

Addressing competitiveness in European small scale rural destinations

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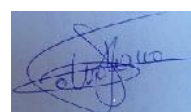
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ABSTRACT

Traditionally competitiveness has been understood as an amalgam of models which could be used at any destination level. Previous studies were claiming to quantify this complex concept; however destinations vary in terms of size, degree of dependence in tourism and current state of economic development, among others. Development of devitalized rural destinations, seem to be a challenge and redeployment of resources toward activities that offer long term, economic, social and environmental benefits while boosting competitiveness, rules the tourism agenda. The current competitiveness models lack coverage for small scale destinations and more pro-active responses are needed in order to lay the groundwork for more sustainable development. Through a critical analysis of existing theory and a qualitative study of the main agents within a small scale rural destination, the dimensions and factors that must be managed in destinations that are in the initial tourism development stage will be determined. An instrument to guide the management of small scale destinations for the achievement of competitiveness will be designed as a key factor for sustainable development of these types of destinations.

The purpose of this study is three-fold. While providing a wider understanding of the meaning of competitiveness at small scale rural destinations, a deeper analysis of what variables critically determine competitiveness within a small scale rural destination in its first stage of development will be posed. Finally, a wish to define a model which simplifies the previous studies and could serve for future small scale destination managers to design strategic and adequate policies and planning decisions in order to sustainable develop its destinations. The assumption that sustainable tourism is a tool for diversifying and revitalize rural small scale territories is taken along this research, thus the fact that for managing a destination in a sustainable manner, it is essential to be competitive, and vice versa.

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1. Introduction

Chapter one is intended to provide a background to the area of research. First, an approach to the tourism competitiveness concept will be provided, including its relation with small scale rural destinations. Moreover, the problem discussion and research questions will be presented. Finally, demarcations and the outline of thesis will be put forth.

1.1 Background of the study

The impact from the international financial crisis, plus the long series of disruptive events during the last years since 2011 has changed the tourism market rapidly. Nations are currently forced to cut expenditure, and at the same time remain well positioned in the world ranking destination list. Travel and tourism is a critical sector in many countries, which impacts national prosperity and the ability to move up the value chain. The uncertain world economic outlook remains extremely challenging for destinations.

As Jennifer Blanke points out, the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report for 2011 has resulted in big shifts among destinations. Small outbound markets grew much faster than large ones, and large emerging markets (e.g. Brazil, South Africa and India) have emerged onto the world stage. Competition among destinations has been intensified as the number of destinations have increased, as a result of globalization (Gomezelj Omerzel, 2006).

Destinations and tourism management organizations are led to reassess their products, their customers, their markets, and their tools for sustainable development. It has prompted them to search out new management ideas around the world and to implement them at home. It has driven them to hone their skills so as to serve to the most demanding customers worldwide. And it is the major force behind efforts to improve quality, and rethink the innovation process. In order to overcome this hurdle, destinations need to

create a new competitive framework to stimulate growth, as future growth will demand competitive models which are able to stimulate innovation, capacity building and investment, removing existing obstacles to travel. Tourism decisions must be driven by the premise of fostering opportunities for new business in emerging sectors (OECD, 2009). The new tourism supply side reflects new trends; more diversified products and new markets. Competitiveness, rules the tourism agenda, and seems to be the time for re-launching devitalized areas.

In recent times, the debate over competitiveness has come to the center of discussion with regards to destination management and positioning of destinations. But the meaning of being a “very competitive” destination is not clear yet. A commonly heard hypothesis linked to the concept of competitiveness is “Year-on-year there exist a significant growth in tourism arrivals, we remain competitive”. This is a very limited generalization, which leaves aside other dimensions of the competitiveness concept. Several models have been developed to analyze the factors that determine a more competitive tourism destination over another. Yet ever since it first surfaced in the early 1980s, it has been a driving rationale for nations’ prosperity policies with no clear definition or model for a tourism context (Porter, 1995; Ritchie & Crouch, 1993; Evans & Johnson, 1995; Hassan, 2000; Kozak, 2001; Dywer & Kim, 2003)

Furthermore, most of the emerging economies of the world are predominantly rural in characteristics and the global recession has affected rural places and people as well. The far ignored rural small scale destinations are nowadays an emerging segment, as main motivation to travel it is characterized by its mystique associated motivation to travel (Wilson, Fesenmaier, Fesenmaier, & C. van Es, 2001), In addition there exist a more demanding customer, in terms of travelling, who is demanding more sustainable practices (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2008). Thus tourism destinations strongly need to adapt fast to the new world wide economic crisis. The new

tourism trends, the context in which they takes part, and the need of taking decisions towards a sustainable development, open the possibility to think about the development of rural small scale destinations through sustainable tools such as ecotourism.

It is well known that rural tourism represents an economic development strategy (Wilson, Fesenmaier, Fesenmaier, & C. van Es, 2001), but no clear definition has yet arisen about what could be considered as a rural small scale tourism destination. Some researchers acknowledge that it is alternative to mass market tourism, it is a sustainable approach to economic development, it represents a meaning for a common planning strategy between public and private stakeholders, and it offers an important role for key groups at the community level, e.g. women and young people (Sillignakis, 2007).

Cosslett goes on, that at the village or town level, nature and culture-oriented tourism, permits small scale businesses to be successful tourism operators based on their own knowledge and experience, and with relatively low capital investment. Also (Hampton, 2009) argues in his paper that the key lessons are that small-scale coastal tourism, whilst not being a panacea for all circumstances, has great potential for real economic development that can benefit local host communities. The classical theoretical background supporting the concept of competitiveness, and its macroeconomics perspective, is scarcely applicable to small scale rural destinations, as it leaves aside the context in which a company operates, which is the environment of competitiveness. In addition, The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report (The World Economic Forum, 2015), since its first publication in 2007 lacks coverage for this type of destinations, as it does not take into account the destination's market size or other vulnerabilities inherent to small scale destinations (Craigwell, 2007).

In this regard, the Integrated Quality Management model works in theory but it is difficult to apply in practice as rural destinations have limited resources concerning time, finance or human resources with a high degree of specialization. As pointed out by M Go

& Govers (2000) destinations tend at the end to be strong in one element of the EFQM model¹, uncovering other important issues to approach quality management. Also the EDEN Network² provides more of a framework to establish networking between destinations than a fixed model to fulfill competitiveness.

This small scale rural context possess several weaknesses, such as deficient facilities and infrastructure, a not stable tourism demand which could stimulate private investment, a weak business sector with a strong lack on tourism experience, not much market agents interested in this considered “minority product” and a demand side integrated by domestic tourism which remains competitiveness at an international level.

These weaknesses are challenges that may require a new framework adapted to the new travelers’ profile, and at the same time to base its development on the basis of standards which assure its competitiveness.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The link between economic development of rural devitalized areas and social, economic and environmental sustainability of a destination raises the need of an integrated competitiveness model. Thus, lack of information regarding certain factors that determine competitiveness among rural destinations restricts action and know-how within the tourism development policies field, institutions and stakeholders. This challenge raises the need to promote and establish an integrated management of tourism activity within rural areas, ensuring local participation, private and public cooperation and public administration leadership while preserving natural environment.

Competitiveness could be applied to a wide range of economic entities, from a nation, to a specific product or service, thus competitiveness definition includes a macroeconomic and microeconomic sense. From a macroeconomic perspective,

¹ European Foundation for Quality Management Excellence Model is a non-prescriptive business excellence framework for organizational management systems

² European Excellence Destination Network (EDEN): is a platform for exchanging good practice in sustainable tourism on a European level and for promoting contact between award-winning destinations

competitiveness is a country's advantage or disadvantage measure when selling its products within international markets (OECD, 2009). In the other hand, from a microeconomic sense, competitiveness is conceived as a business focused phenomenon. Still, Porter diamond remains widely used for analyzing the resources and constraints that influence industry competitiveness, however there appear to be some criticism to its application at a destination level (Grant, 1991)

Either macro or micro approach given to the competitiveness concept, it is a broad enough and complex term to define, which implies the non existence of a generally accepted definition of competitiveness. Moreover, the macroeconomic concept of competitiveness is not applicable to emerging destinations which are at an early stage of maturity, due to a lack of data where indicators could be applied. Likewise, Dywer & Kim (2003) affirmed that any model or any empirical application is fully satisfactory for the measurement and identification of competitiveness determinants at small scale destination levels.

Accordingly, there is a need to create different types of indicators relevant to the different contexts in which a competitiveness model may be applied. It is of relevance to explore, and examine the advantages and limitations of competitiveness' models which follow a sustainable goal for tourism destinations (Hassan, 2000; Mihali 2000) There is also an intention to increase the interest of researchers in order to investigate how competitiveness models could be improved and adapted to different contexts and tourism dimensions, in order to implement neither industrial nor agricultural activities that allows development and income diversification in order to create a new rural context.

The 2nd European Conference on Rural Development in Salzburg in November 2003, has made submissions demanding a rural development policy for all territories which serve to strengthen the rural community, highlighting the importance of cooperation, partnership and a more simplified management system. Moreover, the

Salzburg declaration is committed to a more diverse and competitive rural context as the two first requirements for future rural development policies. Rural tourism has grown rapidly in the last twenty years as a tool for social and economic development at small scale destinations. Moreover environmental awareness has increased during the last years among travelers and local communities are asking for sustainable tourism policies. Added to the aforementioned trends there exist a wish to find solutions for seasonality and a major force for rural communities to stop migrations. Sustainable tourism practices appeal therefore to be the key challenge for small scale destinations.

From the difficulty to define competitiveness, comes the justification for portraying the research in greater depth, thus the significance of small scale rural tourism development nowadays, and the strong need to make some progress into the topic. There is therefore a need to add something more to the existent research done, without negation of the validity of it.

