An approach to cultural heritage in relation to the Competitiveness of tourist destinations – With special attention to the spanish context*

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Abstract

This paper presents an approach to the relationship between cultural heritage and tourism, given the importance cultural properties have acquired as a competitive differentiator. The search for models for measuring the competitiveness of tourist destinations has paralleled the evolution of the people in the early decades of the present century, and research based on observations of visitors, environments, and of the objects that form Spanish cultural wealth is necessary. Apart from measurement models with objective indicators, we identify a number of intangibles, such as identity, authenticity and even human development; they capture a type of tourist that seeks emotional experiences, while being prone to receiving content to a greater or lesser degree. The new Technologies of Information, Tourist Observatories, and National Plans concerning the different heritages of Spain are tools and instruments that increase the possibility of measuring the economic competitiveness of tourist destinations.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage, Travel Destinations, Competitiveness, Spain, cultural tourism.

JEL codes: Z32.

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Introduction

Today we are witnessing a new type of society due to a number of factors, such as globalization, social mobility, and new information technologies, that are felt in virtually all fields of action for human beings, and which are affecting, undoubtedly, the field of access to culture and, in particular, to cultural goods. Tourism brings us closer to these factors, and new dynamics of knowledge-based approach and dialogue between cultures, restitution of history, traditions and beliefs, among many other things are generated. It also enhances the interest in knowledge and the apprehension of such goods for their understanding and accessibility to facilitate their excitement and enjoyment. In Spain, the trigger for changes in favour of culture in tourist offers was the result of the abuses that occurred over a period of years because of sun and beach tourism. This has led to the introduction of cultural heritage attractions in the tour packages – i.e., “the set of real and personal property and intangible that we have inherited from the past and we have decided that is worth protecting as part of our social and historical identity” (Querol, 2010). And that extends to the activity of cultural tourism, defined by the ICOMOS in the Cultural Tourism Letter (1976) as “that form of tourism which aims, among other things, for knowledge of historical and artistic monuments and sites. It has a really positive effect on these as long as it contributes – to meet their own purposes – to their maintenance and protection. This form of tourism justifies, in fact, the efforts that require such maintenance and protection of the human community, because of the socio-cultural and economic benefits for the entire population involved”. However, specifying something else, and following Querol, this work serves what is called patrimonial cultural tourism, whose aim is inherited from our ancestors and goods constituting testimony of civilization. Cultural heritage is presented as a source of income that should be considered, and possibly the clearest manifestation of their contribution to economic development is to be found in cultural tourism.

Background relating to the competitiveness and sustainability

All this took hold in the last decades of the twentieth century when the most important cultural institutions focused their interest on the relationship between the economy and culture. This was corroborated by the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies (Stockholm 1998) and the Conference on Financing, Resources and Economy of Culture in Sustainable Development (1999) and the relevant and decisive publication Economy and Culture (Thorsby, 2001), on account of the growing interest in this issue worldwide. Thorsby talked in his study about the investigations that were being conducted in the nineties with respect to these matters and with respect to a new line of research on cultural heritage as an economic resource or as a consumer product. Moreover, institutions like the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and the International Monetary Fund lent their support to the
idea of culture as an up and coming value (Bayardo, 2004). UNESCO did it with its 2000 Culture Counts report (UNESCO Italian-Republic, 2000), in which there was already talk of cultural indicators, with some examples being cited, noting that they were measurable realities.

Currently we can see that tourism has acquired in recent years economic potential of the first order and that one of the priorities of the current policy is to improve the competitiveness of destinations because of its importance and the global nature of tourist markets (Marino, 2013; Ibáñez Pérez, 2011), which requires from policy makers the development of competitive strategies to stay ahead of the market (Treserras, 2004; Sanchez and Lopez, 2015).

In Spain, the concept “cultural heritage” as an economic resource becomes of Law 16/1985, about Spanish Historical Heritage, an issue that affects the study by Campillo (1998), who believes that the economic goodness of a country depends on its ability to beat international competition. And this, if we talk about Spain, and its heritage, can be unequal due to product diversification and trending. Cultural goods are hallmarks for the people in their own right, which drive the economy and generate employment and benefits.

And when dealing with public goods, logically, it is the state that takes care of them and maximizes them as economic resources, and the state that is capable of generating broad cultural offerings that produce competition between all of the assets in culturally rich contexts (Prieto 1997, 1998, 2000).

