



CULTURE AND TOURISM

Executive Summary



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Executive Summary

This study, oriented towards the analysis of the relationship between culture and tourism, combines an empirical look by means of statistical data with a reflection on the concept of cultural tourism itself, as well as on the strategies and challenges that exist around the bidirectional relationship between tourism and culture. The study is structured in three blocks: the first one contextualises the situation of tourism in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country; the second one analyses the keys to cultural and creative tourism; and the third one focuses its analysis on the strategies and challenges currently faced by the sector.

Tourism is one of the main sectors of economic activity in Spain and the Basque Country, where it contributed 6.4% of GDP (in 2019) and accounted for 11% of total Social Security affiliations. Among the defining features of the Basque tourism model, the following stand out:

<p>Tourism is a key sector of economic activity that has recovered following the pandemic.</p>	<p>Tourists visit the Basque Country mainly for leisure (89% of the total in 2022). There is a certain balance between domestic and international tourism. The average age is 47 years old and most tourists travel as a couple.</p>	<p>There is a diversity of tourist typologies attracted by a rich and varied offer capable of satisfying different motivations.</p>
<p>Regarding activities, these include walking through towns, visits to historic town centres, visits to beaches, heritage sites, museums and urban parks.</p>	<p>Gastronomy is one of the main differentiating factors.</p>	<p>Cities play a clear central role. In 96% of cases, the experience was rated positively.</p>

As a key sector for economic development, many strategies have been developed in relation to tourism, including an analysis of the potential role to be assumed by culture. In this regard, the fact stands out that **culture has a significant role to play in the construction of an ethical and intelligent tourism model**. This is often not reflected in the specific strategies of tourism promotion and planning. The analysis shows the potential of culture along several lines:

1. Culture enriches the tourism offer by providing uniqueness and has the potential to personalise it, focusing on meaningful and unique experiences.
2. Culture has the potential to contribute to the improvement of the relationship between tourism and the local community, enhancing mutual feedback relationships.
3. The existing link between culture and sustainability means that tourism development contributes to the transformation of the tourism model towards an economically, environmentally and socio-culturally sustainable model.
4. Culture improves the competitiveness of the tourism sector, helping to generate a diversified and deseasonalised offer.
5. Culture contributes to a better distribution of tourism throughout the territory.

From this first analysis in the report, it is clear that the relationship between tourism and culture is complex and wide-ranging. This is why defining cultural and creative tourism is important in order to move forward with the reflections.

The World Tourism Organization 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 and products in a tourism destination.

Greg Richards and Crispin Raymond (2000) were the first to define **creative tourism** as tourism that "offers visitors the opportunity to develop their creative potential through active participation in courses and learning experiences, which are characteristic of the holiday destination where they are taken." In this regard, it is a form of tourism that is more focused on the search for unique experiences in which the tourist actively participates in creative experiences related to the destination.

The relationship between tourism and culture strengthens both sectors from the point of view of demand (both visitors and citizens) and supply (business opportunities).

The evolution and changes being observed in the tourism sector are related to changes in **demand** for services and experiences. The pandemic and the evolution of new technologies are two of the contextual factors that have contributed most to accelerating these changes.

Nowadays, tourists demand complete, unique and increasingly sustainable experiences that allow them to make personalised and tailor-made trips. In this new context, the cultural sphere has much to contribute by offering experiences that respond to these new requirements. Some of the main trends in current tourism demand include:

The search for unique experiences. Cultural and creative tourism is closely related to the search for personification and uniqueness. Local experiences are becoming new tourism trends.

Connection with the environment. One of the trends observed is the search for destinations that are different from the big tourist centres and for unique products that allow visitors to connect with places' authenticity.

Distancing from mass tourism. This responds to travellers' desire to connect more deeply with destinations. Modalities such as slow travel seek to connect with what is most natural, close and spontaneous.

Urban vs rural tourism. There are two distinct trends among tourist destinations: the rise of urban tourism and the demand for rural tourism as an alternative to more conventional tourism.

Flexibility. The requirement for flexibility is one of the demand trends that has been most directly influenced by the COVID pandemic.

Sustainability. Sustainability is demanded by both tourists and local communities who see tourism as a tool for the preservation of heritage and the surrounding environment.