The concept of competitiveness will be adapted to small scale rural destinations as well as an attempt to apply the different competitiveness frameworks which sustain environmental sustainable goals in the following sections. Being the guiding principle of this research to avoid one of the major limitations and proposals for further research among the literature reviewed and adopting an holistic view of the topic.

1.3 Research Questions

The purpose of this study is three-fold. While providing a wider understanding of the meaning of competitiveness at small scale rural destinations, a deeper analysis of what variables critically determine competitiveness within a small scale rural destination in its first stage of development will be posed. Finally, a wish to define a model which simplifies the previous studies and could serve for future small scale destination managers to design strategic and adequate policies and planning decisions in order to sustainable develop its destinations.

The assumption that sustainable tourism is a tool for diversifying and revitalize rural small scale territories is taken along this research, thus the fact that for managing a destination in a sustainable manner, it is essential to be competitive, and vice versa. Central to this research is the need to critically answer the following research question:

How to define a competitiveness model for small scale rural destinations?

In order to discuss the outcome of the above research question respectively the answer to the question, the following sub-questions will be taken into consideration in the discussion and conclusion part:

- What is the gap between requirements of tourism and characteristics of small-scale rural destinations?
- Where does small scale rural tourism stands following the most challenging years in recent history and what are the short term prospects for the sector?
- Which are the variables that affect or influence small scale rural destinations that have not reach their maturity state to be competitive?

-

1.4 Course of Investigation

This paper will propose a competitiveness model for a small scale rural destination reviewing the existing and up to date literature while applying the results of an empirical research done within a small scale destination in its first stage of development in the South of Spain and known as *Valle de Alcudia y Sierra Madrona*³.

The contents of the thesis will be divided into six chapters. In the first chapter is an insight into what this thesis is about has been provided, as well as the purpose of the research and its significance. Chapter two provides an overview of the competitiveness and small scale rural destination conceptualization. An in-depth analysis of “competitiveness models” and delimitations of “small scale rural tourism” will be presented. A conceptualization of the research question will be exposed forth. Chapter three describes the methodology that has been used throughout this thesis. The collected data will be presented in chapter four and a data analysis of the findings will be presented within chapter five. Finally, in chapter six the findings and conclusions will be drawn including a critical review for future research.

2. Theoretical background

This chapter will contain a threshold overview of relevant concepts and an analysis of earlier studies connected to the problem area, and more specifically to the research questions which will be reviewed. The concept of competitiveness is explored and defined and the theoretical literature is synthesized to draw out the various elements surrounding competitiveness.

³ Valle de Alcudia y Sierra Madrona, will be appointed as “Alcudia valley and Madrona mountain range” to give the reader a better understanding of the whole research.

2.1 Nature and significance of the competitiveness concept

2.1.1 Competitiveness concept

Competitiveness definition has been approached from various perspectives throughout the history of economic thought, especially in the field of business organization and industrial economics, being from the 80's of last century, when there has been a further discussion between the different schools of strategic thinking. Thus, debate to date, it does not remain closed (Dywer & Kim, 2003).

In any case, the concept of competitiveness has its origin in the area of microeconomics and has been moving to the macro level. Decisive contributions to the concept of competitiveness have been made throughout the years: *Adam Smith* identified land, labor, capital and natural resources as factors of production and emphasized the importance of being the lowest-cost producer; *David Ricardo* developed the law of comparative advantage; *Marxist economists* emphasized the impact of the sociopolitical environment on economic development; *Max Weber* established the relationship between values, religious belief and economic performance of nations; *Joseph Schumpeter* emphasized the role of the entrepreneur; *Alfred Sloan* and *Peter Drucker* developed the concept of management as a key input factor for competitiveness; *Robert Solow* highlighted the importance of education, technological innovation and increased know-how; *Nicholas Negroponte* and other modern economists refined the concept of knowledge as an input factor. However, the diamond model developed by *Michael Porter* (1980) established an integrated framework adding all the previous theoretical formulations.

According to Porter's model (1980), the existence of comparative advantage is a major determinant for global competitiveness. Thus it considers four major factors that may facilitate or impede the competitive advantages of companies which operates in a given nation. Two additional external variables are considered within this model:

unforeseen events⁴ and government influences⁵. While this model is primarily designed to analyze the competitiveness of nations, it is also applicable to lower levels of regions, provinces, cities, etc..

The World Economic Forum has over the years, as stated in the (The World Economic Forum, 2015-2016) recognized the importance of understanding the factors influencing competitiveness and which enable economies to achieve sustained economic growth and long-term prosperity.

Defined as “*the ability of a country or company to, proportionally, generate more wealth than its competitors in world markets*” (Report, 2005) This definition implies that competitiveness refers to the combination of both assets and processes where assets are inherited (e.g. natural resources) or created (e.g. infrastructures) and transformed into economic results (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). Competitiveness can also be defined as “*the ability to retain the competitive position of an organization by satisfying the expectations of customers and shareholders while constantly eliminating the threats and exploiting the opportunities which arise in the competitive environment*” (Jennissen, 1994). Thus, competitiveness can only be sustained by the continuing improvement of the offerings and capabilities of an organization.

In order to gain a better understanding about competitiveness among destinations, we must first understand the basic nature of the concept of competition. Little is known about competitiveness in tourism (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Pike, 2004). The following section will discuss the theoretical and practical definitions of tourism destination competitiveness.

⁴ environmental disasters, terrorist attacks, political boycotts or embargoes, etc.

⁵ economic policies, legal restrictions, among others.

2.1.2 Destination competitiveness

The extant literature examined indicates that destination competitiveness is a major concern for destination management organizations and tourism practitioners. Tourism researchers, including Crouch & Ritchie (1999); Ritchie & Crouch (2003); Dywer & Kim, (2003); Enright & Newton (2004;2005); Crouch & Ritchie (2006); Lee & King (2009) have developed or extended similar frameworks to that of Porter and applied the framework to tourism. A number of other authors have made contributions to the discussion on destination competitiveness, seeking to provide an understanding or practical research in the field to name a few: Mihali (2000); Lee & King (2009) Mazanec, Wöber, & Zins (2007); Mangion, Durbarry Ramesh, & Sinclair (2005); Gomezelj & Mihali (2008); Croes & Rivera (2010).

Destination competitiveness is usually linked to the macroeconomic competitiveness concept, that is “destination’s ability to create and integrate value added products that sustain resources while maintaining market position relative to other competitors” (Hassan, 2000)⁶. In addition, d’Hautesserre (2000)⁷ defined it as “the ability of a destination to maintain its market position and share and/or improve upon them through time” or “its ability to deliver goods and services that perform better than other destinations on those experiences valued by most tourists” as Heath (2003) pointed out. So far, destination competitiveness seems to be related to the relative positioning of the destination within the tourism market.

However, researchers have proposed different definitions on destination competitiveness from various approaches. A competitive destination has often incorporated the concept of marketing planning and competitive development strategies Kozak (2001); Buhalis (2000); Heath & Wall (1992). Particularly, Bordas (1994) said that

⁶ pp 239

⁷ Pp 23

in a conceptual scheme of competitive marketing, once the strongest of the tourism resources (clusters) are identified, the most attractive markets/segments for each resource (cluster) are determined as to their functions in the mix of specific competitive forces.

Then, the competitive opportunities in each of the resources are decided. Similarly Buhalis (2000), holds that destination competitiveness should be achieved by using strategic marketing such as innovative tourism supply side techniques and a flexible stakeholder specialization. He defines destination competitiveness as an effort and achievement of long term profitability, emphasizing sustainability and equitable return. Thus, the success of integrated strategic marketing and management of destination attributes would lead to destination competitiveness.

Likewise, Ritchie & Crouch (2003) pointed out that destination competitiveness is the ability of a country to create value and thus increases national wealth by managing assets and processes, attractiveness, and proximity, and by integrating these relationship into an economic and social model. In addition these authors proposed a framework for the analysis of a destination's ability to compete, considering comparative advantages, competitive advantages, management activities, tourism and environment (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Dywer & Kim, 2003)

In general within the economics and business literature, competitive advantage tends to be stressed, while de-emphasizing comparative advantage as a source of competitiveness. When viewed in a tourism destination context, it is perceived that comparative advantage involves the resources available to a destination, whereas competitive advantage relates to a destination's ability to effectively utilize those resources.

Destination competitiveness is a general concept that encompasses price differentials coupled with exchange rate movements, productivity levels of various

components of the tourist industry, and qualitative factors affecting the attractiveness or otherwise of a destination (Dwyer, Forsyth, & Rao, 2000)

On the other hand, Mihali (2000) also stated that destination competitiveness can be enhanced by appropriate managerial efforts and environmental quality management. The concepts of environment refer to natural and manmade tourism components as well as social and cultural environments (Inskip, 1991). Particularly, Mihali concluded claiming that more appropriate management efforts, marketing activities, quality of services, and environmental management can help to create and integrate value in tourism products and resources so that tourism destinations can achieve better competitive market positions.

A few empirical studies have been related to testing and validating the proposed definitions and models within small scale destinations. Accordingly, as competition increases, understanding the driving forces that contribute to destination competitiveness has become a fundamental step in maintaining tourism destination's growth.

Despite the debate on the subject, the scientific community has not established a widely agreed definition of the destination competitiveness concept. Some researchers sustain that economic prosperity for local community is the key issue for tourism competitiveness, others that environmental marketing activities can also enhance destination competitiveness.

The most accepted and referenced researches are done by Ritchie and Crouch (2003). However, according to Asch and Wolfe (2001) cited in Ritchie and Crouch (2003), other dimensions related to tourism should be addressed, due to the uniqueness and complexity of the tourism field. Thus, having resolved that different destinations are affected by a recognised pattern of development, some tourism researchers (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Enright & Newton, 2004) argue that the factors that draw the competitiveness of a destination may vary from one to another destination, and therefore, a more tailored

approach of competitiveness should be developed in each case, rather than applying one single universal policy or strategy. Of particular interest is the relevance or importance of key competitiveness variables to destinations at different stages of development or evolution then.

