

## THE INFLUENCE OF ARTISTICALLY RECREATED NATURE ON THE IMAGE OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS

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### **Abstract**

This paper analyses the formation of the tourist image based on artistically recreated local nature icons. It focuses on the island of Lanzarote, a destination with its development based on promoting an environmental image founded on the creation of a network of multifunctional, high quality art, culture and tourism centres exhibiting artistic recreation of its unique environmental assets. The methodology utilizes a questionnaire (n=453) structural equations modelling approach in which the overall image is related with on the image of the environmental conditions and the image of the artistically recreated centres. Results show that the destination's image is significantly grounded on the image of the art, culture and tourism centres using art based on Lanzarote's natural assets. They suggest that destinations have relevant opportunities to artistically enhance natural assets to improve their tourist image and marketing, that quality multi-functional visitor centres can be important within a sustainable tourism policy, and part of the emerging breadth of approaches taken by sustainable tourism marketing.

### **Resumen**

Este trabajo analiza la formación de la imagen turística basada en la recreación artística de la naturaleza. Se centra en la isla de Lanzarote, un destino cuyo desarrollo se basa en promover una imagen ambiental basada en la creación de una red de centros multifuncionales de arte, cultura y turismo de alta calidad que exponen la recreación artística de sus activos ambientales únicos. La metodología utiliza un cuestionario (n = 453) y un modelado de ecuaciones estructurales en el que la imagen global se relaciona con las condiciones ambientales y la imagen de los centros artísticos. Los resultados muestran que la imagen del destino se basa en gran medida en la imagen de los centros de arte, cultura y turismo utilizando el arte basado en los activos naturales de Lanzarote. Sugieren que los destinos pueden mejorar artísticamente los activos naturales que poseen para mejorar su imagen turística. Los centros de visitantes gestionados con calidad artística pueden ser importantes para una estrategia de marketing de turismo.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, there have been important developments in the literature about the influence that cognitive (functional) and affective (emotional) aspects have on the perception of a tourist destination's image (Stern & Krakover, 1993; Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999b; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Moreno & Ritchie, 2009; Carballo, Araña, León & Moreno, 2011; 2015). However, the analysis of specific aspects of the tourist image has not been overtly explored, and only recently have specific aspects of a destination, -e.g. geographical (Martín, 2005), environmental (Northcote & Macbeth, 2006; Ryu, Lee & Gon Kim, 2012) and sociocultural characteristics (Cruz, Baltazar, Gomez, & Lugo, 2005) - been analysed.

While there are possibilities for a destination that may be learned from other destinations, or improved by using new image-making techniques, specific characteristics such as location, nature and environmental assets, history, culture, and the arts, are always specific to a destination, and can be differentiated between destinations. Waitt, Lane, & Head (2003) argued that, when a destination uses its specific tourism resources to stress its advantages, it might be able to achieve greater competitiveness.

Furthermore, destinations are not created equally (McCartney, Butler & Bennett, 2008): some have an abundance of resources and comparative advantages while others have limited natural resources and infrastructure to support tourism development (Hsu, Wolfe & Kang, 2004). Ritchie, Crouch & Hudson (2000) earlier discussed whether tourist destinations can be created or are just born, pointing out that a destination that is deficient in resources but uses what little it has more effectively could be more competitive than a destination endowed with a wealth of resources (Hsu et al., 2004).

In this paper, we study the impact of the development of tourist attractions based on the use of the celebration of local art, artistic depictions of nature and local culture on the image of a tourist destination. The case study is based on the island of Lanzarote (Canary Islands), a destination that over the years has developed a network of art, culture and tourism centres (ACTC) based on the artistic depictions of nature. These centres help the management and conservation of the natural characteristics of the sites while offering tourists a unique experience through the incorporation of a distinguishing artistic value. The paper considers both the direct effect that the environmental conditions of the destination have on the image of the destination and the indirect effect created through the image of the ACTC. We evaluate whether tourists' perceptions of environmentally sound management at the destination influence the image of both the destination and the ACTC, and to what extent the unique experience of these centres has an influence on the overall image of Lanzarote.

### 1.1 Environment and tourist image

Many activities that tourists undertake in a destination depend on natural resources. Thus, the consideration of the environmental conditions in the image of destinations becomes relevant (Dolnicar & Leisch, 2008). That is, destinations can improve their image by working towards improving their environmental quality (Logar, 2010).

