

The Recreational use Value in Spanish Protected Natural Landscapes: Proposal for a Nature Park “Serranía de Cuenca”

Mondéjar-Jiménez, J.A.^{1*}, Gázquez-Abad, J.C.², Gómez-Borja, M.A.³

¹ Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Castilla-La Mancha, Cuenca, Spain

² Faculty of Economics and Business Studies, University of Almería, Almería, Spain

³ Faculty of Economics and Business Studies, University of Castilla-La Mancha, Albacete, Spain

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ABSTRACT: Environmental protection is not at odds with the proper use of all the offered possibilities. Along these lines, the touristic products available to the consumer has increased exponentially over the last few years which has made it possible to convert territorial and patrimonial resources into significant elements of recreational use put into value at service of the consumer. Surveys on the recreational usage value in protected national parks are still incipient in Spain and so it is highly recommendable analyse what their future possibilities are and what applications are feasibly achievable. If the various options are taken into account for evaluating the natural resources currently available to tourists, this paper examines a proposal for studying the values of the recreational use of the “Serranía de Cuenca” national park, which occupies more than fifty thousand hectares in the Province of Castilla-La Mancha. Taking into consideration that large number of varied tourist segments that it is possible to encounter in a market, protected natural landscapes have become truly differentiating elements in a quality touristic offer that strictly meets the most demanding sustainability criteria.

Key words: Environment, Recreational use, Protected natural landscape

INTRODUCTION

The tourist industry is characterised by a highly complex structure that reveals itself in many forms of this service that may also have a heavy impact on natural resources and environments of the various tourist destinations (Pomeanu and Teodosiu, 2012). Nature tourism, especially in protected natural landscapes (above all in national parks), has been undergoing spectacular growth over the last twenty years (Ferrari, Mondéjar-Jiménez and Vargas-Vargas, 2010), something that will increase still further in the future according to the forecasts made by the World Tourism Organisation (OMT) for this type of tourism (Pulido, 2007). It is difficult to establish a precise definition for protected natural landscapes, mainly because of the development of the concept for its beginnings until they formed the current institution covering a wide range of functions. Thus, although determined authors may accept that a natural landscape may be defined as a collection of natural ecosystems, it is necessary for the effects of human action on nature to be taken into

*Corresponding author E-mail: JuanAntonio.Mondejar@uclm.es

consideration. It is therefore possible to consider landscapes that have not undergone any changes other than natural processes, together with those that have suffered more or less major modifications, but continue to conserve their structures and original species (Tolón and Lastra, 2008). Moreover, the natural landscape must meet certain extraordinary requirements and qualities that make protection necessary on the basis of extraordinary natural elements (De Rojas, 2006). Along with this aspect, the effectiveness of this protection must be taken into account, in other words, efficient instruments must be employed for effective management of protected areas (Campos and Boada, 2007). Conservation is, therefore, positive and includes preservation, maintenance, sustainable use, restoration and improvement of the natural environment (García and Vicente, 1997; Tolón and Lastra, 2008). Europarc-España is an organization with the participation of the institutions involved in planning and management of the protected natural landscapes of Spain. This forms the principal

professional forum at which the improvement of such areas is discussed and prepared. More specifically, this is where the more than 1,500 protected natural landscapes in Spain, with a total surface area of over six million hectares are managed (Europarc-España, 2012). This organization was created in 1993 and is an active member of the European Federation of Natural Landscapes and National Parks (EUROPARC), a pan-European organization dating from 1973 that brings together 28 countries and dedicated to protected area management and the defense of nature. However, some authors consider that in Spain there is “an unconnected group of regional networks of protected areas, characterized by a significant heterogeneity of

types, a wide diversity of implementations and goals and consequently, considerable difficulty of bringing the autonomous regions together because of the various protection figs 1 and 2 instruments” (Mulero, 2002), producing a situation criticized by several authors. The autonomous community of Castilla-La Mancha has a truly enviable natural landscape richness that places it in a privileged position within the scope of protected areas. Legislative regulation of this scope is based on two fundamental directives: Law 4/1989, of the 27th of March, on the Conservation of Natural Landscapes and Wild Flora and Fauna (BOE, 1989) and Law 9/1999, of the 26th of May, on the Conservation of Nature in Castilla-La Mancha (DOCM, 1999).



Fig. 1. Identifying Logo of the Protected Areas in the Castilla-La Mancha System

Source: JCCM, (2012).

Classification by categories is:

- National Parks.
- Nature Parks.
- Nature Reserves.
- Fluvial Reserves.
- Natural Monuments.
- Protected Landscapes.
- Micro-reserves.