Despite the variety of definitions, it has been crucial to this study to reference how the concept of competitiveness has been applied along time to tourism destinations and how it has been identified by well-known credited authors in the subject. Considering its economic growth implications and the complex process that involves, including social, political and environmental aspects, one may conclude that no theory has so far covered the whole competitiveness phenomenon. It therefore seems that the scientific community has not accepted a general consensus that embraces this reality.

(Ritchie & Crouch, 2003)⁸ proposed a definition of competitiveness in tourist destinations, which is the most accepted and referenced in the scientific literature and are cited below:

“In summary, what makes a tourism destination truly competitive is to increase tourism sustainability, to increasingly attract visitors while satisfying providing them with memorable experiences, and to do so in a profitable way, while well-being enhancing the destinations of the residents and preserving the destination for future generations”.

2.1.3 Competitiveness as a tourism policy development tool

Any form of development requires a comprehensive planning process in order to achieve the desired goal. Today, tourism is presented as a sector capable of promoting economic growth and the enrichment of the social, cultural and environmental dimensions. Even so, the choice of development through tourism and regulation is more complex than it may seem, as tourism is a multi-sector activity which involves several positive and negative impacts, and therefore requires effective sustainable policies over time. In that

⁸ pp 2

regard, territorial development is conceived as the unpredictable result of interactions between social, material and natural spaces in the economic, political and socio-cultural spheres (Kollmann, 2005). Through planning and development of tourism products, a destination can achieve economic prosperity, cultural identity, technological superiority, political stability, and enhancement of its competitive position in the market place. Mill & Morrison (2002) argued that, a lack of tourism planning can lead to negative consequences, especially environmental degradation. They stated the importance of destinations making the appropriate decisions to have better choices for their future development and to avoid undesirable changes to the environment and the community's socio-cultural values. Inskip (1991) differentiated between four planning levels: international, national, regional, and sub-regional, stressing that even small-scale tourism planning has to be accomplished in sequence and at various levels.

One of the ultimate goals of tourism planning and development is to create valuable products for the destination's visitors to experience, and for residents to enjoy a better quality of life as an outcome of tourism development.

As recommended by Centre for Strategy and Evaluation Services (2013), tourism policy is comprised of all the actions carried out under the coordination of public administrations with the objective of achieving previously defined aims in the processes of analysis, attraction, reception and evaluation of the impacts of tourism flows in a tourism system or destination.

According to conceptual frameworks (Dywer & Kim, 2003; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003) and empirical research (Enright & Newton, 2004; Lee & King, 2009) destination competitiveness is influenced by policy, amongst other factors. Whilst competitiveness remains a fundamental objective of tourism policy, tourism activity is often seen as an instrument for development with further social and environmental contributions.

2.1.4 Relation between competitiveness and sustainability

The Brundtland Report, by the World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987 provided the conceptual basis that shapes the current concept of sustainability. Not until five years later, a jointly agreement was taken by over a hundred of heads of state, NGOs and society representatives within the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in the same year. That decision would guarantee the implementation of standards, policies and operational measures within destinations, in order to establish common development rules: the so-called Agenda 21. Unfortunately, since the Brundtland report to present day, the term *sustainable development* has been widespread and adapted to the needs of politicians and used with an ominously ethical lack (Jacobs, 1996).

Nevertheless, there have been, since then, initiatives to reshape destination competitiveness towards sustainability. The WTO⁹ has released the "Global Code of Ethics"¹⁰ and is preparing a new edition of Agenda 21 with recommendations for companies and destinations; European Union is working on his "Agenda 21 in the tourism sector in Europe" and the Johannesburg Summit (2002) includes in its Action Plan basic guidelines aimed at encouraging the development of a more sustainable and responsible tourism, in order to be more competitive.

Since the popularization of sustainable development concept, at the same time the sustainable tourism concept was born. So far, a precise definition of sustainable tourism has not been defined yet, however drawing on the definition of the Brundtland Report sustainable development, WTO accurately defined it as follows:

"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"

⁹ World Travel and Tourism Organization hereinafter WTO

¹⁰ Accessible from: <http://ethics.unwto.org/en/content/global-code-ethics-tourism>

One may conclude that despite the ambiguity and the lack of a precise definition of sustainable tourism, it generally aims at balancing between economic growth, environmental preservation and social justice (Butler, 1980; Hall, 2000; Rebollo & Baidal, 2003).

According to Porter (1995) from a business strategy standpoint, destinations are considered as tourism products; therefore the same rules governing competitiveness in the market for other products could be applied (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). Thus, destination competitiveness will be linked to a destination's ability to maintain and enhance its own attributes which at the same time allows setting their competitive advantage, since this ability will determine the sustainability of destinations. Flagestad & Hope (2001) claimed that strategic success of a destination implies that the market performance of the destination is oriented towards creating a sustainable competitive advantage, which must be viewed through the wider dimension of connected efficiency variables such as social structure, community involvement, assets ownership, and stakeholder relations

Furthermore, authors as Hassan (2000) allude to long-term competitiveness throughout sustainable development strategies. In this sense, competitiveness is understood as destination's capacity to create and to integrate value added products that protects its resources, and at the same time maintain its competitive position among competitors. Thus, it is betting on the preservation and even enhancement of the heritage of the destination as a competitive strategy of it. In short, what (Yunis, 2003) calls "sustainable cycle tourism."

Advances in the understanding of tourism destinations competitiveness factors and the inclusion of sustainability as a performance indicator for competitiveness success, have formed different theoretical models that attempt to represent the system which reflects tourism and its interaction network. The following sections, further critically reviews those models in detail.

2.2 Tourism competitiveness models into the sustainable context

This section delves into the tourism destination competitiveness models underlying those listed within a sustainable development context. It presents the relation between competitiveness, sustainability, development and tourism and it reviews the main frameworks as an aim of this investigation.

2.1.5 Competitive structure of a tourism destination: competitiveness models

In an attempt to explain tourism competitiveness, various models have been developed which have gradually evolved and have been the target of criticism regarding their application and their results. The purpose of this section is to identify and conceptualize the main factors on each model, and to screen its strengths and limitations.

Focused on tourism destinations, Crouch & Ritchie (1999) introduced the competitive advantage theory, with reference to the factors that shape a destination, either those with a nature based and those factors deriving from human creativity. Meanwhile, Dywer & Kim (2003) provided new factors from a similar conceptual basis but an integrated framework. And so then, “local conditions” are outlined by “destination management” and “demand conditions” factors. Global destination competitiveness then is influenced in a positive or negative manner. In turn, a competitiveness that would be measured through indicators is defined.

2.1.6 The Ritchie & Crouch conceptual model

Brent Ritchie and Geoffrey Crouch have dealt extensively with the competitiveness concept and its application to tourism destinations in recent years. In a first approximation, in the early nineties, based on Porter's competitive theories, they have developed a model that provides a tool that would allow applying quantitative criteria to tourism policy decisions.

The Calgary model, offers a framework for destinations to compete more effectively. Ritchie & Crouch (1993) provided a more specific and influenced model by the social environment, noting that "the competitiveness of a destination" is the ability of a target to provide a high living standard for the locals at a given destination. In addition Ritchie & Crouch (2003), stated that destination competitiveness is linked to the ability of a destination to meet visitors' needs on various aspects of the tourist experience. From both definitions it can be said that tourism destination competitiveness must meet locals needs improving their quality of life, while meeting visitor expectations. Both factors, should include the accomplishment of sustainable development and positive economic impact.

A competitive tourism destination according to (Crouch & Ritchie, 2006) should help to increase the welfare state of the local population and must be understood as a long term achievement. Furthermore, destination competitiveness involves the consideration of two elements (Crouch & Ritchie, 2006) the comparative advantage (endogenous resources)¹¹ and the competitive advantage (resources deployed)¹². In this sense, the World Tourism Organization clarifies that the destination must be based on its competitive advantages. While acknowledging that some comparative advantages can be used strategically and become competitive advantages.

This initial model had two main problems when trying its practical application into small scale destinations. Firstly the different nature of the variables and, secondly, the large number of independent variables that must be operational to be able to quantify. The conceptual model of (Crouch & Ritchie, 2006) is not a model "predictive or causal," but only explanatory.

¹¹ Human resources, physical resources, knowledge resources, available capital resources, heritage resources and economy's size are considered Endogenous Resources for Crouch

¹² ability to use these resources effectively in the long term (inventory system, monitoring tools, efficiency and effectiveness).

Furthermore, in a later version (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003) believed that the tourism system is constantly influenced by pressures that arise out of the system itself.

