Antonio Fernández-Morales
María Cruz Mayorga-Toledano
University of Málaga

Patterns of Growth and Legal Framework of Rural Tourism in ANDALUCÍA

Rural tourism is an emergent sector in Andalucía. It showed an impressive growth in the last five years, which is expected to continue in the medium run. The territorial supply dynamics that we analyzed, by means of transition matrices, confirms this fact. But, to avoid the current problems and damages observed in the mature coastal segment, provoked by a massive growth during four decades, an appropriate legislation and a balanced approach to planning are essential to protect the natural and social environment. We carried out a succinct critical analysis of the legal and planning framework, emphasizing their main drawbacks.

Key words: Rural tourism, supply dynamics, legal regulation, Spain

Dr. Antonio Fernández-Morales

Profesor Titular de Universidad

Department of Applied Economics of the University of Málaga (Spain)

Faculty of Economics and the School of Tourism of the Malaga University

Campus El Ejido 29071 Málaga (SPAIN)

Tel: +34 952137189, Fax: +34 952131294

afdez@uma.es

Dr. María Cruz Mayorga-Toledano

Department of Private Law of the University of Málaga (Spain)

Faculty of Economics and the School of Tourism of the Malaga Universit

Campus El Ejido 29071 Málaga (SPAIN)

Tel: +34 952131192, Fax: +34 952131294

mcmayorga@uma.es

Biography

Dr. Antonio Fernández-Morales is *Profesor Titular de Universidad* at the Department of Applied Economics of the University of Málaga (Spain) and teaches at the Faculty of Economics and the School of Tourism of the Malaga University, since 1988. His main

research interests are related to rural tourism and seasonality in tourism. He has published several scientific articles and two text books in Spanish about statistical techniques for tourism analysis.

Dr. María Cruz Mayorga-Toledano is *Profesor Colaborador* at the Department of Private Law of the University of Málaga (Spain) and teaches at the Faculty of Economics and the School of Tourism of the Malaga University, since 1994. Her research interests involve the legal regulation of tourism, especially the rural segment. She has participated in several research projects about the legal regulation of tourism firms in Andalucía, and published various articles related to the Spanish legal regulation of tourism.

INTRODUCTION

It is widely recognized that rural tourism offers an opportunity for income generation and job creation in the countryside as an alternative or a complement to the diminishing role of agriculture and forestry. This fact, combined with the increasing tourism demand, has encouraged many European central and regional governments, including Spain and the region of Andalucía, to invest in rural tourism development and promotion.

Andalucía is the most southern region of Spain (Figure 1), and the second largest one of the country. Its topography is marked by the depression of the Guadalquivir Valley, a fertile agricultural area, which runs between two mountainous areas. One third of the territory is found at an altitude above 600 metres, with 46 peaks higher than 1,000 metres, including the peninsular Spain's highest summit, Mulhacén Peak (3,485 m). The diversity of the landscapes, the warm, Mediterranean climate with hot, dry summers and mild winters with irregular rainfall, and the great number of hours of sunlight, are the causes of its position as the main national holiday destination for Spanish nationals and one of the principal destinations for overseas tourists.

Figure 1. Map of Andalucía

Andalucía was traditionally an agricultural region, but in the sixties a notable tourism 'boom' began in its coast, almost 900 km long. At present, it receives 7 millions of tourists yearly. Now, the regional government is actively involved in promoting and developing rural tourism, in order to find new ways of revitalizing the rural areas, and to spread the benefits of tourism along the whole territory of the region.

However, uncontrolled rural tourism development may produce adverse environmental and social impacts that constitute a serious threat for the countryside, as it has been pointed out, among others, by Yagüe Perales (2002), Cánoves, *et al.* (2004) or Albaladejo Pina and Díaz Delfa (2005).

RECENT TRENDS OF RURAL TOURISM SUPPLY IN ANDALUCÍA

A considerable growth of rural tourism in Andalucía is observed only recently. The number of *establecimientos turísticos rurales* (registered rural accommodation establishments) in this region increased from 316 in 2000 to 936 in 2005, with a growth of 251% in their lodging capacity, measured by the number of *plazas de alojamiento en establecimientos turísticos rurales* (bed-places in registered rural accommodation establishments). The demand also experienced impressive annual rates of growth, always over 15% since 2000.

To get a deeper insight into this phenomenon, within the framework of a broader study, we applied the methodology of the transition matrices to analyze the dynamics of the rural tourism supply in the period 2000-2005, using the municipality, or town, as the spatial unit of analysis. We classified the municipalities by their population size into four groups: less than 1000, 1001-5000, 5001-20000, and more than 5000; and estimated a transition matrix for each group with the available yearly data of the period 2000-2005 (table 1).

A transition matrix provides a succinct way of describing the dynamics of a system, based on a Markov transition probability model. All the elements of the system are classified into a discrete set of states, being the transition matrix a square matrix of probabilities showing the likelihood of an element staying unchanged or moving to any of the other states over a given time horizon. Each element of the matrix, p_{ij}, shows the probability of an element in state i in period t changing to state j in t+1. Thus, in each row are the probabilities of moving from the state represented by that row to any of the states represented in columns in one period.