The Framework Plan Tourism Competitiveness (1992) defines competitiveness as “the ability to make profits and keep them under changing circumstances.” If this applies to tourist destinations, it requires an approach of sustainability based on tourism’s own resources, including cultural heritage sites, in addition to the natural and social attractions, with respect to three levels of competitiveness: macroeconomic, sectoral and business (Perez, 2006). For purposes of measurement, there are different models (Barbosa, 2008), as indicated by Porter (1990), Crouch and Richtie (1999), Kozak and Rimmintong (1999), Enrich and Newton (2004), Gooroochurn and Sugiyarto (2004), and the study by the World Economic Forum: “Report on competitiveness in Travel and Tourism” (2007).

Now, from the point of view of cultural heritage, the studies by Crouch and Richtie design models more in line with the characteristics of tourism (Pérez, 2006: 142).

The method of Crouch and Richtie presents two types of variables: a) domestic destination information, and b) market research about consumer preferences. This model applies, for example, the attractive function or relationship between the variables that attracts and deters to the destination. The method includes incentives as the traditions, gastronomy, language, architecture, religion, education, leisure

activities, work, history, art, sculpture and music. That is, elements of the cultural heritage, for culture as a tourist attraction can be a very powerful element when it comes to caring for the historical, artistic, religious and industrial past of an area. Sharing these resources, between managing their conservation and directing tourism development, helps create links that accrue benefits (Harrison, 1997; Frew and Shaw, 1995; Simons, 1996).

In the assessment of a tourist destination it is important to consider what tourists think about its sustainability, both with respect to the environmental aspect and with regard to the protection of its cultural heritage. Diaz Perez speaks of the need to use indicators to guide tourist satisfaction. Meeting expectations for what a sustainable destination is represents a way to design the supply and orient it so that it is in line with market requirements. In this sense, the World Tourism Organization and many authors understand equity as the main factor of differentiation of a tourist destination, which guarantees the following considerations: it is a safe value (while economic), which is barely exploited, and mainly supported by the public sector, and both tourists and the inhabitants of historic cities, the private sector and the government are potential beneficiaries. Even the type of visitor deserves special mention and responds to different types, depending on their involvement and motivation regarding the values of culture (Ashworth and Tunbridge, 1990; MacKercher and Du Cros, 2002; Caro, Luque and Zayas, 2015). Usually it involves travellers with medium or high economic and cultural level. This, coupled with the commitment in terms of investment -initially the public sector, given the need for the rehabilitation of historical buildings or monuments-, which has been followed by private entities that consider it a duty and an honour, make these attractive destinations an appealing attraction (Pérez, 2006: 268–272).

UNESCO has worked with the aim of encouraging governments to do research on culture and its capacity for sustainable development. So, in 2011 it published a battery of UNESCO Indicators on Culture for Development (Alonso, Caucino-Medici and Novacka, 2011), in which form was given to twenty indicators of seven different dimensions that make it possible to elucidate the relationship between culture and development nationwide. The underlying concepts have much to do with the theme of heritage and tourism, as generators of resources and sustainability, although its aim focused on creating a debate about the value of culture in developmental processes. It is also worth noting the UNESCO World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme Action Plan ST WH Programme 2013–2015, whose goal is a new approach to tourism and World Heritage properties.

After the first phase in 2015, another stage is expected, which will run from 2016–2018. This program has resulted in Sustainable Tourism, the UNESCO World

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(2) http://www.unesco.org/new/es/culture/themes/cultural-diversity/cultural-expressions/programmes/culture-for-development-indicators/ (última consulta 28/01/2016)

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Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme, which aims to develop an agreement at the level of World Heritage to implement a new approach to tourism and cultural heritage, from strategic planning that proposes collaboration with the authorities in order to safeguard heritage, achieve sustainable tourism, and economic development.