They have identified those pressures as macro-economic factors (e.g. technological, environmental, political, legal, sociocultural and demographic facts). On the other hand, micro competitive environment was included as the key component to define the competitive setting, in which a destination must be adapted to be able to compete: local residents, financial institutions, tourism companies and tourists. Moreover they contemplated the existence of a policy planning and destination development, as well as limiting factors and amplifiers that influence competitiveness. The elements of this model are listed in the following figure:

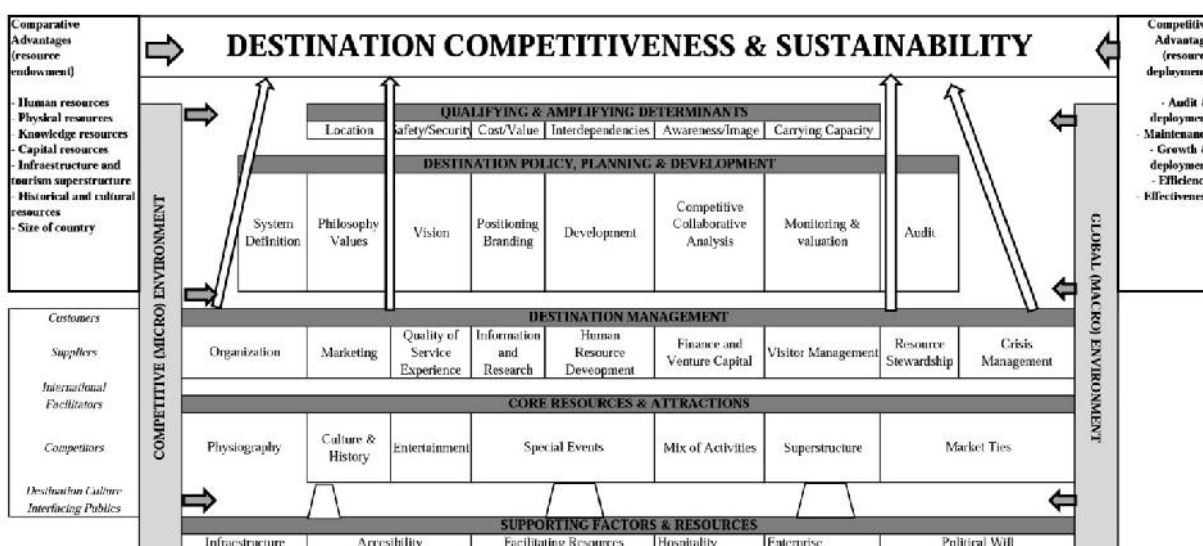


Figure 1. Destination Competitiveness & Sustainability Model. Ritchie & Crouch (2003)

The model analyzes the factors contributing to destination competitiveness and sustainability. The dimensions in which competitiveness is achieved are: quality and amplifying determinants, destination policy, planning and development, destination management, core resources and attractions and supporting factors and resources. Comparative advantage is and competitive advantage influence the whole destination competitiveness and sustainability model. The arrows shows the process, while some factors explain the competitive position of a destination and others are more related to the

potential of the destination. This model would need to be complemented with quantitative indicators to facilitate its application to any destination and allow to create an indicator ranking list. (Papp, 2011).

Although the above described model is one of the most famous and important contributions to the study of competitiveness in tourism destinations, it is worth noting that some authors identified several weaknesses of this model (Crouch & Ritchie, 2006).

First, is a descriptive and conceptual model. In practice many destinations do not have databases and indicators to assess all factors presented in the model. That is indeed the case of small scale rural destinations. In addition, it would be necessary to establish an order and consider the weight of each of these elements, in order to rank the importance of each factor (Garau Taberner, 2006).

The authors eventually developed an index which contains two hundred seventy indicators for each of the elements of the different sectors of the model¹³, contrasting two different but complementary perspectives: objective measures of the industry and subjective measures of consumers, the latter based on their perception of the destination.

2.1.7 The Dwyer & Kim integrated model

Drawing on the Crouch and Ritchie competitiveness and sustainability model, another Dwyer and Kim (2003) proposed a different model to size and manage competitiveness in tourism. The so called "Integrated Model", whose main difference when compared with the Crouch and Ritchie model, lies in recognizing demand conditions as an important determinant for tourism destination competitiveness. It also raises competitiveness is not the ultimate aim of political action, but rather an intermediate target to another more important objective: economic welfare of the population on a regional or national level.

¹³ (attractors and major resources, determining amplifiers and qualifiers; factors supporting industry, tourism policy, planning and development, destination management)

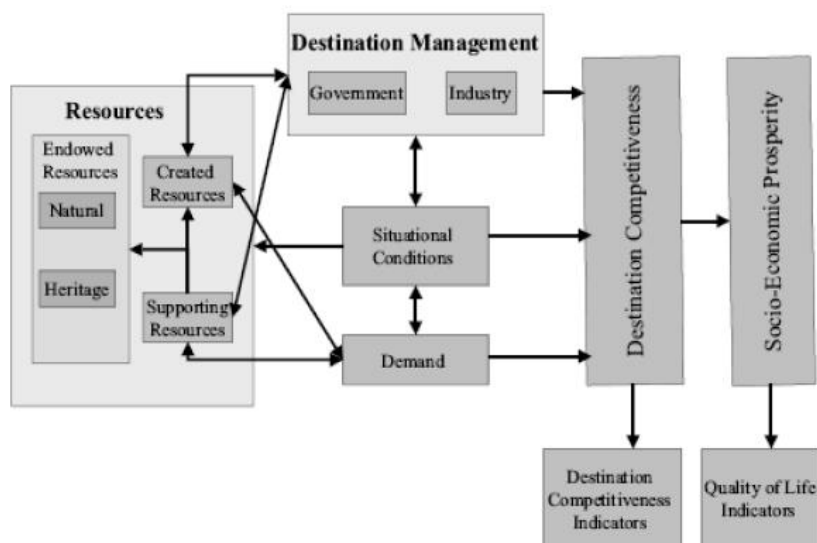


Figure 2. The Dywer & Kim Integrated Model (2003)

Resources are divided into inherent and created resources. As destination competitiveness for Dwyer and Kim vests on the overall value of its resources, main and complementary resources are located within the same box. In fact, they considered that resources are the providers of the main characteristics of the destination, reason for tourists to make their destination choice. Local conditions are external forces that impact on the destination. Which corresponds to the rating determinants identified in Crouch & Ritchie (1999) model. Unlike the previous presented model, public and private destination management involvement is distinguished within Dwyer and Kim model.

Demand conditions refer to three essential elements: tourism awareness, perception and preferences of the tourism demand. For the authors, demand factors are particularly important in determining destination competitiveness. The reason is that a destination could be competitive for a group of visitors but not for another, depending on the travel motivations of each group. On the other hand, the model indicates causalities, the specific resources' characteristics and complementary factors influencing the demand side, while the nature of demand conditions, specifically travel preferences and motivations influence the type of product and service provided by destinations. Dwyer, Forsyth, & Rao (2000) argued in their model that "heritage resources", "resources created"

and "support resources", constitute the main determinants of success of the destination and the basis of tourism competitiveness.

Thus the Integrated Model is composed by the environmental conditions, destination management and demand factors. Their interaction is leading to achieve the competitiveness of tourism destinations, whose ultimate goal is to improve living standards and welfare of residents (Dwyer & Kim, 2003).

This model was applied to analyze the competitiveness of Korea and Australia. Importantly is to mention, that the authors created a series of indicators to measure its competitiveness, while recognizing that they are not the only ones that could have formed the basis for the survey (Dwyer & Kim, 2003)¹⁴. Moreover, according to (Dwyer & Kim, 2003)¹⁵ would be interesting to weigh the indicators according to their degree of importance for tourism in Korea and Australia. However, such action would be complicated, as it would require a very close breakdown of visitors' motivations to travel to each destination and the continuous monitoring of preferences' changes.

The main limitation of this model is problematic in its practical application, since *"collecting through surveys or indicators which reflect the situation in each destination in each of the elements would be of great use, but would be costly and sometimes impossible due to the lack of comparable data between destinations "* (Garau Taberner, 2006)¹⁶

So far the models presented, stress the importance of competitive advantage rather than comparative advantage, although some comparative advantages might turn into competitive advantages. Hence this new paradigm focuses on the profitability of long-term destinations, breaking thus the idea of maximizing short term profits, which ignores the negative impacts that tourism can have on the destinations and therefore would jeopardize their sustainability.

¹⁴ p. 46

¹⁵ p. 64

¹⁶ pp. 4

The World Travel and Tourism Council in collaboration with Christel DeHaan Institute Travel Research at the University of Nottingham, have developed the "Competitiveness Monitor"¹⁷ for tourism in order to develop benchmarks across countries (Gooroochurn & Sugiyarto, 2005)¹⁸. The Competitiveness Model was created to assess the degree of competitiveness of more than two hundred countries, and sixty five tourism competitiveness indicators were implemented and summarized into eight major groups showing the level of performance of each country relative to other countries.

The methodology could be summarized in two stages. First, twenty-three indicators are normalized according to the technique adopted by the United Nations. Then "an aggregate index is calculated for each of the eight groups, which is obtained as an arithmetic mean of the standardized indices" (Bravo Cambria, 2004). Subsequently, Gooroochurn and Sugiyarto (2005) based on the methodology of the Competitiveness Model, developed "a synthetic indicator of competitiveness, obtaining a weighted average of each of the eight composite indicators, where weights are obtained using factor analysis techniques" (Bravo Cambria, 2004).

Moreover, for Gooroochurn and Sugiyarto (2005) concluded that destination competitiveness is not affected by the same factors in the same grade at any destination. The weights, from zero to one, granted to each of the eight indicators are: Technology (0,220), Social indicator (0.217), HR (0.153), Price (0.147), Openness (0.126), Infrastructure (0.101), Human Factor (0.033) and Environment (0,003) (Gooroochurn & Sugiyarto, 2005)¹⁹.

After calculating the competitiveness index, a ranking is done in order to rank the degree of tourism competitiveness of each country (Garau Taberner, 2006)²⁰The

¹⁷ Competitiveness Monitor, CM in the following.

¹⁸ pp. 27

¹⁹ pp. 34

²⁰ pp. 3

contribution of Gooroochurn and Sugiyarto (2005), attempts to overcome the absence of data and allows to compare the competitiveness of different countries (Garau Taberner, 2006)²¹. However, as mentioned by Garau Taberner (2006) the main drawback of this study is seen in the results. Any of the countries considered as the most competitive destinations were mentioned within world's top tourist destination ranking (according to millions of tourist arrivals). Additionally, the weight given to the indicators may be questionable. For example, the social and technology indicators have the most weight, while, human tourism and environment indicators have the lowest. The environmental indicator is of particular importance to tourism, especially when the growth of nature-based tourism is the main attraction in a destination, as emphasized by Ritchie, Crouch and Mihali , among other authors.

The indicators presented at the Competitiveness Model mention the social, human, economic and environmental aspects. However, the corporate structure of tourist destinations is not considered, so that deviates from the structural approach that considers the company as an essential part of destination competitiveness (Flores Ruiz & Barroso González, 2009).

