeat bookings. A small number of tourists owned second homes in the region, including family homes. The form of network that was singled out for particular criticism was the access infrastructure (with 3.27 of 5 points) and the tourism planning in the area (3.17). The cultural tourists were also critical of the inadequacies of public services (2.18), the secondary road infrastructures in the region (2.06) and a poor signposting of the access to villages, tourism offices and cultural monuments of interest to visitors (4.39).

Empowerment

The financial benefits that accrued to local people from expenditure by cultural tourists in mountain areas were felt by tourists to contribute to the maintenance of local businesses (the importance was of 4.25 on a 5-point scale). The tourists also perceived that local communities gained self-confidence from having tourist visits. In addition, they identified local people, either directly or by inference, as holding considerable power in the tourism marketing chain because of their dominance among accommodations providers. The tourists also emerged as wielding considerable power in the relationships with local people, in terms of the price of local products (4.64 of 5 points), restaurants and bars (4.45), and accommodations (3.73).

CONCLUSIONS

Cultural tourism in mountain areas has many features that point to effective integration of local resources into wider networks. The ownership of cultural tourism resources is strongly localized and in many mountainous zones there is close integration of cultural tourist activities

into the natural and cultural resource base and into established social and institutional structures through networking.

Close networking between the cultural tourists and local community was evident because there is a marked element of return tourism, partly based on family links, that is a valuable source of business. Cultural tourist activities are generally taking place on an appropriate scale and contribute to economic and cultural sustainability. Local business people have become empowered through the commercial opportunities provided, although seasonality is a feature of some weakness.

Several weaknesses were identified in the context of the seven underlying criteria on which the analysis was based, which point to a need for remedial action to promote integration more effectively. The more peripheral areas are visually attractive but have fewer cultural attractions and bad roads, have a less developed cultural tourist infrastructure and are not well linked with the more developed areas.

Access infrastructure to the areas and within the region need to be upgraded and greater coordination of public transport services is required. Several threats to the quality of the cultural environment were identified by the tourists, including some deterioration in the quality of cultural products, many problems with parking in the main towns, and poor signposting of the access to places of interest. In Cerdanya, a very important holiday destination year-around, several tourists emphasized that local products, accommodations, and restaurants in this area are of high quality but relatively expensive.

Two forms of action appear to be required, in particular, to address the weaknesses identified by the cultural tourists: greater care for the cultural environment by individuals and stricter control by the authorities. It is also clear that retaining and improving quality must be accompanied by providing good value for the money spent. Further investment in both transport and leisure infrastructure is required in mountain and rural areas and will probably involve both private and public contributions.

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