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## DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL TOURISM IN GRAN CANARIA

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### **Abstract**

This article will analyse the potential of Gran Canaria's cultural heritage to attract tourists. For this purpose, a bibliographic study was carried out regarding cultural tourism and its evolution, as well as the tourism in Gran Canaria. Furthermore, it was complemented with a series of interviews conducted with professionals in the sector. The conclusion is that a change is taking place in the behavior of tourists and in their interests. It is highlighted that the destination has the potential to attract cultural tourists, but that, there are some issues that need to be addressed such as the low qualification and lack of entrepreneurs to work on this new tourism model, better conservation and maintenance of heritage sites and objects on the island and a marketing campaign to attract cultural tourism.

**Key words:** cultural tourism, heritage, experience, authenticity, Gran Canaria

### **Resumen**

En este artículo se analizará el potencial que tiene el patrimonio cultural de Gran Canaria para atraer turistas. Para ello se realizó un estudio bibliográfico respecto al turismo cultural y su evolución, así como del turismo en Gran Canaria. Además, se complementó con una serie de entrevistas realizadas a profesionales del sector. Se concluye que se está produciendo un cambio en el comportamiento de los turistas y en los intereses. Se destaca que el destino tiene el potencial de atraer a los turistas culturales, pero que, hay algunas cuestiones que deben ser abordadas como la baja cualificación profesional y la falta de empresarios para trabajar en este nuevo modelo de turismo, una mejor conservación y mantenimiento de los lugares y objetos patrimoniales de la isla y una campaña de marketing para atraer el turismo cultural.

**Palabras clave:** turismo cultural, patrimonio, experiencia, autenticidad, Gran Canaria

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## DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL TOURISM IN GRAN CANARIA

### 1.- INTRODUCTION

Heritage is considered to be an asset that has a value and that the current population has inherited it from the ancestors (Pérez, 2018). Thus, the villages are established according to their cultural heritage and develop in a creative way in front of the challenges of the present and give them security when facing the problems of their immediate environment (Sanjo, 2007). In this context, the Canary Islands, have a varied and rich heritage that they have inherited from the aboriginal peoples, constituting at present an important archaeological wealth (Sanjo, 2007). From there, throughout history, a whole legacy of cultural and natural heritage has been increased and shaped for its inhabitants and visitors which has been a real tourist attraction (Sanjo, 2007).

Tourism in the Canary Islands began in the 1960s as an exclusive sun and beach destination (Marrero and Santana, 2008). The social reality generated at that time by the emergence of new economic models meant a social development that produced waste and abandonment of heritage resources (Sanjo, 2007). It is from the 21st century onwards that the concern for establishing quality plans arises with the execution of a more sustainable model through the Agreement for Competitiveness and Quality of Tourism in the Canary Islands 2008-2020 (Marrero and Santana, 2008).

Gran Canaria could be seemed as a massive tourism destination in the Canary Islands, as shown by the data available on the tourists who visit the island, since they make up 27.72% of the approximately 15 million visitors to the entire region (Promotur, 2020a). Its pleasant climate and splendid beaches have made it a mass destination, which is why it is necessary to generate new expectations of development and diversification through its cultural heritage (Marrero and Santana, 2008). In a recent report on the reputation of heritage tourism in the Canary Islands, (70,000 opinions from 160 cultural centres on the islands), it was highlighted that the capital, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, in comparison of the other islands, is the one that receives the highest scores for the cultural experience (EFE, 2019).

All these arguments justify carrying out a study on the current state of cultural heritage in Gran Canaria and the possibilities it offers. On the one hand, to see the demand of the cultural tourist, and on the other hand the opportunity offered to the destination to create a new tourist model to diversify and renew itself.

The present paper is developed following a structure that starts from the evolution and definition of the concepts of culture, heritage and tourism, as well as the connection that could exist between them. The current trends and motivations of the tourist when visiting Gran Canaria and the heritage possibilities it offers are explained below. Afterwards, the methodological process followed throughout the work will be explained, to finish with the reflection and evaluation of the possibility that this product may arise and be situated as a demand of the cultural tourist of the island.