Navickas & Malakauskaite (2009), from the Competitiveness Monitor above, modified some of the indicators used in this model for evaluating the competitiveness of tourist destinations and included additional indicators in order to reflect an updated and more contemporary tourist profile. For example, the price competitiveness indicator has been supplemented by the authors with the price indicator restaurants and the prices of tourism goods and services (e.g., souvenirs). In terms of infrastructure development indicators, the authors propose to improve the competitiveness of tourism destinations by adding more indicators related to transport: rail network, system quality telecommunications and airlines. With respect to the human dimension of the tourism

²¹ pp. 3

sector they pointed out the population indicator. Finally, in terms of social development indicators, the authors replace the indicator "personal computers" for "number of Internet cafes" for example. Their study demonstrated theory building on the use of destination competitiveness beyond merely defining, aggregating and indexing it.

From this perspective, a comparison between the conceptual frameworks, Competitiveness Model and Goorouch and Sugiyarto contribution and other empirical studies appear to be adequate for the aim of this research, as will more accurately elucidate the key variables that would shape small scale destination competitiveness model.

2.1.8 A review on other empirical studies

The work of Kozak & Rimmington (1999) on the competitiveness of Turkey was prepared from surveys of tourists who had visited this country during the summer of 1999. It is worth mentioning two important contributions: first the identification of the main motivations to visit a destination and the most important grievances regarding their tourism experiences. Likewise, strengths and weaknesses of the destination are known. Second, this study allows a comparative assessment made by tourists from the attributes of Turkey and the relative position of this country compared to other competing destinations.

However, this research does not allow a comparison of competitiveness between countries because only Turkey is compared to "other destinations" and not vice versa. Enright and Newton (2004) performed a pioneering work in several aspects. It is an approach to competitiveness from the point of view of supply: from the interviews with members of the tourism industry the main elements of destination competitiveness are identified and categorized from urban Hong Kong with respect to their competing destinations. This attribute identifies whether the destination must continue in the same direction (elements important for competitiveness and in which Hong Kong is in a better position than its competitors) or elements considered "wasted effort" (the target has a relatively good position, but it is not important factors for competitiveness). Thus,

elements that, despite not having a good relative position, are not determinant for competitiveness and where the destination attributes "must focus" because it is very important elements for competitiveness and the destination does not have a good position.

Another contribution of this research is that not only analyzes the competitiveness of a destination from its tourist attributes or characteristics of the tourism industry but is also considered important in this economic environment situation. The authors' competitiveness tourism destination must be framed in a broader context of generic competition. "Therefore also studied with the same procedure IPA grid surveys and a number of determinants of competitiveness in business environment and the economy".

But the trial of Enright and Newton, also has some shortcomings: only a comparison of a destination compared to other competitors. Furthermore, although identifying and prioritizing the key elements of competitiveness for urban destinations in the region of Asia, makes no global aggregation of all the key factors for the competitiveness of the destination: it is impossible to establish a ranking of destination competitiveness, how it is pointed out in the work of Gooroochurn and Sugiyarto (2005).

Finally, although the analysis from the supply provides essential information to measure competitiveness, is not taken into account at any time or the motivation for consumers to travel to the destination or the considerations which could improve these services consumed.

2.3 Small scale rural destinations

For the course of this research, the concept "rural tourism" has been combined with the small scale dimension. The integration of both concepts into one, is understood by the researcher as tourism that takes place in rural areas where it has low population densities and a very low tourism arrivals and/or not developed infrastructure within a non-positioned region as main destination. Rural tourism is found to have brought benefits to

the local communities in terms of their economic growth, social cultural aspect, services, standard of living and these have built up positive attitudes and behaviour of the local communities towards tourism development. Past studies have revealed that, rural tourism has been actively promoted in most of the countries without an overall effective strategy and proper planning with the stakeholders (Wearing & Neil, 1999).

2.3.1 Rural tourism and life cycle for small scale destinations

In general, rural tourism have been included as all tourism flows that take place within a non urban destination, regardless of tourists motivations to travel, leisure activities and level of interest in rural culture, as well as the existence of strong linkages with the agricultural community and accommodation modalities choosen. However, it might seen more appropriate to define those global tourism movements taking place at rural areas with the term “ tourism at rural areas” (Cals, Capella, & Vaqué, 1995)²²

For the World Tourism Organization, rural tourism is understood as a tourism in which rural culture is an essential component of the product offered. As recorded by the Tourism Excellence Plan of Castilla-La Mancha, “the hallmark of rural tourism products is the desire to offer the chance to experience the physical and human environment in rural areas for visitors [...] and as far as possible, allow them to participate in rural activities, traditions and local people lifestyles²³.

To delimit a precise definition of rural tourism, is has never been an easy task for academics. However, it may be more practical for the aim of this research to consider its basic elements.

Advantages of large scale tourism definitely are economies of scale and scope but empirically sustainable tourism is more likely relate to small scale tourism (TIES, 2006),

²² pp. 22

²³ Based upon the Tourism Strategic Plan 2015-2019 for the región of Castilla-La Mancha where the area of study is located. Further information at: <http://www.turismocastillalamancha.es/PLAN-ESTRATEGICO-TURISMO-2015-2019.pdf>

compatibly rural tourism and its small- to medium-sized companies constitute in the moment of development right now more a small-scale basis than a large scale basis.

Development should also be sensitive. In order to realize this, efficient use of resources for tourism development is necessary. The accumulation of negative impacts over time leads destination to a crisis within the tourism sector. Therefore, strategic planning should play a key role in the sustainable development of destinations, avoiding the negative impacts of tourism (Butler, 1980). However, to assess the current state of small scale rural destinations and predict patterns of development, diagnosis tools are needed.

In this regard, the life cycle model of tourism destinations of Butler (1980) is the most cited tool used for that aim within the scientific literature, thus its applicability has been confirmed by a large number of cases Cooper & Jackson (1989); Russell & B (1999) Virgen (2009) The model serves as a tool for early warning of potential deterioration of the tourism sector within a small scale rural destination, and it may suggest corrective strategies (Berry, 2006). Moreover, and related with the previous reviewed literature, the destination life cycle is one of the most important issues for the study of tourism competitiveness. It shows the destination's evolution and identify different stages that require planning and management actions. In the first stage, the exploration phase, tourists can be classified into the category "browser" according to Cohen (1972) and "allocentric" by Plog (1973). Destinations in this phase do not have a defined accommodation offer, being the first visit for travelers and "adventure into the unknown". In the next phase, called "involvement", residents respond to demand in terms of a limited supply of housing and basic tourism infrastructure. Still tourism is not very important for the local economy.

Subsequently, development phase, consolidation and stagnation are the next steps in the life cycle model. However, within the research community, doubts were raised about the utility of this model as planning and management tools. Hernández & González

(2007) have confirmed that the model is operational as it is able to determine the exact position of the destination but does not have the ability to predict future development trends. Similarly, Choy (1991) concluded that the model showed many limitations in the context of Pacific Islands and thus could be used, at best [...] as a diagnosis tool after the fact.

2.3.2 Conceptual delimitations: small scale rural destinations in perspective

As it is unlikely to gain optimal profits through economies of scale and scope within a range of many small- to medium sized companies, there are other convincing approaches that create a surplus; »a study carried out in Costa Rica found that the positive economic impact of nature and culture tourism on a small community can be five to 10 times greater per dollar of tourist spending than for an all-inclusive mass tourism destination«. Tourist spending is local, and tends to stay in the community, spread across a number of individuals in the community, and circulating in the local economy - the so-called »economic multiplier effect« (Cosslett, 2007) this implies that »small-scale rural tourism should involve limited tourist numbers, already available for local use.

Efficient use of resources can be achieved through the existing natural features being utilized as tourist attractions (Chalker, 1994; Orams, 1995). Provisions should be made to protect and conserve the natural features, in particular those located on fragile land and threatened areas (Orams, 1997; Chalker 1994; Budowski, 1976; Lindberg & McKercher, 1997). Furthermore nature and culture tourism requires less public infrastructure and lower levels of private investment per visitor (Cosslett, 2007).

Cosslett goes on, that at the village or town level, nature and culture-oriented tourism permits small scale businesses to be successful tourism operators based on their own knowledge and experience, and with relatively low capital investment. Also Hampton (2009), argues in his paper that the key lessons are that small-scale coastal tourism, whilst

not being a panacea for all circumstances, has great potential for real economic development that can benefit local host communities. Continuitive, Hampton (2009) states growing evidence of positive economic impact of small-scale tourism. In detail that means in small scale tourism expenditure can retain more locally through lower economic leakages, as there are low foreign exchange needs (minimal imported materials/equipment) and local ownership, so profits retain.

Furthermore small scale tourism has stronger linkages than mass tourism as they use local goods and services. Low capital requirements are allocated in easy entry circumstances and high levels of local ownership (Hampton, 2009). »Innovative national leaders and forward looking planners from around the world have proven that tourism that features authentic culture, nature and experiences creates more opportunities in local communities than any other type of tourism«, writes Gül den Türköz Cosslett.

Considering this small scale tourism benefits the local community whilst there is government planners' awareness of benefits of locally-owned small tourism (Hampton, 2009) and investors willing to cooperate at the expense of profit.

Based on evidence from previous studies, small scale rural destinations are characterized by the following shared characteristics:

- Takes place within natural or rural environment/areas.
- Activities marked by a sustainable implementation mode on a long lasting basis. Environmentally bearable, economically viable and socially equitable for local people.
- Low intensity development, low impact and not overcrowded areas. It must be carefully planned and monitored, favouring the qualitative aspect compared to the quantitative aspect.
- It does not alter the local lifestyle and rural culture support an open contact and integration of local community.

- Local economy must be revitalized by this small scale rural development effect, based on individual small scale holdings and designed as a complementary activity.
- Preserving natural and cultural heritage is a priority.
- It is based upon the endogenous resources.