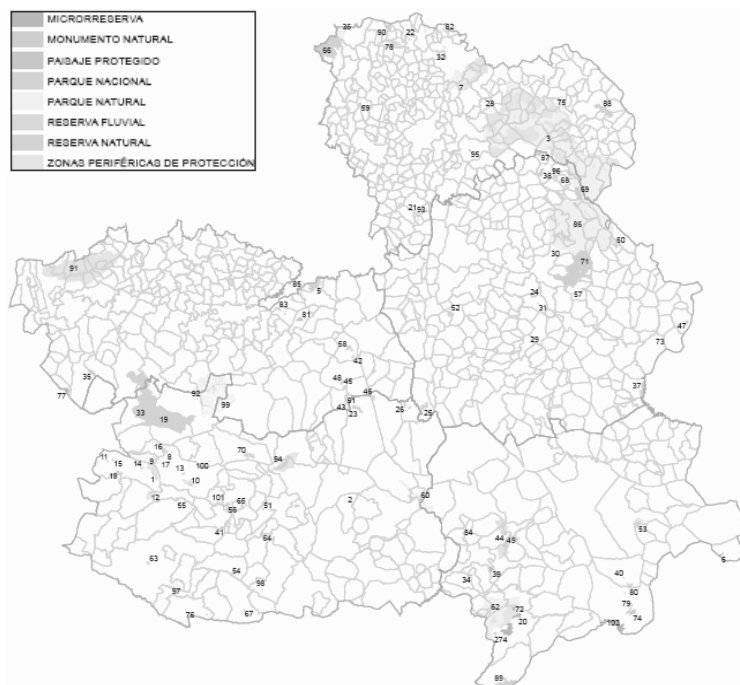


Fig. 2. Plan for the Protected Areas in Castilla-La Mancha

Source: JCCM, (2012)

Table 1. Protected natural areas in Castilla-La Mancha

CATEGORY	NUMBER	TOTAL DECLARED AREA (ha.)
National park	2	42.784,00
Nature Parks	7	478.253,00
Nature Reserves	22	14756,35
Micro-Reserve	48	7447,4
Fluvial Reserve	6	4307,89
Natural Monument	24	33484,25
Protected Landscape	1	36,38

Source: JCCM, (2012)

Table 1. Type of tourism in Castilla-La Mancha 2010 (%)

Type of tourism	Cuenca	Castilla-La Mancha
Active and ecotourism	26,0	30,4
Themes	23,4	43,5
Nature / rural	59,5	54,3
Wine	11,6	14,9
Conferences-Meetings	7,2	16,1
Gastronomic	38,6	41,9
Heritage	55,7	54,3
Film	0,0	0,9
Route of Don Quijote	8,4	8,4

Source: IPTCM, (2012)

Table 2. Activities in domestic travel to Castile-La Mancha

ACTIVITIES	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Shopping	46,1	53,1	55,8	61,4	52,3	58,3
Walking through the countryside / nature enjoy	68,2	67,5	69,0	71,5	53,5	57,9
Visit family / friends	65,9	72,2	73,3	78,5	74,8	76,7
Gastronomic activities	19,4	27,7	37,3	46,7	44,0	44,8
Cultural visits	28,2	27,0	34,5	35,7	34,3	31,7
Enjoy the beach	0,0	1,9	0,0	1,5	2,1	1,0
Nightlife and nightclubs	30,8	35,8	30,0	35,0	28,1	28,1
Cultural shows	9,2	9,1	11,0	17,2	14,9	13,0
Sports	12,8	13,4	12,4	13,6	16,1	17,3
Religious Events	11,1	5,9	10,5	10,7	11,5	14,8

Source: IET, Movimientos Turísticos de los Españoles (FAMILITUR, 2012)

The nature park “Serranía de Cuenca” is located in the northeast of the Cuenca Province (Castilla-La Mancha, Spain) and includes a large part of the so-called Serranía Alta (High Mountains) de Cuenca. It forms part of the Southern Iberian System and consists of 73,743 ha. It includes land belonging to eleven municipal terminuses, with the contribution of the Cuenca municipal terminus being significant with almost half of the nature park area. Demographically, it is an area with a very low population density of around 2,000 inhabitants, with a trend towards population aging. Population centres are small and only three exceed 100 inhabitants, with the largest having six hundred.