### 2.- LITERATURE REVIEW

The World Tourism Organization (1995), from now on UNWTO, defines tourism as the set of activities of people who travel and stay away from their residence for less than one consecutive year and more than 24 hours, for leisure, business or other reasons. Later, the definition was broadened, referring to tourism as a social, cultural and economic trend linked to the travel of people to places outside their usual place of residence for personal or business/professional purposes (UNWTO 2010).

Various scholars, based on these etymologies, have studied and determined it from different areas such as economy, ecology, geography, psychology, statistics, law and political sciences (Requena and Muñoz, 2006). These definitions allude to the term culture, either explicitly or because the term is so broad that it can be studied from different areas. Therefore, a revision of the term culture is necessary in order to delimit and relate its etymological projection to the tourist field, especially from the social and anthropological point of view.

In this line, the British anthropologist Edward B. Tylor in 1871 conceived culture as that totality that includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs and any other aptitudes and habits that man acquires as a member of society (Podestá, 2006). Later on, in contrast to Tylor's postulation, the current constructivist considered the culture as a differentiation tool which appears more and more as an element of the strategy of social actors, remarkably if they are engaged in social or political struggles (Cucho, 1997). Consequently, time is a determining element according to the rhythms and interactions between members of a human group (Aguirre, 2004). Hence, culture is where the tourist activity is going to develop, serving as an impulse to the development of the regions. Still, it also becomes challenging to delimit what would encompass the fusion of both terms (Moragues, 2006). Moreover, it should be considered that the tourist himself is capable of transmitting and disseminating his own culture wherever he may be, while at the same time destroying the existing one, which is why culture and its manifestations change (Pastor, 2003). Therefore, two ideas must be taken into account; first, that cultural tourism can be included in any form of tourism and, second, that it should be presented as a tourist experience establishing a cultural threshold (Moragues, 2006). However, there must be a balance of terms so that it can generate the well-being of those who exercise it without having to destroy the properties and identity of the hosts (Moragues, 2006). In this sense, it is evident that heritage should be mentioned as a cultural attraction that should bring benefits to the receiving community of visitors through tourism (Troitiño and Troitiño, 2016). Therefore, the different definitions of heritage will establish the connections between the terms.

UNESCO (2011) refers to cultural heritage as those goods bequeathed by their ancestors, the testimony of their passage through time, thus being able to understand their way of life, society, economy, etc. It is for this reason that the principle of sustainability is sought, which allows for the best conservation of this heritage and for future generations to enjoy it. In addition to the importance of the object, attention to the public is incorporated as the receiving agent of the places linked to the heritage. Furthermore, that is why this organisation classifies these goods as tangible, divided into movable and immovable and intangible (UNESCO Office San José, 2011). In a social context Pernaut (2002), maintains that heritage is the structure of culture, its tradition and experience and is composed of universal and particular elements, historical and current, tangible or material and intangible or immaterial, visible and invisible. Here, although culture is also mentioned, it refers to society as a collective for which it constitutes a symbol that identifies it. Similarly, Velasco (2009), based on the work carried out by several authors, considers that heritage is the set of material and immaterial goods that are identified by a specific society as bearers of the community's cultural values. This makes them worthy of special protection not only with their conservation but also with the use that can be made of them.

Having defined and demonstrated the terms tourism, culture and heritage, all that remains is to create a definition of cultural tourism and heritage tourism. This way, their similarities and differences through the experiences and authenticity provided by the destinations could be understood. The National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States defines heritage tourism as "travelling to experience the places, artefacts, and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. It includes cultural, historical and natural resources" (Gibson, 2015). The UNWTO defines cultural tourism as "a type of tourism activity in which the visitor's essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination" (UNWTO, 2019). Both concepts refer to what people seek in their travels: education, history, experience and authenticity. Nevertheless, the former includes the present as part of the heritage. Thus, Bachleitner and Zinz (1999), consider that among the different factors that have provoked interest in cultural tourism is the possibility of offering culture as an individual experience, which feeds the feeling of the unique and stimulates a way of remembering in a journey of adventure to the past.