2.3.3 The European initiative and the Spanish case

A boost for rural tourism has been the regional policy and rural development orientation, promoted by the European Communities. As a result of agricultural crisis, social and economic decline within rural areas, the Commission of the European Communities (1990, p.3) suggests a set of measures that “ should be aimed at creating rural tourism products which marketing may arise the creation of companies that specify and manage them”. On the other hand, recognizes that “rural development depends not only on agriculture”, so it aims to promote “other forms of economic activities that contributes to maintain rural population and a strengthen the rural economy” (European Commission, 1991, p.10).

Moreover, it is also evident, that there exist a concern about a real connection between tourism and a dynamic system that encourages local economic development. The European Parliament (1991, pp.90), within a resolution regarding a communitary tourism policy, expresses the need to promote tourism “encouraging public and private investment in regions covered by Objective 1, that protect their cultural and environmental attractions and to promoted local economic development”. It also refers, to the promotion of rural tourism based on the rapprochement between countries, cultural heritage knowledge and natural environment focus” (European Parliament, 1991, p.91). So, new EU initiatives such as LEADER are welcome, as well as community proposals for rural tourism.

In this framework, the LEADER I initiative is created in 1991, as well as the following editions: LEADER II, in 1994, and LEADER + , in 2000, which lasted until the

end of 2006. A major impetus for the creation of a wide range of rural tourism supply in Europe, was the fact that only territories whose development projects were innovative and achievable, were beneficiaries of LEADER initiative. In LEADER I the basic objectives that rural tourism need were conceived: better understanding of countryside leisure demand, supply development, stimulating the creation of rural tourism basic infrastructure, provide cultural and other leisure activities and promote, at the same time, a decentralized tourism supported by individual investment.

The Operational Development Programme and Rural Economic Diversification (PRODER, in Spanish) have been made in the same direction. This is an exclusive action made by the Spanish Government during 1996-1999, directed to areas that were not benefited from LEADER II. PRODER 2 (2000-2006) has been applied to the entire national territory. Consisting on a package of endogenous development for rural areas, whose objective is strengthening and diversify the economy, maintain population, social welfare and natural conservation.

In Spain, the development of the White Tourism Book, in 1992 and the Framework Plan for Spanish Tourism Competitiveness (FUTURES in Spanish) (1992-1995), sought to reorient the Spanish tourist model. This plan, was considered a major change, as was the first time that rural tourism, was regarded as an important sector of the country's overall tourism.

The combination of the factors described so far, explain why during the 90's Spanish rural tourism had a significant growth from the demand point of view. However, complementary tourism supply, has not been able to observe the same growth. At the end of 1990, every Spanish region possessed its own laws and regulations regarding types of accommodation in rural areas.

PICTE plan, the last one until now, considers rural tourism in Spain as one of the most booming growing sectors, and highlight the problems of investment required to

create a diverse offer. Generate common patterns of competitive appear to be a big challenge for small scale rural destinations in Spain.

The communication of the Commission to the European Parliament “The future of rural world” in 1988, marked a turning point in how to address the rural development policy by the European Community and has become the framework document for

European rural developmental strategies. Inspired by this principles the European Commission proposed in 1991, the Community Initiative LEADER that ended in 1994. This new policy orientation and rural development tools were sactioned and reinforced by Cork at the Rural Development Conference in November 1996. The outcome document, systematized 10 items aimed at progress “towards an integrated rural development”. These elements are: rural priority, integrated approach, diversification, sustainability, subsidiarity, simplification, programming, financing, management, evaluation and research.

The Community Initiative LEADER was followed by LEADER II (1996-2001). Alongside the national administration in Spain, decided to implement a roadmap for development and economic diversification for rural areas (PRODER), aimed at budget implementation. This mentioned action, follows the LEADER philosophy and methodology for economic diversification included within the Community support framework.

2.3.4 Competitiveness models and its application at small scale rural destinations

The models appear to be suited for large developed countries that are in a position to offer tourism experiences for several market segments. But this makes no sense for particularly smaller countries, which must be selective in their targeted marketing. For example, the 2008 Global Competitiveness Report and the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report which rank 138 countries, only mention and rank 12 small

countries as defined by the 1.5 million population threshold. The reason for this lack of coverage is unclear, but it seems that these indices might not shed light on the specific issues and challenges confronting these countries, in that many of these variables take no notice of the destination's market size, the degree of dependence on tourism, the current state of economic development, or the vulnerabilities inherent in small size.

The only study that examines tourism competitiveness in the context of small destinations is that of Craigwell (2007). Craigwell uses the WTTC index to measure tourism competitiveness among Caribbean destinations. This index consists of eight separate indicators: price, human tourism, infrastructure, environment, technology, human resources, openness, and social aspects. Price factor is considered the most important indicator of competitiveness according to this study.⁶ The main shortcoming of this index is similar to the shortcoming of other indices. Namely, it lacks a clear understanding of a cause-effect relationship. For example, in the ranking of Caribbean countries based on the WTCC index, the countries with the highest ranking seem to reveal the least price competitiveness in terms of their tourism product.

It is clear that measurement efforts beneficial to small island destinations have been lacking in the discussion. In this second part of our lecture we will try to empirically apply the concept of competitiveness to the context of small island destinations.

2.4 Area of Study: Alcudia valley and Madrona mountain range

As an attempt to understand small-scale destination competitiveness, this section briefly reviews a case study, where further empirical methods will be applied in section 3. A small-scale rural destination in Spain will be drawn, returning then to the key issues outlined before. Thus this section should be interpreted as an example to amplify previous points and it will help the researcher to interpret broader lessons from the research aim.

2.4.1 Economic overview

The area of study, “Alcudia Valley and Sierra Madrona mountain range”, is an area located at the south of Castilla-La Mancha region in Spain (see figure 3) and it is formed by 12 towns within Ciudad Real province²⁴.



Figure 3. Map of Spain and location of Castilla-La Mancha región. Source: Google images

It is clustered around a Local Action Group²⁵ known as “Alcudia Valley and Madrona Mountain Range Sustainable Development Organization”²⁶.

Alcudia Valley LAG is the administrative base from which derives all the programs of relevance for socio-economic dynamism in very ruralized towns and in mainly related to the use and enhancement of the cultural and natural heritage for tourism.

We will call this set of municipalities Alcudia Valley and Madrona Mountain Range. Occupying an area of 3425 km² with 21,833 inhabitants, is one of the largest geographical areas throughout the south central plains, but also one of the most unpopulated, with a density of 6.37 inhabitants/km². Around the 50% of the population is living in the town known as Almodóvar del Campo.

²⁴ Abenójar, Almodóvar del Campo, Argamasilla de Calatrava, Brazatortas, Cabezarcados, Cabezarrubias del Puerto, Fuencaliente, Hinojosa de Calatrava, Mestanza, San Lorenzo de Calatrava, Solana del Pino y Villamayor de Calatrava.

²⁵ Hereinafter L.A.G., further information about this organization at Annex 1.

²⁶ LAG name in Spanish: Asociación para el Desarrollo Sostenible del Valle de Alcudia, see appendix A

Basically is organized into three territorial units: from North to South, Tirteafuera Valley, Alcudia Valley and Madrona Mountain Range. The first unit is specialized in rain fed cereal, grapevine yards and olives; central one, focused on ranching the merino sheep²⁷ and retinto cattle²⁸, and south unit is mostly focused into forestry exploitation and livestock farms.

Among the different natural units comprising the territory, the natural area called Alcudia Valley, gives its name to the region and conform the natural heart of the region. This area has low population density, high significance of agriculture, low levels of income and an important geographical isolation as well as a complex territorial structure.

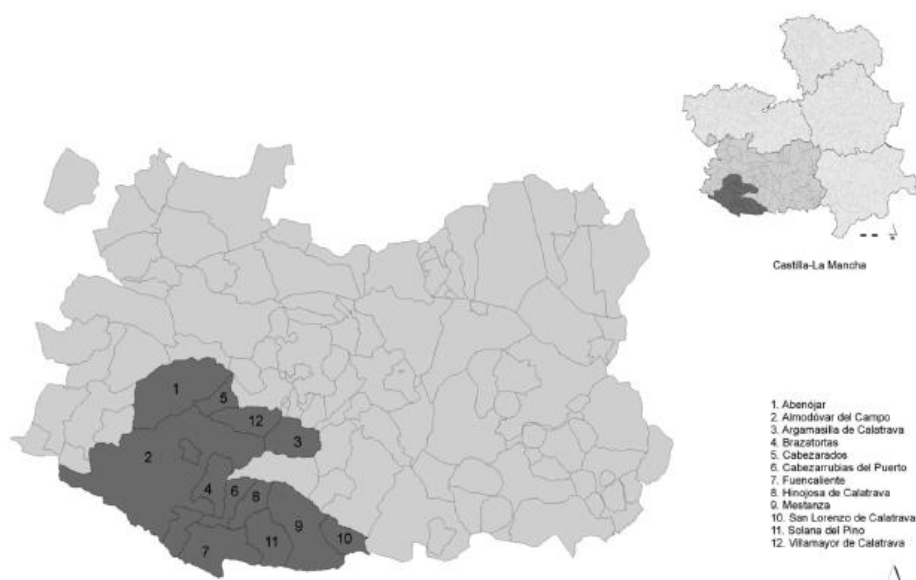


Figure 4. Location of Alcudia Valley and Madrona Mountain Range. Source: Estudios Geográficos (Vol. LXXIV, 275, pp. 409-437)

The local economy is weak, characterized by an excessive weight of the primary sector, which is focused on an extensive traditional production, formed by mainly cheese factories, oil mills and cooperatives, honey packers and meat products from small farms.

²⁷ The Merino fleece sits at the top of the grading charts for fineness; it is the standard against which all others are measured. Merino sheep are also noted for their hardiness and their herding instincts and have been used as parents of several other breeds, notably the Rambouillet of France.