MATERIALS & METHODS

Nature tourism has great potential in Spain, Castilla-La Mancha and the province of Cuenca. At regional level, in 2010, nature tourism have leading next heritage tourism the type of tourist activity performed in Castilian-La Mancha region, with 54.3% each, while in the province of Cuenca, the most accomplished type of tourism was nature tourism (59.5% of visitors) followed heritage tourism (55.7%) (Table 1). With respect to the previous year 2009, nature tourism has been increasing, rising from second place occupied with 50.9% of the cases, only behind heritage tourism (53%).

On the other hand, regarding the activities of the Spanish in their travel Castilla-La Mancha (Table 2), the activity of walks in the countryside and enjoy nature is the second most important, behind the visit family and / or friends, during the years 2006-2010, but in 2011 stood at third place, behind the visiting family and / or friends and buying activity. However, the evolution over the period 2006-2011 as a whole shows a reduction in the activity of walks in the countryside and enjoy nature.

In the region of the Serranía de Cuenca Alta, consideration as a unique high natural value, with an enviable wealth of fauna and landscape, are converted at the great historical and cultural heritage of the province of Cuenca in a major tourist attraction that fosters large flow of visitors to the area.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The interrelation between tourist activities and protected natural landscapes has been covered by several studies (Millán, 2001), in which the importance of evaluating rural touristic spaces based on rational administration of existing natural and cultural resources. Here, the protected natural landscapes are increasingly reviving the interest of a society to which they provide

a full series of services, such as those with a recreational character that directly affect the people’s welfare (Del Saz and Suárez, 1998). However, the economic assessment of these resources involving the recreational use of free access to protected natural landscapes that lack a market must be tackled, which assumes obtaining significant information in terms of management of policies on their recreational use by free-access (Samos Juárez and Bernabéu Cañete, 2011b). It is difficult to assign economic values to environmental resources, especially within the scope of protected natural landscapes. Specifically, there are various methodologies for calculating the value of recreational use of a protected natural landscape (García and Colina, 2004). One of the most usual methods is that of trip cost, which based on recreational service demand (Haab and McConnell, 2002), according to the need to travel or move to the location in order to enjoy the recreational functions that this meets (García and Colina, 2004).

The consumer behaviour model is based on the familiar utility production function model (Freeman, 1993) according to the following formula:

$$\max \quad U = U(X, r, q)$$

$$\text{s.a.} \quad Y = X + c_r r - p_w t^*$$

where r is the number of visits to the location per unit of time, q is the quality of the environmental resource, X is the quantity of cash, the price of which is unitary, Y is the income, p_w is the salary rate, t^* is the total time of the individual and c_r represents the total cost of the visit to the location (García and Colina, 2004).

CONCLUSIONS

It is necessary to stress the importance of the protected areas in Spain, the situation of which has substantially improved over recent years, especially in the Castilla-La Mancha autonomous community (Mondéjar, Mondéjar and Cordente, 2010). This important step forward was largely made possible by awareness of the people of the interest and need to preserve these areas as key parts in the environmental improvement of the territories and the establishment of specific conservation legislative measures by the regional government. Recreational or touristic use of protected natural landscapes must allow substantial improvement in resource management so that the key concepts (such as touristic load capacity) are considered when exploiting the possibilities of the areas under various protection levels. If the large number of varied tourist segments that can be found in a given market is taken into consideration, it can be concluded

that protected natural landscapes have become real differentiating elements in a quality touristic offer. However, taking into the account the research into the value assessment of a rural touristic area, it is necessary to establish economic value assignment methods for the environmental resources, especially in the scope of protected natural landscapes. This paper puts forward the options of the various methodologies for calculating the value of the recreational use of protected natural landscapes. The goal of improving information for decision-making in a scenario marked by environmental and economic sustainability so that protected natural landscapes maintain tools for sustainable management. Thus, correct flow management reveals the importance of producing touristic products that are sufficient for consumer demand, together with the actual characteristics of the protected area based on the available natural resources. Precisely within the recommendations that may be employed in assessing the value of the abundant touristic resources existing because of public and private initiatives to promote tourism in certain geographic areas in order to achieve economic diversification in mainly agricultural areas, it is possible to highlight the creation of infrastructures on various levels, (access roads, lodgings according to demand requirements and adequate signs etc); to promote and develop activities linked to environmental conservation. The main limitation of the paper derives from the availability of information, which shows the significance of achieving it in a timely adequate fashion so it can be employed in decision-making. Future research line deriving from this paper include the application of the trip costing method into the demand for recreational services to the "Serranía de Cuenca" Nature Park, which occupies over fifty thousand hectares in this province of the Castilla-La Mancha region.

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