Tourists have preferences for environmental aspects of the destinations, and therefore form a cognitive image based on these aspects which influence their decisions about what destinations to visit and what services and experiences to enjoy at the chosen destinations (Hamilton & Lau, 2005; Fridgen, 1984). Thus, destinations can increase their attraction by promoting an image based on environmental factors and activities related to their use of nature and its conservation (Akama, 1996). There are useful instruments available to do this, such as the implementation of a "green branding" approach which helps destinations to position themselves in a more competitive environmental profile (Mihalič, 2000).

The ways destinations manage their environmental profile through actions and recognition can have an influence on their tourist image (Ryu et al., 2012). That is, destination images can be improved with

the application of ecological marketing that builds on the new interest in quality environments (Chen & Tsai, 2007). For instance, there have been developments in the operationalization of environmental certifications focusing on practices of sustainable tourism or ecotourism (Font & Harris, 2004; Font, 2002; Buckley, 2002).

## **1.2 Culture, creativity and tourist image**

Some researchers have considered the influence of cultural attractions such as the built heritage, museums and monuments, on the image of tourist destinations (Richards & Wilson, 2007). Tourism and culture are closely linked and cultural tourism is an important segment of worldwide tourism (Richards & Munsters, 2010), with more travellers increasingly ranking arts, heritage and other cultural activities as one of their main reasons for travelling (Constantin & Mitrut, 2009).

As culture is utilized as a means of social and economic regeneration, the cultural tourism market has become flooded with new cultural attractions and heritage centres (Smith, 2005; Richards & Wilson, 2006). Cultural itineraries can also be a means of linking together creative enterprises and events, stimulating visitors to see a number of different activities in a specific region (Richards, 2011b). Tourists often consume the creative lifestyles of others (Richards & Wilson, 2007). Tourist experiences usually emphasise active involvement in local culture, rather than the highlights of global culture (Richards, 2011a).

It has been argued in the wider academic discourse that in the search for alternative models of cultural tourism, many destinations are using “creativity” as a development strategy (Richards, 2001; Prentice & Andersen, 2003; Richards & Wilson, 2006). There is a general division between “cultural heritage” assets that are seen as more traditional, and “creative” assets that are seen as more urban and contemporary. This divide is also embedded in different destination images (Richards & Marques, 2012).

Arts and creativity are attributes of the image projected by a destination (Jarábková & Hamada, 2012; Richards, 2011b; Camprubí, Guia & Comas, 2008; Lindroth, Ritalahti & Soisalon-Soininen, 2007). The ability of a tourism destination to compete depends on “its ability to transform the basic inherited factors into created assets with a higher symbolic or sign value” (Richards, 2011b). In addition, “serial reproduction” of cultural images across destinations can be avoided by adopting strategies of creativity leading to distinctive and exclusive images (Richards & Wilson, 2006).

Creativity has become increasingly important for the development of tourism in cities and its images in recent years (Smith, 2005; Richards, 2012; Romero-Padilla et al, 2016) since it enhances certain atmospheres which both locals and visitors appreciate (Lindroth et al, 2007); it can also help to make places more distinctive for visitors, and tourism promotion of cultural attractions can become a tool for the regeneration and the revitalization of culture resources as well as a means of developing more sustainable models of tourism (Richards & Marques, 2012). Creative resources may also allow tourists to enhance their learning about local capacities, and increase their appreciation of the experience, the traditions and the unique features of the places they visit (Tan, Kung & Luh, 2013; Richards & Wilson, 2006).

## **2. DATA AND METHODOLOGY**

The empirical study reported here was conducted in and on the ACTC of the island of Lanzarote, one of Spain’s seven Canary Islands. Lanzarote is a destination that has focused on environmental conservation with an artistic profile. Due to its environmental efforts, Lanzarote has been granted various environmental certifications. Since 1993, a Biosphere Reserve was created (UNESCO Biosphere Reserves), and in 2015, it received the UN declaration of Geopark (UNESCO Global Geoparks), in recognition of its environmental management.

In addition, in 2015, Lanzarote received the Biosphere Responsible Tourism Certification recognized by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), a body under the World Tourism Organization. The GSTC acknowledges the trajectory followed by the island in advancing sustainability. The award also recognizes social responsibility, economic development, environmental compliance, cultural protection and the involvement of the tourist at the destination.