²⁸ Retinta cattle, is the main indigenous bovine breed from Spanish dry areas. It was distributed in the southern half of the Iberian peninsula.

Regarding the industrial sector, there exist some direct and indirect influences within Alcudia Valley, as it is closed to a strong industrial city called Puertollano. Regarding the service sector, it is comprised mainly for retail commerce and a very unstructured tourism sector.

2.4.2 Overview of tourism resources

In relation to the tourism resources and geographic distribution, which includes natural factors and human ones, it constitutes a clearly representative territory landscape of the western Castilian-Manchego²⁹ area (Sancho, 2004)³⁰, of paleozoic origin. Apalachense landscape is clearly identified, with a great natural wealth, mainly in the valley, of undoubtedly landscaping and environmental interest (García, 2003)³¹

It is characterized, moreover, by the punctual appearance of volcanism. Its signs of identity are summarized in the presence of the Mediterranean mountain on siliceous substrate, a hydrographic network that integrates rivers, streams, thicket and ray-grass belonging to the basins of the Guadiana river, to the northern ones (Valdeazogues, Alcudia and Guadalmez) and the Guadalquivir river to the south (Ojailén, Fresnedas and Tablillas,) . Fauna also represents a wealth natural heritage, since it constitutes "a European paradise for the observation of birds (Gosálvez, 2009)³². With great potential for ornithological tourism.

Much of the territory is integrated by the Network of Protected Areas of Castilla-La Mancha³³, as well as the Natura 2000 Network and Site of Community Importance (SCI)³⁴ All together with the two special protection area (SPA)³⁵

²⁹ Refers to the fact of being from the región of Castilla-La Mancha (e.g. Spanish is something from Spain)

³⁰ p. 24

³¹ p. 10

³² pp. 85 et seq

³³ Law 9/1999, of 26 of May, of Nature Conservation in Castilla-La Mancha

³⁴ Sites of Community Importance is defined in the European Commission Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) as a site which, in the biogeographical region or regions to which it belongs, contributes significantly to the maintenance or restoration at a favourable conservation status of a natural habitat type or of a species and may also contribute significantly to the coherence of Natura 2000.

Five spaces in the category of SCI and SPA for their faunistic values in relation to mammals, amphibians and reptiles, fish, invertebrates, and flora of interest, to which we added four important areas for birds designated by the International Birdlife Programme³⁶.

In 2011, Alcudia Valley and Madrona Mountain Range was cataloged as Natural Park around 200.000 hectares, given the excellent degree of conservation of their ecosystems and their exceptional importance in relation to geological heritage, biodiversity and the landscape of Castilla-La Mancha³⁷.

As a humanized territory, through the archaeological remains, it is known for the human presence from Prehistory to the present, both in the Palaeolithic and mainly, in Neolithic, period in which they are dated numerous examples of schematic rock paintings linked to the Mediterranean arch and now with a limited accessibility for the tourist.

2.4.3 Tourism sector approach

Alcudia Valley has, as the latest updated data from Instituto de Estudios Turísticos (IET, 2010), a total amount of 8 rural accommodations, 7 hotels, 5 guesthouses with an average stay of 0,62 days. 27 restaurants and 140 bars and cafes compose the offer of restaurant business in the area. Data reflect a stagnation in recent years in the number of facilities for all categories. However the Valley has a well developed infrastructure regarding transports and a decent structure of companies that organize leisure activities.

³⁵ The Spanish term is *ZEP and* is a designation under the [European Union](#) Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds.

³⁶ International Birdlife Programme is the world's largest nature conservation partnership. Additional information at <http://www.birdlife.org/worldwide/programmes>

³⁷ Please, see Appendix B for a broader perspective of the destination through maps

Accommodation		
Type	Name	Capacity
Bungalow, B&B	Arroyo Carboneras	45
Health resort, SPA	Baños de Fuencaliente	61
Rural B&B	Complejo Turístico Los Azores	52
Hostel	Hotel Peña Escrita	17
Rural house	Casa del Valle	12
Rural house	Casa Rural Don Tello	18
Rural house	Casa Rural El Nido de Alcudia	13
Hotel **	Hotel Sierra Madrona	35
Rural house	La Casa de la Mina	9
Rural house	La Posada de Alcudia	8
Rural house	Hotel Rural Sisapo	13

Figure 5. Accommodation table at Alcudia Valley and Madrona Mountain Range. Source: self compiled

The Institute for Spanish Tourism Quality Certification is an organization of quality systems specially designed for tourism businesses. The establishments supported by the "Q for Quality" have passed strict audits to ensure that its provision of service quality assurance, safety and professionalism. None of the establishments located in the study area possess this quality certification, nor any sustainable tourism related.

Regarding additional services for visitors such as restaurants, we could mention only 3 in the whole are which could be of a good standard and an authentic cooking. Companies offering guided tours, experiences, and organized trips are "Madrona Activa" and "Descubre Alcudia" who are having year by year a slow but steady increase of customers.

There are three organizations that are mainly focused in tourism; two of them focused on the area of study and the other one more focused in the whole region (5 provinces) but supporting all initiatives in the area³⁸

Its biogeographic characteristics make the areas of study as one of the best preserved natural areas of Castilla-La Mancha region, which is reflected in the large number of protection standards. However, this territory is threatened primarily by the abandonment of traditional practices that have shaped the landscape over the centuries.

The lack of a sustainable use of resources is a major weakness within area as well as the lack of infrastructure, or waymarked nature routes. The statement of the Natural Park Alcudia Valley and Sierra Madrona occupying 60% of the area and the management and boosting around this unique item is one of the best opportunities for the area.

The region of Alcudia Valley stands out not only for its rich and varied cultural heritage, but also for its stunning natural setting. It is a clear example of Mediterranean forest, formed by ridges landscapes, valleys and gorges, where oaks, gall oaks and oak trees line the environment. The integration of all elements result in a natural landscape unit of strong personality. The faunal diversity and the floristic wealth gives the region a greater degree of natural and cultural heritage competitive advantages which have to be preserved over time.

Specifically, and from the technical team of the Local Action Group, has worked in four axes creating local identity, which is considered for the aim of this research as the current tourism management model used in the area of study. It follows the fulfillment of the following above mentioned axes:

- Declaration as Natural Park
- Culture of transhumance

³⁸ The organizations are: ASETURVA, Ecoturismo CLM and LAG Asociación Desarrollo Sostenible Valle de Alcudia

- Mining and archaeological basis
- Natura 2000 Network

In this region one-third of its territory is a sensitive area and have different forms of protection. However, as a rule, the percentages of investment in cultural heritage have been low and have been limited to the reform of property or infrastructure development. Only two towns has developed a real tourism strategy.

In order to establish the basis for understanding the current realities and future possibilities for tourist development of the regions analyzed, our study aims to analyze the tourist, specifically the infrastructure, facilities and services.

Obviously, this sectoral analysis is far from covering the full range of necessary studies in regional planning of tourism in privileged natural areas, studies and analysis of carrying capacity and host community, analysis of tourism demand (number of visitors, age, sex and level of training them, average spending per visitor, average stays, degree of seasonality, origin of visitors, means of transport, purpose of visit, distribution channels used, etc.), evaluation of policies, projects and activities in tourism and so on. The traditional poverty of visitors records and tourists, resulting in strong gaps in the statistics for the analysis of large-scale and time constraints and budget to save those gaps with extensive fieldwork, have forced us to focus our attention on a part of reality: the analysis of resources and infrastructure, confident that the conclusions we draw therefrom can act as an indicator and starting point for future work.

2.4.4 Problems affecting the area of study

Alcudia Valley clearly has a strong potential as a small scale rural destination. However the limited research done so far, and the non-existence of deeper tourism analysis and prospects of socio-economic reality of the area by public institutions make the tourism development more slow and less sustainable. Most of these studies and other

corporate-level analysis agree on the conditions that delay the development of this province as a rural destination. In summary it can be listed as follows:

- Poor infrastructure, low internal and external accessibility.
- Depopulation, lack of highly-skilled, low demographic dynamism, an aging population
- Weakness of the business, lack of motivation, poor outreach
- Potential of underutilized food industry
- Strong weight in the energy sector in the provincial GDP
- Tertiary weak and low-skilled
- Irregularity and lack of data on tourism demand
- Lack of a common agreement between two lobbies: tourism and hunting.

2.4.5 Alcudia valley and madrona mountain range swot analysis

Performing a SWOT analysis involves the generation and recording of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in relation to a particular task or objective (Fortuny & Fayos Solà, 2015). It is customary for the analysis to take account of internal resources and capabilities (strengths and weakness) and factors external to the organisation (opportunities and threats).

STRENGTHS

- Existence of natural, cultural and human authentic resources.
- Richness, diversity and complementarity of cinegetic activity.
- High attraction power for non-urban tourists within the national tourism market.
- Access to various tourist market segments (ecotourism, agrotourism, adventure tourism
cultural tourism and gastronomic tourism).
- Uncrowded alternative tourism destination supply.

WEAKNESSES

- Shortage of accommodation infrastructure and no specialization.
- Non specific ecotourism product strategy, or defined experiences by topic.
- Spatial concentration of the hotels in two towns.
- Reduced quality and diversity of supply of existing housing. Low levels of occupation.
- Small camping sector development in the region, with a single example in Fuencaliente town.
- Dining little focused on tourism and barely focused on local cuisine.
- Highly relevant qualitative and quantitative natural and cultural resources, but without adjusting for tourist use (access, signage and security).

OPPORTUNITIES

- Power differentiation of inherit resources and great capacity for exploitation and conservation by tourism.
- New trends in rural tourism demand, open new markets such as ornithology tourism and gastronomic tourism.
- Ability to compete on a quality basis, not as mass destination.
- Substrate in the catering sector, which could be redirected towards local food supply and quality of services.