It is meant to bring together different actors from both the private and voluntary sector, and increase the need for periodic reports on the state of the conservation of properties, strategic analysis, the identification of opportunities in relation to quality tourism products and services, while looking for an understanding and appreciation of the outstanding universal values that distinguish the World Heritage properties.⁴

Sustainability and tourist destinations: the cultural as a competitive differential

There is now a consensus or tacit acceptance that the good planning, development and management of the tourism sector generates profits and wealth in a way that reverses in the quality and standard of living of citizens, but its potential is limited. This requires the consideration of sustainable tourism indicators (Pérez, 2001), which contribute to striking a balance between the demand of visitors and the absorption capacity of the place or resource. Doxey (1976) discusses the measurement of economic sustainability, environmental sustainability, and a third issue called sociocultural sustainability. This observation establishes three fields: quality of life, cultural heritage, and society and population (Doxey, 1976). With respect to cultural heritage, a number of strategies for its responsible use are needed, taking into account the limitations of the different sites’ carrying capacity and the constant changes that places and heritage resources are subject to (Hernandez, 2003, 2005). It is a challenge that must be undertaken by putting limits on management plans for the sites, such as the Master Plan for the Alhambra and Generalife (Vinuesa, 2000a; Jimenez, 2007; Villafranca, Chamorro and Lamolda, 2013). Troitiño proposes a series of points to contemplate what he calls memory locations and life, linking heritage and tourism. For this purpose he formulates the following tasks: “a) Define a Strategic Plan Target […], b) Addressing active recovery policies of cultural heritage; c) Prepare good heritage destinations for citizens beyond the specific needs of tourism; d) Ensure adequate infrastructure and equipment; e) To promote the connection between the various heritage resources; f) Building bridges of communication between urban policies, territorial, tourism and cultural heritage “(Troitiño, 2007).

All this would pass through a policy of integrated strategies that, in the case of heritage destinations, would be based on the recommendations of the main international organizations on tourism and sustainable development for urban planning and land management, based on an understanding that tourism is a central and

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integrated activity, and based on approaches and interventions that are in line with the target. The local institutions are the ones that must lead these processes, together with entrepreneurs and private actors, so that these processes are assumed by the social partners (Vinuesa, 2005; Ballester, 2008). And all this in order to achieve greater competitiveness in the destinations and in the cities where culture and cultural heritage become dynamic generators of differential elements necessary for leisure tourism development (Treserras, 2004).

A starting point on the issue of sustainability in relation to the competitiveness of destinations is the publication by the OMT of the Practical Guide to Sustainable Development Indicators for tourism destinations (OMT, 2005), since tourism management reverts on cultural and socioeconomic environments. From this guide comes research on the development of indicators of sustainability – understanding that this is a sensitive issue, since the proper conservation of a tourist site contributes to its competitiveness.

The context in which work was undertaken was with the consideration of tourism as a major source of resources for the world economy and to help those responsible for the management of tourism to achieve sustainable tourism, taking into account also that in recent years we are witnessing a diversification of tourist destinations. This publication was preceded by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992), which agreed to the creation of Agenda 21, which would address mainly the issue of sustainability. OMT, in 2004, had redefined sustainable tourism “guidelines for sustainable tourism development and management practices are applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations [...]. The sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, where it is necessary to establish an appropriate balance between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability” (OMT, 2005a: 9). The second one concerns the issue at hand: “Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their architectural heritage and lively and traditional values, and contribute to intercultural understanding and tolerance” (OMT, 2005a: 9).

The purpose of this guide was to alleviate the problems that could arise in any destination by proposing the creation of a series of indicators; with regard to cultural heritage it focuses on aspects of the conservation of cultural sites, monuments, damages, maintenance, designation and conservation. An artistic historical monument is not isolated, but part of an urban or landscape environment, constituting an example of a trace of a cultural past. Tourism, understood as a factor of change is the “main income generator and creator of image, which depends on cultural property in urban areas to attract visitors” (OMT, 2005a: 87). In the field of tourism, the declaration that a site is a site of interest, or subject to protection, enriches it. And the designation as a Heritage site is an added attraction to keep in mind with respect to the economic sectors and the promotion and marketing of tourism. For this, they propose a series of indicators for conservation issues, which we summarize below:
1. Indicator of the legal basis of protection:
   - Number and type of new laws or amendments needed to preserve structures at the municipal, provincial, state, cantonal or national level.

2. Indicators of designation:
   - Number and type of appointment where the structures, monuments, and historical sites are recognized;
   - Percentage of sites or structures that are eligible to receive the designation and are effectively appointed.

3. Level indicators of financial support for protection:
   - Amount of funds.
   - Voluntary contributions.
   - Contribution of tourism to conservation.

4. Profile indicator of the issue of heritage conservation:
   - Number of electronic and print articles on structures, monuments and historic buildings.

5. Site status indicators:
   - Percentage of change in the development of the adjacent area of the cultural heritage and the performance or non-performance of maintenance or rehabilitation;
   - Building of the site.