In our case, the elements are the 768 municipalities of Andalucía, classified annually into one of five states that describe their level of available capacity in registered rural accommodation establishments, I: 0 *plazas* (bed-places); II: 1 to 8; III: 9 to 12; IV: 13 to 20; and V: more than 20. The limits of states II to V correspond to the quartiles of the variable in 2000 in the municipalities with rural accommodation supply. We estimated the probabilities p_{ij} by means of the maximum likelihood estimator when the individual transitions are known: the sample proportion of municipalities that started in state i in any observed year and ended in state j the following year, as a proportion of all municipalities that started in state i in any observed year.

Table 1: Estimated transition matrices of the variable rural accommodation capacity of the municipalities of Andalucía by population size

	Less than 1000 inhabitants						1001 to 5000 inhabitants				
	State in t+1						State in t+1				
State in t	I	II	III	IV	V	State in t	I	II	III	IV	V
I	**0.967**	0.009	0.016	0.005	0.003	I	**0.943**	0.017	0.015	0.018	0.007
II	0.038	**0.886**	0.025	0.038	0.013	II	0.045	**0.847**	0.045	0.018	0.045
III	0.000	0.000	**0.875**	0.063	0.063	III	0.034	0.011	**0.828**	0.080	0.046
IV	0.000	0.000	0.056	**0.861**	0.083	IV	0.024	0.012	0.048	**0.690**	0.226
V	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.026	**0.974**	V	0.008	0.008	0.000	0.032	**0.952**

	5001 to 20000 inhabitants						More than 2000 inhabitants				
	State in t+1						State in t+1				
State in t	I	II	III	IV	V	State in t	I	II	III	IV	V
I	**0.949**	0.019	0.016	0.013	0.004	I	**0.935**	0.014	0.032	0.009	0.009
II	0.054	**0.784**	0.081	0.081	0.000	II	0.000	**0.667**	0.000	0.222	0.111

III	0.064	0.021	**0.787**	0.043	0.085	III	0.031	0.000	**0.875**	0.031	0.063
IV	0.025	0.025	0.025	**0.675**	0.250	IV	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.714**	0.286
V	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.024	**0.976**	V	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.029	**0.971**

Note: States I to V represent the five levels of available rural tourism accommodation capacity according to the number of *plazas* (bed-places) in *establecimientos turísticos rurales* (registered rural accommodation establishments) in every municipality.
 I: (0), II: (1 to 8), III: (9 to 12), IV: (13 to 20), V: (more than 20).

The results indicate that, in general, there is a probability of about 5% of entering in the sector of rural tourism in a year (this rate rises to 22% considering a period of five years). On the other hand, once in the sector, the dynamics of the variable is accelerated, as the probabilities of changing to a higher state (those at the right of the main diagonal) are higher. Distinguishing by population size, the most interesting feature is that the lowest mobility is observed in the municipalities with less than 1000 inhabitants. This is also the group with the smallest growth rate in the 2000-2005 period, 139%, and their share in this market decreased from 15.7% in 2000 to 13.6% in 2005. In contrast, the municipalities with more than 20000 inhabitants, that are hardly considered rural, and offer only 12.3% of the supply, have experienced the highest rate of growth, 416% in five years. These findings raise the question of how effective and focused are the recent policies of rural tourism development, even when their objectives include the social and economic revitalization of the less developed areas (which generally include the smallest municipalities) and decelerating the observed depopulation trends in the rural inland.

TOURISM PLANNIG AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Given that, since 1978, regional governments in Spain have extensive legislative powers, including legislating about tourism, tourism planning is based mainly on a regional scale, Ivars Baidal (2004). However, there was not a tourism law in Andalucía until 1999, which was followed by several Acts and regional tourism plans, some of them specific for rural tourism (*Plan Senda, 2002, Decreto 20/2002*).

The municipalities also play an important role in the development of rural tourism, due to their capacity to regulate the land-use by means of town-planning. It is often difficult to reconcile the rationality of town-planning with an unstoppable process of urbanization and tourism development, due to the perception of this process as a source of wealth and prosperity, already seen in the neighbour coastal areas.

After a detailed analysis of the current legal framework of rural tourism in Andalucía, we can summarize its main critical aspects from a sustainability point of view in the following three points:

The very few legal restrictions to an unlimited growth are clearly insufficient to prevent the risk of an uncontrolled expansion of this sector (for example, there is a legal maximum number of beds in a rural accommodation establishment, but not a maximum number of accommodation establishments by geographical areas like municipalities or *comarcas* (small groups of neighbour municipalities which are sometimes used in tourism planning processes).

The rural label is not always in correspondence with an authentic rural product (for example, any hotel located in a municipality with less than 20,000 inhabitants can be legally classified as a rural hotel, regardless of its characteristics).

The main emphasis in the current legislation is placed on the regulation of the accommodation aspects, and there are many other areas that need a clear and respectful regulation, like environmental, educational, or promotional ones.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Rural tourism is an emergent sector in Andalucía with a spectacular growth in the last five years that is expected to continue in the medium run. The territorial supply dynamics that we analyzed confirms this fact. But, taking into account the observed irreversible

environmental damages and current profitability problems in the beach segment in this region, an appropriate legislation and a balanced approach to planning are essential in order to ensure that the natural and social environment in rural areas is protected. In this line we propose (i) some legal limits or restrictions to the total number of accommodation establishments or their available capacity by small geographical areas like municipalities or *comarcas* (small groups of neighbour municipalities), (ii) a clear and respectful legal regulation of the environmental and educational aspects of rural tourism, and (iii) the creation of permanent institutions dedicated to the coordination in rural tourism matters between the regional and local administrations and with the other sixteen regional governments.

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