In this regard, Richards (1996) approaches culture from two perspectives. Firstly, he refers to culture as a process linked to anthropology and sociology. The process are the movements linked to a cultural impulse, to the search for new knowledge or simple contact with a different human reality towards tourist attractions. This way, tourists can obtain new information and experiences that satisfy their cultural needs. Secondly, he distinguishes culture as a product associated with literature and art history. It focuses on activities carried out during the trip without attending to specific motivations, focusing on

cultural practices (for instance: visits to museums, concerts, exhibitions) offered outside their place of residence.

As it is shown, the motivation for cultural tourism offers a multitude of dimensions. It can be incorporated into the leisure practices a commercial space that becomes a resource providing experiences identified as authentic and unique, such as images of tourists alongside natives, in front of emblematic places or miniature reproductions of historical constructions or symbols (Santana, 2003). Therefore, Richards (2003) claims that cultural tourism is a valuable resource for the growth of different regions as all places have a culture to offer. In this way, cultural tourism has the opportunity to recognise the identity of the destination itself (Cluzeau, 2000), but not only understanding the space, who lives there and who has lived there, but it also includes the relationship and contact with the residents. For this reason, the real motives that lead a person to show interest in being in contact with heritage elements are those that refer to authenticity.

Establishing two types of authenticity, MacCannell (1973) makes a differentiation between the real and authentic world sought by people and the staged that is decorated so that the tourist feels it as real. On the other hand, Wang (1999) referred to three types of authenticity: the objective, the constructive and the existential. The first one is centred in museological studies. The second one has a subjective character and only grants authenticity or not depending on the person. The last one takes into account the personal questions of each tourist, their feelings and perceptions to analyse the experience. The latter is the one what makes it possible to understand that tourists are motivated and interested in cultural tourism (Donaire, 2012; Kohl, 2003). The heritage experience, at the same time, will allow the creation of attitudes in a subjective way that will lead to correct attitudes towards the heritage elements being visited (Ham, 2011).

For all this, the possibility that exists to attract the attention of the cultural tourist and commercialise it as a resource is considered. This is the reason why cultural tourism is viable in a destination, which is none other than the search for authenticity by tourists who are looking for new attractions such as those provided by cultural heritage (Navalón and Rico, 2012). Moreover, the relationship between tourism and heritage, will allow a concern about its conservation and its incorporation into the experience of tourists and local citizens, even in the Canary Islands, which as a coastal destination, does not stand out in this tourist sector (Chávez and Pérez, 2010).

### 3.- METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1.- The research context: Gran Canaria

According to data provided by Promotur (2020b) the main aspect that motivated the tourists to choose the destination of Gran Canaria in 2018 was the weather (79.9%). On the other hand, 16.3% of tourists arrived on the island in search of authenticity, while 6.7% and 6.3% chose it for its cultural offerings and historical heritage, respectively (Table 1). Compared to 2017 (2.4%), it has increased considerably (Promotur, 2018). Likewise, the reason for choosing Gran Canaria due to the climate was 10% less with respect to the year before (Promotur, 2018). Therefore, it could be observed that tourists are changing their behaviour, searching for new experiences and wanting to get to know the destination and its culture.

**Table 1:** Most relevant aspects in the choice of the island, 2018.  
Source: Promotur, 2020b.

ASPECTS	FIGURES
Weather	79.9%
Security	49.1%
Sea	46.2%
Quietness	44.7%
Beaches	41.9%
Accommodation Offer	39.7%
European Membership	36.2%

<b>Easy Trip</b>	33.3%
<b>Price</b>	32.8%
<b>Landscapes</b>	27.4%
<b>Environment</b>	25.9%
<b>Gastronomy</b>	21.7%
<b>Entertainment</b>	20.1%
<b>Authenticity</b>	16.3%
<b>Commercial offer</b>	10.0%
<b>Exoticism</b>	9.8%
<b>Nightlife</b>	9.1%
<b>Footpath network</b>	8.1%
<b>Cultural Offerings</b>	6.7%
<b>Historical Heritage</b>	6.3%

It is also reflected in the activities carried out by tourists in the island. As shown in Table 3, 71.9% go to the beach, while 8.6% make cultural visits (Table 2). However, there is a greater interest in walking the streets, exploring the island on their own and even hiring organised excursions, thus showing an interest in getting to know the island.