6. Threat level indicator with respect to the cultural resources of a site.
   - Increase/decrease in the threats that endanger the purpose and use of a site (OMT, 2005a: 87–92).

Each is accompanied by the reasons for use, possible sources of data, manner of use and a comparative analysis that takes into account the idea that appropriate heritage conservation contributes to an understanding of the cultural segment as a competitive differential.

Latin America also generated actions in relation to the guidelines of the OMT, through the organization of a regional workshop for the Andean countries, with the idea that the best decision is the one that has better information (OMT, 2005b, 25–40). In other cases, economic, sociocultural, and environmental effects that could cause tourism were evaluated, which resulted in an assessment of sustainability depending on the type of destination, classified into three types: developed, developing, or indigenous, black and racial populations. This led to the proposal of a series of sociocultural sustainability indicators, which in the sociocultural dimension worked with the criteria of architectural conservation, crafts, festivals, and traditions, with implementation indicators (Garcia and Rozo, 2007: 150–177). Similarly, the Latin American countries explored the field of competitiveness with respect to tourist destinations in their relationship to cultural heritage. The works by Medeiros Barbosa (2008) and Lima de Morais (2014) on Brazil give credit to the process. The first pinpoints the issue of competitiveness in order to thoroughly understand the concept and explain the process followed so as to be able to conduct a rigorous measurement of
it. All under the conviction that this is relevant to public administration, as only what can be measured can be effectively managed. Medeiros Barbosa (2008) defines five macro dimensions: infrastructure, tourism, public policy, economics, and sustainability, subdivided into thirteen dimensions in order to achieve and enforce competitiveness. The thirteenth dimension is “cultural aspects” and is included in the dimension of sustainability. This section takes into account three variables: a) cultural production associated to tourism, b) the historical and cultural heritage, and c) governmental aspects. It posits that measuring the cultural aspects of a region is very complicated, because to compile an inventory and to quantify the cultural mechanisms will not necessarily produce a result that reflects the cultural situation of destination.

This study was initially applied to six destinations, and after the exploration period it was extended to fifty-nine others, and explains in detail the procedure for measuring the competitiveness of tourist destinations in Brazil, with formulas for measuring each of the domains and subdomains (Barbosa, 2008: 16–21). Moreover, the study by Lima de Morais (2014) concerning the competitive advantage through cultural tourism, also held in Brazil in the city of Ceará-Mirim in Natal, State of Rio Grande do Norte, was based on the concept of cultural heritage as something with tourist and economic potential. The study analysed from a theoretical point of view the issue of the negative impacts of tourism, due to improper treatment of culture, but also the positive impacts, in the search for solutions (de Morais, 2014: 138–153).

Another point of view is one that is coming from Colombia, with respect to the competitiveness of tourist destinations and the creation of indicators. This perspective suggests that there are no competitive countries, but rather regions with certain competitive tourism products. And above all, this perspective considers it necessary to arbitrate assessment and management systems in order to effectively utilize resources. This requires a system of indicators established under the Tourism Sector Plan 2003–2006 – “Tourism for a new country” – with sustainability criteria. First, the program proposed platforms or evaluable subjects, variables and indicators and indexes. About the former, the following were specified: platforms of tourism sustainability, tourism management (productivity, quality); tourist support (attractive, infrastructure, technology); socio-cultural sustainability, and environmental sustainability. These themes were divided into a number of variables that pave the way for defining evaluation mechanisms of competitiveness. From there the indicators define what is to be measured and the indexes’ set measurement formulas. In the third platform: Tourist Support in the case of the variable “attractive” (means the group consisting of tangible and intangible assets of a community) corresponds to two indicators: Cultural Resources Valued, and Festivities and Valued Events, with corresponding indices or formulas. In the fourth appear “Conservation” and “use heritage”, which correspond, respectively, to indicators of Cultural Heritage Conservation and Set to value intangible heritage (VVAA, 2008: 15–29). This study also provides the methodology of data collection, evaluation, etc., as well as a system for conducting Tourist Inventories, established by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism (Buchelli, Arbey Castillo and Villarreal, 2009).
Some intangibles on tourism and heritage: identity and authenticity