The **tourism offer** is organised on the basis of the requirements of demand and the needs of the sector and it adapts rapidly to changes influencing the tourism industry. Changes in demand have led to a boom in tourism products closely related to culture and creativity, such as cultural routes or itineraries or *painting holidays*. In addition, there is a proliferation of the organisation and creation of networks of agents and destinations that come together to offer themselves in a specific niche of interest (such as networks of creative cities or gastronomic or historic hotels).

In relation to the tourism offer, the urgency of transforming the sector by means of global sustainable development criteria means that a decentralised and deseasonalised offer is being promoted in order to respond to the challenges imposed by mass tourism. As has already been noted, culture, as well as being an attraction, is a key axis that differentiates the destination and contributes to achieving the objectives of **decentralisation, differentiation, uniqueness and deseasonalisation** that are so important for the sustainability of the tourism sector.

In addition to the economic, social and cultural development opportunities generated by the tourism sector, there are also big **challenges** to be faced. Contextually, the arrival of the pandemic highlighted the dependence of some world economies on the sector, and provided an opportunity to reflect on the need for new approaches and change. The main challenges facing the sector include:

- **The control of overcrowding**, which is detrimental to the quality of life of residents and to the vitality, character and culture of the territory.
- **The imbalance between economic and social impacts**, the control of which should make it possible to reduce the negative externalities arising from tourism activity and improve social determinants.
- **Compensatory measures for seasonality**, which leads to a concentration of tourist demand at certain times of the year and has negative effects linked to changes in income, job insecurity, environmental deterioration, etc.
- **The recognition of value of contemporary heritage**, which represents opportunities to be explored for both tourism and culture.
- **The construction of a narrative**, which contributes to a definition of the country and the community, and which manages to become pervasive and be transferred to the more specific tourism strategies and products.

The challenges currently faced by the tourism sector must give way to **strategies** to overcome them. To this end, the report concludes by examining four key strategic areas for the development of the tourism sector that interact positively with the cultural and creative sector and can respond to current challenges, among which sustainability stands out.

Inclusion of the entire cultural and creative sector

Extending cultural tourism strategies towards the cultural and creative industries makes it possible to respond to new needs and demands arising in the sector, promote and strengthen the attraction and differentiation of the destination, increase the tourist offer in the area, strengthen synergies between the cultural and tourism sectors, boost the economy, facilitate coexistence with the local community, encourage respect for cultural diversity, etc.

Promotion of tourism diversification

These strategies imply going against monoculture, enhancing the existing offer beyond the obvious cultural attractions. They permit action against tourist overcrowding and to protect existing heritage from the degradation to which it is exposed by mass tourism and, in addition, to promote other attractions in the area.

Promotion of cultural diversity

In order for tourism promotion strategies to be sustainable, they must be aimed at improving the quality of life of the populations involved and preserving the values of the destination, respecting cultural diversity as a source of richness.

Generation of good relations between the local community and visitors

The adoption of policies and strategies that comprehend tourists as temporary citizens of the city and that facilitate coexistence between residents and travellers is important to foster positive public opinion towards tourism, allowing for co-development in a city.

The common thread that runs through the challenges and strategic lines presented is undoubtedly **sustainability**, which deserves special attention. According to the UNWTO, **sustainable tourism** is tourism that “takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.” Ensuring the sustainability of the tourism sector involves achieving a balance between the environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, which mainly involves:

1. Making good use of environmental resources, which are a key element for the development of the sector.
2. Respecting the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, contributing to the preservation of tangible and intangible heritage and fostering intercultural tolerance and respect for diversity.
3. Ensuring that economic activities bring socio-economic benefits that are well distributed among all stakeholders, including those directly involved in the tourism sector and the local community in general.

By way of summary, some elements are highlighted that can contribute to broadening the outlook of the link between culture and tourism.

The Basque Country’s own culture provides an **identity** with great cultural and tourism value.

The Basque Country has a wide variety of **cultural assets** for tourism development in a small territory, which facilitates the design of combined proposals.

The quality of services, accessibility, standard of living, vitality, cultural offer, the size of cities, etc., give the Basque Country a **comparative advantage**.

The cross-sectional **sustainability**-ethics-culture approach must be the axis of any countrywide strategy today.