**Table 2:** Activities carried out.

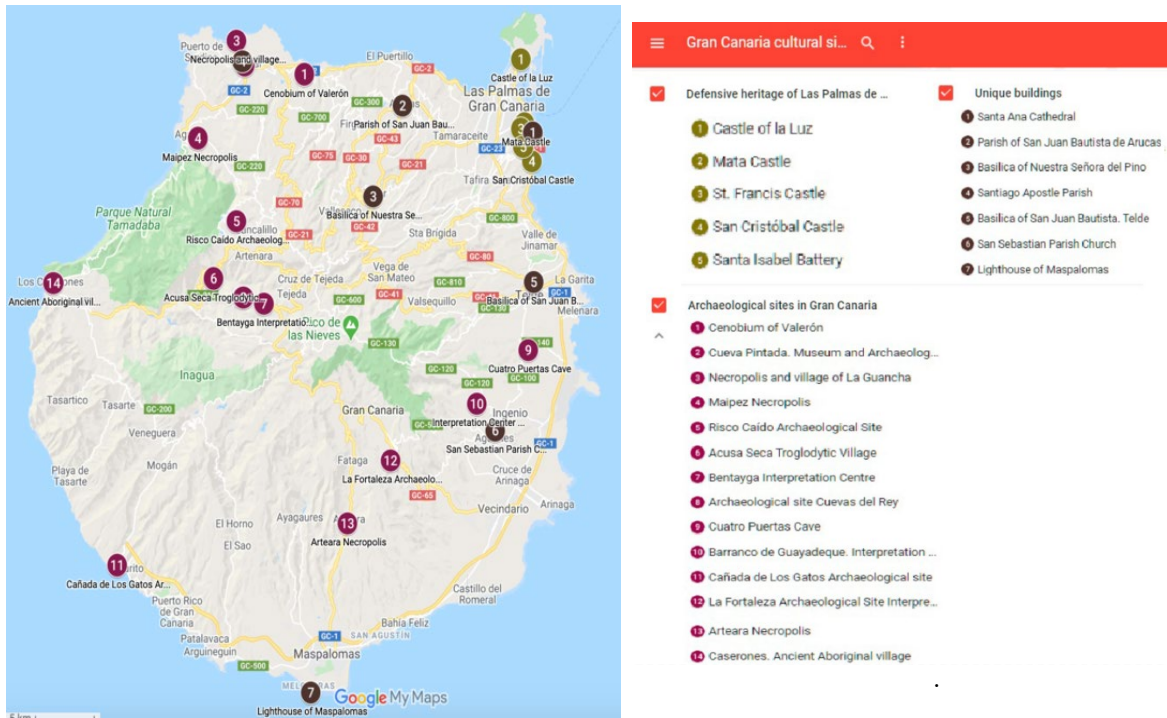
Source: Promotur, 2020b.

<b>ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT</b>	<b>FIGURES</b>
<b>Beach</b>	71.9%
<b>Wandering</b>	68.5%
<b>Swimming pool, hotel facilities</b>	57.3%
<b>Explore the island on their own</b>	44.2%
<b>Taste Canarian gastronomy</b>	24.3%
<b>Nightlife/concerts/shows</b>	18.8%
<b>Organized excursions</b>	14.0%
<b>Sporting activities</b>	12.8%
<b>Leisure or amusement parks</b>	11.4%
<b>Wineries/markets/traditional festivities</b>	10.9%
<b>Sea excursions/whale watching</b>	10.5%
<b>Activities at sea</b>	9.1%
<b>Museums/exhibitions/cultural centres</b>	8.6%
<b>Nature activities</b>	8.4%
<b>Health and beauty treatments</b>	6.1%
<b>Astronomical observation</b>	2.8%