However, since the first decade of the century, there has been a change of sensitivities and interests regarding tourist destinations in favour of strengthening the identity of the tourist territory, based on cultural and natural heritage. A change has occurred in the historical cycle of European tourism, where competitiveness depends increasingly on the different destinations and products, and in which plays an important role in the decision of the tourist who is involved according to their preferences and the emotions. And this represents an intangible that we must not forget (Requejo, 2007). As Rico Canovas (2014) points out, the concept of authenticity in the field of cultural heritage and tourism is key to understanding visitors’ attraction to the various traces of culture (Kolar and Zabkar, 2007), since it represents universal values and are one of the main motivations for traveling (Belhassen and Caton, 2006; Martin, 2010). Also, Canovas detects that authenticity is manifested in the degree of depth that tourists relate to the cultural element, and distinguishes two types. On the one hand, the very experience of legitimate experiences, based on a feeling of certainty with respect to the originality of the places and heritage objects, and, on the other, existential authenticity, linked to the motivations that explain the relationship between tourism and cultural heritage. The individual relates to his past, he has a personal experience. This typology is intended to generate experimental evidence in tourism, especially in the individual’s relationship with cultural tourism. The reason is that the tourist needs to reaffirm their identity and group membership in a globalized world like ours (Cánovas, 2014). It becomes one of the elements capable of generating a competitive impact on the welfare and satisfaction of tourists and visitors.

For this reason, the need to introduce unrepeatable offer products in the tourist panorama for personal experience was detected in order to favour the ordered and differentiated configuration of tourist areas. It is evident that in Spain the difference is in the landscape, the cultural heritage, and the natural resources. It was especially necessary to differentiate the coastal areas, more populated because of the politics of sun and sand. There was a need to change and it was done, giving more importance to the identity of the territory, the transformation of area tourism and heritage resources. Requejo (2007) speaks of serving the most neglected areas, looking to offer the uniqueness of the place to tourists, while maintaining sustainability. He understands that this would be linked to regional planning objectives concerning the area in question being a competitive destination, based on the principles of identity inherent in both the nature and the landscape, and its cultural heritage.

On the other hand, in 2011, at the IV Conference on Tourism Research, a study on Urban landscapes and perceived authenticity was presented. It pointed to the importance of finding ways to help generate competitive advantages. Thus, with respect to the heritage destinations it is necessary to fight for sustainability, both from Academia and from the Public Administration sector, in order to put in value the artistic heritage of cities, taking into account current trends regarding the
activation of urban centres as places of interest for tourism, leisure and commerce. The concept of the perceived authenticity by the visitor is likely to become an indicator of the impact that conservation and maintenance of the urban landscape, as well the activities done in destination, bring about on the tourist (Molina, Moreno and Fernandez, 2011). The assessment of authenticity requires consideration of several factors: the number of tourists, the level of independence, compliance with the stereotypes of the country and culture, as made explicit by the previously mentioned authors.

Another intangible with which to work is currently the subject of human development from the perspective of the opportunities offered by tourism for the welfare of people (Alfaro, 2014), but, in this case, with respect to the field of enhancing personal skills, thus adding the nuance of social inclusion to the issue of the sustainability of tourism. It goes beyond the purely economic, which is inherent in this field of tourism activities, as it contains a huge potential for developing different dimensions. In the field of culture, are necessary the contribution to solidarity, the respect for beliefs and traditions, the care and protection of these and the shared cultural heritage among the inhabitants of a place and their visitors. Peru is currently working with these premises to improve these abilities in people, focusing on the opportunities offered by culture for development (Alfaro, 2014: 63–75).

The measurement of culture in Spain

This issue becomes relevant in forums and research in the first decade of this century; although its origin dates back to the 1980s, when UNESCO created the Framework for Cultural Statistics (UNESCO, 1986). Anyhow, again, we have to look to the beginning of this century to see how and when the importance of the impact of culture on other areas of the economy, such as tourism, was put forth in Spain (Carrasco 1999). However, the measurement of culture is considered an unfinished task (Carrasco 2005; Villalba Salvador, 2015: 93-96). The statistical tables are no longer instruments or tools, but they do not involve debate or discussion, which itself is typical of the indicators. The Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports (formerly the Ministry of Culture) has since 2005 published yearbooks of cultural statistics, prepared by the General Department of Statistics and Studies of the General Secretariat Statistics MECD, from the multiple sources of interpreted data sets available. The yearbook presents boxes on cultural tourism, cultural habits and practices, heritage, museums and museum collections, among other things. The aim is to provide data indicative of the importance of the cultural sector as a driver of the economy, for example, with respect to the tourism sector, and it is a useful tool for creating indicators and measurements of competitiveness (MECD, Yearbooks). The last is the corresponding yearbook published in 2015. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports seeks to make sure that this does not remain in what is a mere compilation of data and statistical indicators of culture with the
aim of incorporating both the most significant results and the indicators that allow to assess the phenomenon in a global environment. The yearbook is divided into three sections. The first includes the estimates affecting different cultural sectors, including tourism and cultural habits; the second block is the one that provides the most specific information regarding the contents that are really of interest to this work: heritage, museums, archives, libraries, book, performing arts, music, film and video and bullfighting affairs, and the third concerns the main results of the Satellite Account of Culture, for purposes of assessing their overall impact on the Spanish economic sector (MECD, 2015).