The ACTC are one of the main tourist attractions in the island. They receive more than 2.5 million visits per year. There are seven centres in the ACTC network, each featuring some of the specific natural and cultural characteristics of the island. They were designed by the artist and architect César Manrique, (1919-1992), who was a strongly influential figure in the early stages of tourism development of the island. He had a powerful influence on the planning regulations in Lanzarote, recognizing the dangers of tourism, but also its potential for conservation and the economy of the island: he effectively lobbied for the long-term and sympathetic development of tourism. That influence was, and is, responsible for restricting the development of high-rise hotels on Lanzarote, and the use of traditional colours and building styles in tourism-related construction. His ideas inspired a tourism product combining art and nature, together with the definition of standards for the physical infrastructure, such as the use of the colour white and low-rise accommodation facilities. The ACTC are original artistic creations that enhance the value of natural resources in the island by their artistic interventions.

Lanzarote has evolved over the last 50 years as a destination which is recognized by these artistically recreated natural resources with César Manrique as its original creator and contributor. Thus, it is valuable to investigate whether these artistic icons based on environmental resources do make a contribution to the image of the destination, since this evidence can be useful for the management of environmental and artistic icons in other new or mature destinations seeking sustainable tourism development. Therefore, the following hypotheses are formulated for this research:

Hypothesis 1: The environmental conditions of a tourist destination have a positive and significant influence on destination image.

Hypothesis 2: The environmental conditions of a tourism destination have a positive and significant influence on the ACTC image of Lanzarote.

Hypothesis 3: The ACTC image has a positive and significant influence on the destination image of Lanzarote.

A structured questionnaire was developed to test the hypotheses above. The questionnaire was designed in Spanish and translated into German and English, the languages of the major visitor sources for the island. The survey instrument was self-administered by the visitors to the ACTC after they had finished their visit in June and August 2013. A copy can be found in the Supplemental Data section of the web-based version of this paper. A total of 453 usable questionnaires were collected from a random sample of visitors.

The methodology utilized for the investigation of the above hypotheses of the relationships between the constructs measuring the different images and the environmental conditions is based on the Structural Equations Modelling (SEM) approach. This technique allows researchers to appraise causal relationships between variables in complex models involving direct and indirect effects, as well as simultaneous relationships between variables. Further, whereas other multivariate techniques can deal only with observable measurements, SEM is able to work with latent variables, i.e. variables which are not directly measured but are inferred in the model from other variables which are related.

### 3. RESULTS

Data were processed with SPSS and AMOS 20 statistical packages. Following the usual procedure there are two stages in the data analysis: (1) Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to determine the suitability of considering components of destination image, ACTC image and environmental conditions; (2) SEM analysis for the relationships between destination image, ACTC image and environmental conditions.

The SEM methodology has the purpose of simultaneously estimating the relationships between latent variables and indicators, and determining the validity and reliability of the measures (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1989). The proposed model was tested in AMOS 20 using the maximum likelihood (ML) procedure to investigate the interrelationships among the factors. The results of the evaluation showed that the data adequately fit the theoretical model since all indices are greater than 0.9.

The structural model shows coefficients in standardized form. The statistical significance of parameter estimates was examined through the critical ratio (c.r.) test statistic. The c.r.'s for paths should be outside the threshold range of  $\pm 1.96$  to be considered significant (Byrne, 2001) (Table 1). All path coefficients were positive and significant at the 5% level with values ranging from a high of 15.06 (Environmental conditions→Destination image) to a low of 10.77 (ACTC image→Destination image), which provides evidence of convergent validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). According to the structural parameters of interest, the estimates are all highly significant, the regression coefficients are significant as they were less than 5% probability. The structural model provided support for all of the hypotheses.

There is a positive relationship between the environmental conditions, ACTC image and destination image. That is, the environmental conditions have a positive and significant influence on both the destination image ( $\beta=.87$ ,  $p=0.0$ ) and the ACTC image ( $\beta=.93$ ,  $p=0.0$ ). Among the three factors of environmental conditions, “environmental and artistic elements” ( $\beta=.94$ ) is the most important explaining them, followed by the “environmental certificates” ( $\beta=.87$ ) and the “environmental actions” ( $\beta=.63$ ). Thus, we accept hypothesis  $H_1$  that environmental conditions have a positive and significant influence on destination image, and also  $H_2$  that environmental conditions of a tourism destination have a positive and significant influence on the ACTC image. Further, we also accept  $H_3$  since the ACTC image has a positive and significant influence on the destination image ( $\beta=.79$ ,  $p=0.0$ ).

Interestingly, the expositions and exhibitions factor ( $\beta=.78$ ) is the most important explaining the image of the ACTC, and the destination brand ( $\beta=.92$ ) is the most important factor explaining the image of the destination. The affective component is the factor with less influence on both the image of the ACTC and the image of the destination ( $\beta=.61$  and  $\beta=.78$ , respectively).