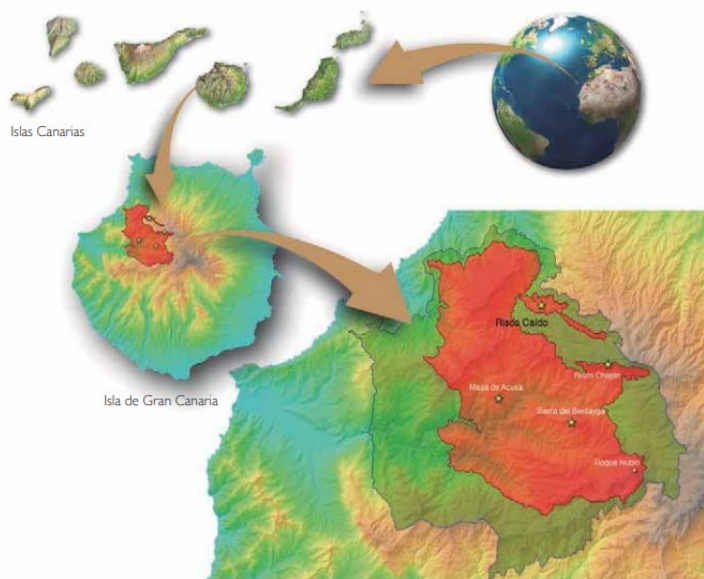
Although the data indicates that the main tourist interest of Gran Canaria is the sun and the beach, the island offers a great wealth of heritage, as reflected in the following map (Figures 1 and 2). This is why it will serve as the basis for its heritage promotion. Among all of them, the cultural landscape of Risco Caído and the sacred mountains of Gran Canaria could be highlighted due to its recent incorporation as a World Heritage Site (Figure 3). The cultural landscape of Risco Caído (Figures 4, 5 and 6) and Sacred Mountains of Gran Canaria was distinguished by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 2019 (Cabildo de Gran Canaria, 2018).



**Figures 1 and 2:** Cultural Heritage in Gran Canaria.  
**Source:** Author's own.



**Figure 3:** Location of Risco Caído in Gran Canaria.  
**Source:** Cabildo de Gran Canaria, 2018.



**Figures 4, 5 and 6:** Window of Bentaiga, Roque de Beintaiga and Roque Nublo.  
**Source:** Cabildo de Gran Canaria, 2018.



### 3.2.- Data gathering

A series of interviews with four experts from the tourism and cultural heritage sector of Gran Canaria were undertaken for the project (Table 3).

**Table 3:** Sample.  
**Source:** Author's own.

NAME	CHARGE	REASON	Procedure
Pepe Cuevas	Inspectors of the Historical Heritage of the Gran Canaria Council	It is in the Council where the campaigns to promote cultural tourism on the island are carried out. Interviewing these professionals will serve to know and evaluate what is being done.	Face-to-face interview
José Guillén			Telephone interview
Mary Fe de León	Technician of the Tourism Product Unit of the Gran Canaria Tourist Board	This interview will be used to find out which tourists visit the cultural heritage, under what conditions they visit it and what is being done by the Board to give it value.	Telephone interview
Elena Acosta	Director of the House-Museum of Christopher Columbus	This museum is the one that generates the most significant number of visitors on the island. Her vision will help to see how the island's tourists have evolved.	Face-to-face interview

These participants have been selected for their expertise in the industry and their deep knowledge of it. The interviews were recorded to be analysed later. Nevertheless, annotations will also be taken during the interviews to address the most relevant aspects. These interviews were done between January and February 2020. The analysis of the interviews will be based on the position of the interviewee and their experience. Not all interviewees occupy the same position, so the understanding of the subject and the time spent on practice in their jobs will be the variables studied.

#### 4.- FINDINGS

In this section, the main findings regarding the four topics covered in the interviews are presented:

- Opinion about the promotion of the cultural heritage
- Campaigns
- Tourism trends
- Cultural exchange

##### 4.1.- Promotion of the cultural heritage

All interviewees agree with the idea that cultural tourism in Gran Canaria should be promoted. According to Elena Acosta, director of the House-Museum of Columbus, “it is important to show how we are”, as tourists are increasingly looking for the authenticity of those places they visit.