The measurement of competitiveness in Spain and cultural heritage

Under this heading, it is worth mentioning the work of Sanchez Rivero (2004, 2006, 2009), whose proposal is based on a measurement system called item response theory or “logistic model with two parameters”. This system is based on the different discrimination indicators, distinguishing between inherited resources and resources created, each with its own indicators, with the aim of demonstrating the ability to analyse this system. Everything leads to the conclusion verbalized by Sancho Pérez and García Mesanat (2006a, 2006b) that there is no single position on what should be the accepted indicators that contribute to sustainability through better management of tourist destinations. Another debate arises from the study of heritage and cultural resources: the objective and subjective indicators, the latter being related to the perception of tourists and is therefore more difficult to assess (Villalba Salvador, 2015: 99–101). It is worth mentioning the great interest of tourism observatories, which have their origin in tourist information systems and which introduce changes in research and tourism management. OMT addressed the development of a Tourism Information System based on statistics supplied by data on the sector in order to meet their own information needs. This does not mean that there were no working methods in this regard, but it was thought that the unification – which will be called TIS or Tourist Information System – is necessary. This would be a short-term objective, including the development of a system of indicators of the competitiveness of tourism. In addition, the indications of the United Nations (1993) will continue as countries develop functional satellite accounts focused on one particular aspect of economic reality (e.g. tourism) and ambiance estimates of countries’ Standard National Accounts. Therefore, one TSA or Tourism Satellite Account “constitutes a system of economic information related to tourism, as tourism account, satellite to the main system of national accounts in terms of classifications, definitions, principles of record compilation methods. The key is to properly separate the aggregate data contained in the national accounts of the part referring to the tourism sector. This requires that additional information provided by tourism statistics” (Sancho Pérez, 2001: 291–302). But that satellite account sometimes does not meet the expectations and needs of the whole arc of tourism performance. Therefore, SIT
offer a more comprehensive approach, just as the observatories of information and monitoring of tourist information; although the former is more used in marketing studies and management of destinations, and the second in collecting data on visitors and further analysis and publication of results to deepen the tourist phenomenon.

In Spain we should emphasise, because of its intrinsic interest, the Tourism Observatory of the Group World Heritage Cities in Spain, led by Professor Troitiño, whose reflections on the changes in management methods in recent years could favourably affect the competitiveness of these destinations (Villalba Salvador, 2015: 101–104). Moreover, we must also take into account that current tourist information systems, also known as tourist observatories, are innovative from the point of view of research and tourism management. The year 2005 was an important date as UNESCO published work on Managing Tourism at World Heritage sites (Peder sen, 2005), and the aforementioned Observatory was born. It had two goals: to get accurate, continuous, and orderly information on the tourism activity of the different cities integrated in the Heritage Cities Product Club and to provide operators and public and private agents of the various member cities of the group with an information tool to monitor the tourism market at a general level (and in comparative perspective), which could help define strategies in the medium and long term. Therefore, it is a useful tool to deepen with respect to the tourist phenomenon at different scales (local, provincial, regional or national).

