

THE IMPORTANCE OF ASSESSING THE AESTHETIC QUALITY OF THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

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ABSTRACT

A more in-depth look at what is generally termed environmental impact shows that, in many cases, what we are really talking about are not environmental impacts, but rather considerable changes in the aesthetic quality of the destination's cultural landscape. In this regard, the goal of our work is to help create a methodology that will enable us objectively to assess the changes which have taken place in the aesthetic quality of the cultural landscape to ensure proper management of the cultural landscape and thus prevent the destination entering into decline. In the absence of specific indicators for assessing the change in the aesthetic quality of tourism destinations, a first approach was to test in the context of a mature tourism destination operational landscape indicators of visual quality identified in the perspective of rural landscapes.

KEYWORDS

Aesthetic Quality, Cultural Landscape, Tourism Destinations.

1. INTRODUCTION

While the need for efforts to assess the aesthetic quality of the cultural landscape in general and in tourism destinations in particular has been acknowledged, there is still a significant lack of unanimity as to how such an assessment should be carried out, the main consequence of which is that the visual aspects of the landscape study are neglected. Yet such an omission carries implications for the way in which priorities related to the management and maintenance of the landscape are established, since aspects which are capable of being measured and reported are deemed significant, while difficult-to-measure aspects are simply omitted and, consequently, attributed less importance.

The goal of our work is to help identify operational landscape indicators of visual quality in mature tourism destinations as has been done in relation to rural landscapes. In this regard, five concepts - stewardship, coherence, disturbance, historicity and naturalness - identified in the perspective of rural landscapes as appropriate to measure the effects of landscape change on visual character and being

predictive of visual landscape preferences, were empirically tested in the context of a mature tourism destination.

2. METHODOLOGY

The changes induced by tourism development on the cultural landscape of the tourism destination and considered to adversely affect the competitive capacity of mature tourist destinations were identified from a wide review of the literature. Photographs were taken of the impacts that had been identified and were subsequently processed using the photographic software, Adobe Photoshop, to remove the visible effects of the impact of tourism development on the cultural landscape of the tourist destination.

Subsequently, the interviewees were asked to assess, on a 5-point Likert scale, the likelihood of their choosing a tourist destination with scenes like those in the pictures. The photographs showing the original landscape and the processed photographs were presented randomly for around 10 seconds.

3. MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS

The examination of the data received from 392 survey interviews at Faro International Airport in the months of August and September 2010 has allowed us to conclude that the concepts and indicators identified in the contexts of rural landscapes as being predictive of visual landscape preferences may not all be applicable in the contexts of mature tourism destinations. For instance, the concept of naturalness, which has been found to considerably enhance landscape preference, might not have exactly the same relevance in the context of a mature tourism destination. It was proven that the perception of the aesthetic quality of landscapes with a very strong human interference, like golf courses, is very similar to that of natural landscapes.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Despite some methodological flaws which ascertaining the aspects related to the aesthetic quality of the landscape may be subject to at this time, we are of the opinion that they cannot continue to be left, since knowledge of these factors can facilitate proper management of the landscape with a view to minimising the effects that tourism development has caused on the cultural landscape of the destination.

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