Agreeing with the idea of Troitiño and Troitiño (2016) about the tourist attraction that heritage can represent and therefore its promotion is necessary. Pepe Cuevas (cultural heritage inspector) states that there are only certain places that are promoted. However, promotion should always be carried out with respect, as promulgated by UNESCO (2005). Pepe Cuevas and José Guillén (cultural heritage inspector) concur that promotion should only be directed at that tourist who is genuinely interested in heritage and its conservation. In this way, the visitor can experience experiences and expand knowledge, as indicated by Morère and Perelló (2013). In this sense, Cuevas remarks that:

“Many places are not on the list of that set of sites of tourist-cultural interest, but increasingly the tourist is less “tourist” and more traveller, and they look by themselves the heritage on the Internet.

That is to say, it not only depends only on the promotion but more and more the interested tourists look for themselves to get to where they want. Then we would have to reorient the promotion policies, in my opinion, thinking more about the sensitive tourist because many tourists come to the island, 4,000,000 last year, who are not interested, so we do not have to do general promotion but that we would have to orient to that tourist segment that does want or does intend”.

The interviewees also agree in the expenditure generated by this type of tourist. They affirm that it is quite low since most cultural visitors hire all the services in their country of origin. Still, Acosta differs in this point, arguing that, despite this, tourist spending in Gran Canaria can generate a network of economic benefits that can be reinvested in heritage conservation, reaffirming her position that this type of tourism can benefit the island. Therefore, as indicated by Richards (2016), cultural practices can generate economic benefits. Acosta claims:

“If you have a pole of attraction, like the House-Museum of Columbus, that thousands of tourists visit, then those tourists have a drink, buy something in a store and this way they will create a network of economic benefits and jobs and companies that are created around it, so tourism generates jobs. That money should also revert to maintenance because the conservation of cultural heritage is very expensive. Then, the investments of public entities and even private ones should look after it, knowing the role that cultural heritage plays”.



## 4.2.- Campaigns

The campaigns that are currently carried out are aimed at local tourism, as Guillén and Cuevas assert. Mary Fe de León (technician of the tourism product unit of the Gran Canaria Tourist Board) indicates that campaigns are beginning to be carried out at a national level. She adds that with the naming of Risco Caído as World Heritage by UNESCO, campaigns will start to be carried out at an international level. This way, they could attract a more significant number of tourists interested in this type of activity.

Nevertheless, de León describes the difficulty of promoting these resources, as the tourist who visits the Canary Islands does so with the aim of sun and beach tourism. Even so, she points out that when journalists or public figures visit the island, they are offered cultural activities so that they can discover other attractions in Gran Canaria and serve as a means of promotion. De León, when referring to the appointment of Risco Caído as a UNESCO World Heritage, affirms:

“This is a milestone that will begin to put us on the map of cultural tourism through the network of the cultural heritage of UNESCO and well, we are in that path, and many offers will accompany this milestone. It is not an isolated thing; there are many offers that can complement the great offer that is neo-archaeological tourism.

Everything is weaving a network around the heritage in Risco Caído that will be joined together with *Gran Canaria Destination Starlight* and with the biosphere reserve. That will make Gran Canaria a resident place for those tourists who are looking for something more than sun and beach”.

On the other hand, Acosta agrees that more and more campaigns are being carried out to highlight the historical and cultural heritage of the island. This is why Acosta declares that heritage should be promoted more since tourists are increasingly looking for authenticity and the uniqueness that the local population has to offer. In this way, the tourists can have contact with the residents and get to know the identity of the place they are visiting, as suggested by Cluzeau (2000). Thereby, Acosta asserts:

“Campaigns are being carried out, more and more in fact (...). However, I think there should be more because more and more tourists are looking for authenticity, uniqueness, that which is proper to the place and what we can offer seems to me fundamental but always within sustainability”.