This work is framed in investigations that resulted in the 2008 publication of the Tourism Observatory Group Heritage Cities of Spain (Troitiño et al., 2008), an essential reference document for defining indicators. Prior to this publication there were a number of papers based on the interest in the link between tourism and historic towns (Vaquero, 2002 and 2004, Hernandez, 2003; Hernández and Vaquero, 2005; García, 2005; Lobo Montero, 2001; Vinuesa, 2003, 2000b; Vinuesa and Torralba, 2009), although the article published by Garcia Hernandez (2007) on tourism planning and management in relation to the cities included by UNESCO in the World Heritage List deserves special attention. The starting point is that the transformation brought about and with measurable results, since the turn of the century, regarding the increased tourism, the new demands, and increase in the number of destinations. The increase in tourism influences local politics and encourages the creation of new lines of action, such as meeting or event tourism, shopping tourism, language tourism (Taboada de Zúñiga Romero, 2010), sports or film tourism (Field, Brea and Gonzalez, 2014), to give a few examples. Garcia Hernandez (2007) analyse the change in tourism management structures of these cities, specifically in response to the departments of tourism, autonomous agencies that deal with tourism management (consortiums, foundations, public tourism companies, municipal boards), organisational structures and management bureaus, whose function is the integration of public and private provisions in relation to the tourism business, public bodies that enhance the work in order to conserve and restore heritage sites, and also create organisational structures involving different cities, such as city networks like the Network of Cities Ave and Network of Jewish-Sefarad, among others.
An approach to cultural heritage in relation to the competitiveness of tourist destinations (Hernández, 2007: 92). This has been a challenge and a change of direction from the inertia prior to the series of actions that resulted in the competitiveness of the tourist destinations stage. In the words of Garcia Hernandez “in general terms the creation of an agency specifically for local tourism management involves the crystallization of the sophistication of the development process of any destination and becomes one of the instruments of efficient management and therefore competitiveness” (Hernandez, 2007: 92).

Recently a study was published based on the development of a guide to study tourism observatories, the most widely used heritage (Guilarte, 2015) destination tool. It is an ITAS or Integral Tourism Analysis System that has two functions: 1) data collection and analysis to improve the competitiveness of the destination, and 2) a research system to develop projects related to sustainability. This is what is offered outside of traditional visits to monuments, buildings, and historic sites. This requires obtaining a comprehensive analysis of modes of development of tourism destinations. In any case, both systems are based on the analysis of the phenomenon of tourism. The observatories are particularly important in relation to the World Heritage Cities Heritage, especially in Spain, where this group (GCPHE) has a joint observatory working on cities as a whole and individually, as it is perceived in the Report from 2008 (Troitiño et al., 2008) and numerous cities in this category have an observatory. Latin America, however, does not have a considerable number, despite some notable cases. The failure to implement these tools can result in competitive disadvantages.

Guilarte Pérez (2015) has generated a proposal based on ITAS for heritage cities with a methodology for the study of Santiago de Compostela, Cordoba and Salamanca, as consolidated cities, and Avila and Segovia, as emerging cities. On the subject of the research and study based on these observatories, he analyses two systems: one collection and data analysis system, and the other a system for research on the development of projects to ensure the protection of tangible and intangible heritage sites that are vital for long-term sustainability. This sheds light on the fact that observatories are the most widely used tools in the studies carried out for World Heritage Cities since they detect, for example, what could be improved, in order to strengthen competitiveness and sustainability, deepening the inquiry into supply, the economic impact, and the local population. It is essential to develop the flow of visitors and the capability of host destination as a whole, but also of heritage products (Guilarte, 2015: 55–75).

On the other hand, we must also take into account the work being carried out by the State Administration, in particular by the Ministry of Culture, in relation to the deeper knowledge of the cultural heritage of our country through the National Plans -which are management tools that are based on the study of the assets that make up the order, in order to rationalise and optimise resources for its preservation and dissemination, ensuring at all times the coordination of the actions of the agencies of the state, regional and local authorities- (EICP, MECD, National Plans). Each of these actions provide evidence that the implementation of new systems for
performance and management, new resources, new content and operational plans, when analysed in detail, they can become a source for defining the indicators of a possible model of competitiveness with respect to Cultural Heritage.

**Importance of new technologies in the current outlook**

We cannot forget in this approach the change that generated the Information Technology and Communication (ITC) also with respect to this field concerned with the knowledge and promotion of cultural heritage in the field of tourism. They have become absolutely necessary tools in relation to tourist destinations (Poon, 1993). Upgrading and updating the necessary tools for promoting destinations need the constant updating of the object of the offer for visitors. The tourist interested in culture is a 2.0 user, who collects and generates information and opinions on social networks, which makes them a protagonist in this area of knowledge, even though they are nothing more than a potential customer, but always hungry for information at all stages of the process, from the moment it stands as a protagonist (Mallor, Gonzalez Gallarza and Fayos, 2013). In fact the tourist becomes a 2.0 tourist (Caro, Luque and Zayas, 2015; Suau, 2012) as it reaches 42% of all the tourists, whose information tools are social networks (13%), online magazines (12%), blogs (18%), internet portals (18%), recommendation systems, etc., used in the usual phases of preparation, implementation, and subsequent recreation. Without forgetting that this type of tourist, interested in cultural property, already has at their disposal technologies such as geolocation systems, applications, virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), or QR codes, capable of use in the world of museums, which really seeks a travel experience and contemplation in situ (Caro, Luque and Zayas, 2015: 934–942). All this is helping to shape what has been called smart tourist destinations or “innovative tourist destinations, consolidated on a cutting edge technology infrastructure, ensuring sustainable development of the tourist territory, accessible to all, to facilitate interaction and integration of visitors with the environment and increase the quality of their experience in the destination” (Segittur, 2013).