Table 1. Standardized estimates of structural paths

Direct effect	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Results
$H_1$ : Environmentally conditions→Destination image	0.87	0.056	15.06	0.00	Accept
$H_2$ : Environmentally conditions→ ACTC Image	0.93	0.051	13.81	0.00	Accept
$H_3$ : ACTC image→Destination image	0.79	0.018	10.77	0.00	Accept

### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The tourism promotion of cultural attractions linked to the creative management of natural assets can be managed as useful tools for the regeneration and revitalization of cultural resources, thereby contributing to the sustainability of tourist destinations (Richards & Marques, 2012). Image is a powerful tool in marketing that enables managers to communicate and position their product and services more competitively (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a).



This study contributes to sustainable tourism research by investigating the usefulness of using creativity and art in sustainable destination management. They are considered important elements that bring opportunities for the differentiation and specialization of tourist destinations, since they are increasingly demanded by tourists and can contribute to destination image formation. This paper has addressed the contribution that the sustainability and the creativity factors make to the image of the tourist destinations.

The results show that creativity through the enhancement of the artistic value of natural assets can make a contribution to the environmental profile of destinations, and thereby influence the image of the art centres - or artistic attractions - and the overall image of the destination. From a general point of view, conservation of the cultural heritage has been considered as a dimension of the sustainability of a destination (Richards & Wilson, 2006). Thus, the creation of artistic attractions -such as Lanzarote's ACTC - can be a useful opportunity to enhance the environmental and sustainable profile of the image of tourist destinations.

The perceptions tourists have about the environmental conditions of the destination are found to influence both the image of the ACTC and the image of the destination. That is, the environmental conditions contribute directly to the image formation of the destination and indirectly through the image of the ACTC. Therefore, the results suggest that when there are important artistic environmental attractions at the destination, tourists might perceive the sustainability capability of the destination mostly through the factors of creativity, followed by the factors of environmental certification and management. The implication is that creativity and art creation based on natural resources may be playing an important role in the image formation similarly to more conventional approaches of sustainability.

Thus, whereas the image of tourist destinations can be improved by achieving sustainability goals through sound environmental management, there is additional scope for image formation by working through the application of creative solutions that increase the value of natural assets. That is, natural assets can be re-created through artistic innovations in a way that tourists can visit them and enjoy and understand them, thereby enhancing the tourist experience and satisfaction, contributing to the improvement of the destination's image. Richards and Wilson (2006) suggest that cultural managers often have creative skills which can be used to innovate the tourist experience. In the case of Lanzarote, this role was played by a recognized artist who devoted his creative efforts to build up projects in his island integrating nature with art and architecture.

On the wider scale, this work shows that well-managed environments, quality buildings, relevant cultural and environmental interpretation, and well-designed visitor centres, are much more than artistic luxuries: they can be economically valuable to probably any destination worldwide. The management of the ACTC in Lanzarote provides a useful example to other destinations for re-creating their environmental and natural assets from a cultural perspective in order to enhance their tourist resources and improve their tourist image.

There are two important additional issues to be mentioned here. Sustainable tourism is a holistic approach: it seeks to build the wider aspects of society and the economy as well as tourism, supporting art, culture and conservation (Bramwell & Lane, 1993). Lanzarote's ACTC bring tourists together with those wider aspects. Furthermore, the growing interest in sustainable tourism marketing "demonstrates the breadth of approaches that can be utilised to understand how consumers can be influenced to make more sustainable choices that do not compromise their main motivations" (Font & McCabe, 2017, p. 879). The ACTC are a living example of one of those approaches.

A question not answered in this paper is to what extent the success of the ACTC programme in Lanzarote owes much credit to the figure of artist and architect César Manrique, as initial promoter of the idea of the ACTC and his impetus on sustainable tourism. Further research could look at the role of leading artistic figures, both locally and internationally, in generating the dynamics of culturally

recreating natural resources with the aim of sustainability and image enhancement. A working hypothesis in this direction would be to what extent the role of leading promoter can be substituted by the role of social capital and civic society in articulating the necessary innovation leading to the artistically recreation of natural resources.

A practical limitation of this study is that it considers only the environmental aspects of sustainability in the formation of the tourist image of a destination. Further research should explore the influence of sustainability from a broader setting by looking at other dimensions such as social and economic issues. In addition, there is a need to further investigate the contribution that artistically re-created natural assets can make to the tourists' satisfaction and visiting intentions. More evidence would be welcome regarding the relationships between creative activities and the image of successful destinations. In this regard, the role of well-known personalities is a question that should be also further investigated.

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