## 4.3.- Tourism trends

Another meeting point between all the interviewees refers to the tourist who is looking for experiences and more authenticity in his trips. Gran Canaria is a sun and beach destination, and it is a model that is difficult to change. Still, to which another type of tourism can be added so that the destination can gain value. Thus, tourists carry out cultural tourism activities that complement the main reason for the visit, which is to enjoy the excellent weather.

Hence, Guillén states that tourists who come to Gran Canaria for cultural visits are still a minority. He declares that “heritage is not a significant element, and the tourism we are receiving right now does not come directly to see the conservation and research of heritage”.

According to Cuevas, in the Canary Islands, since the tourism industry began to develop, it has mainly been a mass-tourism model. Thus, in his opinion, cultural tourism is damaged by this mass model, since this “influences tourist’s expectations and their use of the island”. Nevertheless, in consonance with Pulido, Calle and Velasco (2013), mass coastal destinations could also offer a cultural heritage and serve as an excuse to renew coastal tourist spaces.

In line with Acosta, the city of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria is currently also offered as a weekend destination in which to enjoy cultural life. She states that “the positioning of the islands brings with it a desire to get to know the culture of the islands”. Moreover, the filming of internationally famous television series and films supports the appeal of heritage tourism. This is what Debrine (2013) considers

to be a factor in the identity of a place since the activities produce a change in the understanding of heritage and contribute to its revaluation.

On the other hand, de León defends that in order to change the mentality of the tourist, it is needed a landmark that will make the cultural tourist go to Gran Canaria. According to her, it could be Risco Caído once UNESCO names it as World Heritage. It is a product that materialises that can serve as a resource to be offered as authentic. Nonetheless, she highlights that Chinese tourists are the ones who travel most for cultural reasons. In particular, she cites the fact that the Chinese poet Sanmao lived on the island and tourists from this country go to Gran Canaria to visit the place where she lived and the places she describes in her poems. She alleges that “it is pure cultural tourism because they do not go to the beach”.

#### 4.4.- Cultural exchange

The Canary Islands are characterised by the fact that populations of different nationalities such as English or Dutch have established themselves there, which has led to the establishment of various cultures. In this sense, de León states that, since the arrival of the first English, their customs have been adopted, emerging a cultural exchange that has influenced different aspects of the life of the islanders as language, traditions or buildings. She adds that the cultural exchange has been generated by the population of Gran Canaria itself, as they are characterised by an open mentality. She claims:

“The Gran Canarian has always been a person opened to what comes from outside, to their customs, and they open their minds and culture to other cultures and other traditions, and of course, we have taken part of that culture that they have brought to us”.

Cuevas agrees with de León that the local population has adopted many of the tendencies of these tourists, but with a negative point of view, he considers that the local culture is deteriorating. He goes so far as to say that there is a “touristification” of Canarian culture. Similarly, he argues that many traditions are sold to tourists, turning them into a tourist souvenir. This is what MacCannell (1973) described as two types of authenticity: the real world and the staged world.

Finally, it should be noted that a barrier to this exchange can be generated due to the language barrier, as there is a large part of the population that does not know how to speak English or any other language apart from Spanish. Cuevas alleges:

“The language frontier which is a natural sin of the Canarian educational system because if the boys and girls from the beginning had a second language or a significant linguistic investment, in the case that they are dedicated to the tourist sector, they would already have this capacity, but this is not the case”.

Acosta argues that tourists are increasingly interested in the culture of Gran Canaria. It is the same as considered by Ham (2011) that the heritage experience will allow correct and positive attitudes towards the heritage elements that are visited. Thus, she comments that there has been a change in the way tourists travel, which is no longer as massive as it used to be and is a more informed tourist.

Acosta and Cuevas agree that it is necessary to better prepare professionals to be able to promote this cultural exchange with tourists so that they know more about the culture. Similarly, she adds that the lack of knowledge of the island’s history by the sector’s professionals is a barrier to this exchange. Acosta comments:

“There are many events like the conquest or the passage of Columbus that immediately creates this interest in people and today they are wasted because the first who does not know about these facts is the canary”.