**Conclusion**

This paper has approached the issues concerning the competitiveness of heritage destinations, those in which culture and in particular cultural property become a special and attractive destination for tourists in the 21st century. After a brief review of history, it shows that the last decades of the previous century put culture on the economic map. It was institutions such as UNESCO, the Inter-American Bank for Development, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund which undoubtedly contributed to it. In Spain it is from the enactment of the law 16/1985 Spanish Historical Heritage that cultural heritage is seen as having economic potential, without
An approach to cultural heritage in relation to the competitiveness of tourism and in the globalised world in which we live, one of the key objectives is to improve the competitiveness of destinations, so that those responsible for the current policy are forced to stay ahead of the market. The publication of the Battery Indicators by UNESCO on Culture for Development (2011) was the trigger for the beginning of the discussion of culture in the development processes, which plays an important role in tourism and heritage. The program UNESCO World Heritage Sustainable Tourism, which has completed the initial phase (2013–2015), is currently in the second phase, which runs until 2018, in order to develop an agreement, at the level of World Heritage, involving diverse society actors, including volunteering.

The problem today is no longer the conjunction of culture and the economy, but to create responsible strategies that take into account the constant change and evolution that heritage sites experience through management plans, such as the Master Plan for the Alhambra and Generalife, and integrative strategies with respect to tourism, urban planning and land use.

This is inextricably linked with the problem of sustainability, which is a starting point in the work of the OMT: Indicators for Sustainable Development for Tourism Destinations (2005), as has been the beginning, both in Spain and in Latin America, of a series of activities as the Regional Workshop for Andean countries on Sustainability Indicators, or the awareness of countries like Brazil and Colombia in terms of measuring competitiveness.

On the other hand, some hardly measurable intangibles have emerged in recent years, which we can interpret as a challenge for countries and their policies of action for researching and studying the topics addressed. I mean identity as the central value -based on landscape and cultural heritage- or authenticity -that emotionally affects individuals who need to reaffirm their membership in a group in a globalised world like ours. Authenticity becomes a scale or indicator that can generate a competitive advantage that affects the welfare of the visitor. Another of these intangibles is human development, which could be produced thanks to tourism as a generator of opportunities. This is something that transcends the realm of the economic and is said to enhance personal skills with respect to social inclusion, based on the principles of solidarity, respect for beliefs and traditions and cultural heritage, shared between the host population and the tourist.

Regarding Spain, the issue of the measurement of culture is something in the process of being developed. With regards to cultural heritage, Cultural Statistics Yearbooks can be considered an aid for creating indicators. Another element of importance are Tourist Observatories, which originate in the tourist information systems and for which a guide for study has been developed – an ISAT or Integral System Analysis of Tourism, for the cities of Santiago de Compostela, Cordoba and Salamanca, as consolidated destinations, and Avila and Segovia, as emerging destinations. This tool examines the phenomenon of tourism from the point of view of data collection and analysis, and from the point of view of research in order to long-term sustainability. To this can also contribute National Plans on Cultural Heritage
(Cultural Landscape, Traditional Architecture, Industrial Heritage, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Protection of Underwater Archaeological Heritage, Heritage and Education), which represent the start up of new management systems and performance, new resources and contents that could become the sources for the definitions of the indicators used to develop a possible model of competitiveness with respect to heritage sites.

And finally, a remark concerning the importance acquired by the New Technologies of Information and Communications and its role in the promotion and management of cultural heritage and tourism. The tourist of today is a 2.0 user, who uses social networks, Internet portals, blogs, online magazines, and technological tools, such as applications of virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), or QR codes applicable in museums and institutions that encourage the most current and authentic travel experience and that contribute to achieving smart, sustainable, and responsible tourism.

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