Consequently, Cuevas exposes that the tourist is looking for authenticity and that what the island offers is a staged authenticity, as MacCannell (1973) pointed out for those who disguise reality so that the tourist feels it is real. He remarks that it is the local community that has to value its own culture so that

the tourist can be influenced by it. To do so, he adds that it is necessary to take care of the island's heritage and learn about it in order to give it more importance.

Conversely, Guillén thinks that foreigners are not so open to cultural exchange because they hire tourist packages and stay all their time at the resort, so the cultural exchange is challenging. He declares that it is necessary to promote cultural tourism, more authentic and with more contact with the residents. He adds that:

“The tourism that the Canary Islands currently receive is tourism that is not interested in culture. However, whose only motivation is the sun and the beach, it is massive and generates a significant impact, limiting their stay in hotels to get sunburnt”.

## 5.- CONCLUSIONS

1. There is a very close relationship with the search for authenticity and experience when referring to cultural tourism.

Tourism trends have changed over the years. The relationship between heritage and society has been highlighted, which includes tourism as a consequence of the social and leisure use of heritage assets as referred to by the English anthropologist Edward B. Tylor (Podestá 2006). From this connection, new tourism modalities have emerged, such as cultural tourism (Moragues, 2006). In this sense, Rico Cánovas (2014), in her doctoral thesis, proposed the evolution of heritage spaces that have been transformed based on the needs and demands of current tourism.

According to this author, the cultural tourist seeks the authenticity and experience of the places he visits, which is why the territories have had to specialise their spaces by establishing tourist products and themes that go beyond traditional cultural tourism. In the processes of renovation of mature tourist destinations, the argument of betting on the tourist dimension of cultural heritage is an excellent option (Gibson, 2015). The measures adopted will serve to maintain a good level of competitiveness, both nationally and internationally (Rico, 2014).

2. Gran Canaria has a particular tourist market.

In the renovation of consolidated tourist destinations, the tourist dimension of heritage is evident (Hurtado, 2002). On Gran Canaria, where the mass sun and beach tourism has stagnated, there is a need for renovation, since only its pleasant climate and coasts are promoted abroad, as highlighted in the interview with Mary Fe de León. Moreover, as argued in the interview with Pepe Cuevas, the tourist package is the usual way to hire this destination from the place of origin, with very affordable prices and an all-inclusive program. This way of planning the stay means that tourists visiting Gran Canaria does not generate significant profits, adds the same interviewee. This is the main reason that justifies highlighting other virtues of the island, such as the richness of its heritage and incorporating it into its tourist offer to expand or complement the traditional tourist market based on sun and beach (Richards, 2016).

3. There is a lack of appreciation for the Cultural Heritage of Gran Canaria.

Gran Canaria has an undeniable cultural wealth. It must be protected, valued, disseminated and enjoyed by all of society (Portillo, 2012). However, it is not offered abroad to potentially interested parties because of the lack of coordination between the different organisations dedicated to the promotion of the tourism sector and the heritage of the island (Robertson, 2005). This is also linked to the fact that there is a lack of awareness among the local population itself and among professionals in the sector of the cultural importance that exists on the island (Portillo, 2012). Thus, professionals with an understanding of this are needed to attract tourists and instil the idea that culture must be included in leisure practices and that cultural heritage can encompass cultural and heritage experiences (Ham, 2011).

4. The cultural exchange between tourists and the population is both positive and negative.

The Canary Islands are a meeting place for different cultures due to their geographical location, according to Mari Fe de León. This is the reason why there has always been cultural exchange with Europe, Africa and America (Santana, 2003). The population has adopted the different customs of the tourists who come, adapting to them and changing attitudes, which has led to Gran Canaria's society being open-minded (Santana, 2003).

However, according to Guillén, the mass tourist who arrives on the island in search of sun and beach is not so interested in contact with the population, limiting his stay to the place of accommodation. Cuevas even referred to a "touristification" in Canarian culture, losing its own traditions and customs. Furthermore, there is a barrier due to the lack of preparation of the professionals in the sector, as they do not have sufficient qualifications to show the authentic culture of Gran Canaria and allow the visitor to live unique heritage experiences (Ham, 2011).

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