THREATS

- Deficiencies in public-private partnerships coordination
- Increased competition by neighbor regions , especially wine tourism, cultural tourism and ecotourism.
- No differentiation of the area as a tourist destination
- Reduced identification of the area as a tourism destination by travelers and local community
- Strong identification of a supply side, focused on hunters and cinegetic activities.

3. Methodology

To answer the research questions proposed at the beginning of the study, some data and methods will be used in related analysis and discussions. Aimed at examine the association between key destination competitiveness variables and the stage of development of a small scale rural destination.

3.1 Paradigm

The aim of this master's thesis is to create knowledge about competitiveness at small scale rural destinations. In order to produce scientific knowledge, to discuss how reality is perceived by the researcher is needed. Depending on how reality is perceived, a certain basis for construction of knowledge and deduction of conclusions are gained. It is therefore important to consider under which paradigm the research has been carried out and how this choice affects the study (Guba, 1990; Silverman, 2001).

A paradigm is a set of basic values which has an impact on how reality is perceived and on To answer the research questions proposed at the beginning of the study, some data and methods will be used in related analysis and discussions. Aimed at examine the association between key destination competitiveness variables and the stage of development of a small scale rural destination.

how scientific research is carried out (Guba, 1990). There are several paradigms that guide actions during research Guba (1990) lists positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, and as an opponent paradigm to those, constructivism. In other words, it is a set of basic beliefs which guides action (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) and in this thesis, will be guided by the constructivist paradigm. Initially Ontology will be found giving the first principles of the subject. Then an Epistemology will be discussed, to present an understanding of present thoughts and theories into the subject. Here literature and empirical research will be used to find such assumptions.

3.2 Information coverage

3.2.1 Research purpose

There exist three objectives that are intended to achieve in this research, taking as sample population a small scale rural area which is undeveloped as a tourism destination. Thus using sustainable competitiveness theories underlined in section 2. More specifically the objectives are:

- a) To define the conceptual framework through the contemporary literature, on competitiveness at small-scale rural destinations.
- b) To determine the variables shaping the competitive position of small scale rural destinations.
- c) To develop a strategic destination competitiveness model applicable to this type of destinations or similar ones.

3.2.2 Research approach

In order to meet the research objectives, and according to the research question, exploratory study will be used. Exploratory study is a kind of study which “to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light” (Robson, 2002). The best way to write this research thesis was found to be through a methodological triangulation which is “the general term for when more than one qualitative data collection techniques and analysis procedures are used in a research design” (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007)

Despite the fact some researchers had pointed out the danger that carries using different data collection methods, the counterargument is that combining different methods is a way of validating qualitative data (Cobb, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 2000), thus it opens the way for richer and potentially more credible interpretations as it reduce personal biases. This pluralistic approach to the method relies on the arguments of Feyerabend (1993) too, for some methodological opportunism "that appears to constitute actual scientific practice, from which all methods are welcome, then, all the gadgets are legitimate as long as that lead the investigator to achieve the goals ".

Although this research came up with the research problem based on realities, research questions however were developed from already existing theories, which later were compared to the reality, therefore this research is of deductive nature. Existing theories is the base for deciding what information should be selected, how it should be understood, and finally how to relate the results to the theory (Johnson & Turner, 2003).

3.3 Data collection methods

For this research, two types of data were gathered. These included the primary and secondary data types. Along with primary data, the researcher made use of secondary resources. According to Veal (2006), it consist on previous published data, which have been collected and analysed by others. It is immediately available at minimal costs, and provides a good starting point for further research. Secondary data have been collected at the same time from different places (cross-sectional data), allowing the researcher to get a broader analysis of already existing theorists from the beginning of the research, trying to work always with the most updated data. It is difficult for the author to take a longitudinal study because data from some sources lacks on continuity and timeliness. Especially when trying to identify the general tourism conditions of the area of study, Alcudia Valley, as there do not exist structured data neither for the supply side, nor for the demand side.

Detailed literature was obtained in the form of e-journals and e-books from Syddansk Universitet Library online facilities. The focus was on destination competitiveness, rural tourism development and destination management. This published literature will further support results and established the theoretical framework. Institutional documents were also revised in the form of reports and projects made by the Local Action Group of Alcudia Valley and the Regional Tourism Council (IPT)³⁹. A main institutional source of secondary data was European Commission for Rural Developemtn.

In addition, primary data collection has been conducted through qualitative methods in the form of in-depths interviews and one focus group among the core stakeholders within a small scale rural destination located in the south of Spain and known as Alcudia Valley and Madrona Mountain Range. Location was well suited for this research, as this destination is in the previous phase of development, not even been

³⁹ Instituto de Promoción Turística de Castilla-La Mancha

considered yet as a destination per se. Thus it possesses the main characteristics to be defined as a small scale rural destination reviewed in section 2.4.

3.3.1 In-depth interviews

The process for conducting the indepth interviews follows the listed steps: plan, develop instruments, collect data, analyze data and disseminate findings. More detailed steps are given in Appendix C as well as the „Stakeholder Interview Guide“ at Appendix D. Distinguishing individual (as opposed to group) opinions about how competitiveness could be addressed at the above mentioned destination, was crucial for the aim of this research. This method will provide much more detailed information that is available through other collection methods, as provides a more relaxed atmosphere and the tiem to express broader opinions for key stakeholders (Pacho, 2015). However, time-intense to conduct the interviews as well as possible responses biases might be considered. Experts informants were purposefully selected, the list of the participants can be checked at Appendix C. I have sought informed oral consent for all the formal interviews and have taken care not to share identities while exchanging information with other stakeholders.

Responses were recorded making use of a voice recorder as a tool. This form of data collection gives us the possibility to focus on the conversation instead of redirecting the attention into noting down the answers. After all interviews were recorded, a complete report of the transcripts was made (Veal, 2006).

The interview is the basic technique of the project to collect information that has not been written or published. Tourism data, previous studies or statistics scarce and the in-depth interviews had been a source to collect historical, current and qualitative elements of relevance, such as the conditions of the natural area and its relationship with the neighboring population, as well as the possibilities of its ecotourism development.

3.3.2 Focus group

While in-depth interviews are a main method of gathering qualitative data, they are barely used alone. More often they are combined with other techniques of collecting information, e.g., focus group interview (Morgan, 1997). The author decided to carry out a focus group interview and thus adopted the research technique of triangulation (Maxwell, 1996) which is defined as the systematic comparison of findings on the same research topic generated by different research methods“ (Bloor & Wood, 2006)⁴⁰ The purpose of conducting a focus group is to listen and gather information. It is a way to better understand how people feel or think about an issue, product or service. Focus groups are used to gather opinions” (Krueger & Casey, 2009)⁴¹. A good reason to select this research methodology was the fact that there might appear questions which are discussed in one specific town but not in another one, compare if there is a need of different strategies according to different places.

The group was formed by opinion makers, in order to compare the results with the in-depth interviews made before with main social representatives from organizations working in tourism in the area, or owners of companies working in the area. Before the field work, 14 people were recruited, each of them from the different towns that forms the area. The selected stakeholders, had at that time, an academic background in development, environmental sciences, heritage and/or economics or they were in charge of one of these areas in their daily responsibilities at the town hall or tourism organization that they represent. They were personal contacts who accepted to participate⁴². In terms of the advantages of focus groups, they can cover a large number of people in the same group (Wall, 2001), as an efficient way of gaining a large amount of information (Gibbs, 2009) and particular opinions or attitudes in a short time, and are a most effective tool when used

⁴⁰ pp. 170

⁴¹ pp. 49

⁴² See Appendix E

in conjunction with other data collection methods as a form of triangulation (McClelland, 1994).

The sample of people selected, had the main characteristics that according to (Krueger & Casey, 2009) must exist to be considered as a focal group.

- **Size:** The main element of a focal group is the people that form it, who can range from six and a maximum of twelve for a good use and management of the interview. In relation to size (Morgan, 1997) states that the ideal is a group with at least six participants and no more than ten, because under six it might be difficult to have a substantive discussion and more than ten will be difficult to control (Morgan, 1997)⁴³. The group selected for this research of twelve people is enough to make possible for all participants to have the opportunity to share opinions and share perceptions and big enough for getting a diversity of ideas.
- **Characteristics of the participants:** The focus group was a set of people with similarities in some aspect that were relevant for the researcher, so the homogeneity of the group was determined by the purpose of the study. However it is recommended that the participants don't know each other at all, for this research was not possible, as the common characteristic is to be involved in Tourism issues at the Alcludia valley and Madrona mountain range, and they share not only the Tourism activity but also the area in which the Tourism takes place. Nevertheless, researchers have now questioned since it sometimes results effective and a priority that the people that form the focus group know each other to achieve a better opening and revelation (Krueger & Casey, 2009)⁴⁴
- **Provide qualitative data:** The central objective of the focus group was to collect data of interest which is not available neither at recent literature or other sources.

⁴³ p. 43

⁴⁴ p. 10

The main aim was to obtain a range of opinions from the interaction of the participants in one focus group. As researcher, the group was moderated and direct observation was applied too as suggested by (Krueger & Casey, 2009).

- **Focusing de discussion:** The interview questions of the focus group were carefully predetermined, bearing always in mind that the result should be easy to understand and be logical for the participants. At the beginning more general questions were used and about the end, they become more specific⁴⁵. The first questions will helped the participants to focus towards the topic of interest of the researcher. The group consensus was not overconsidered by the researcher instead heeding the feelings and motivate the comments (Krueger & Casey, 2009)⁴⁶.

3.4 Research process

The research presented has been developed into four stages including in-depth interviews and focus group. Starting with a background research and article research, as well as specific data collection related to the Natural Park proposed as an example of small scale rural destination. The combination of them, resulted into a thesis statement and hypothesis, laying then the basis of this investigation. (, and literature review), data analysis, interpretation, and report writing.

⁴⁵ See Appendix E

⁴⁶ p. 12

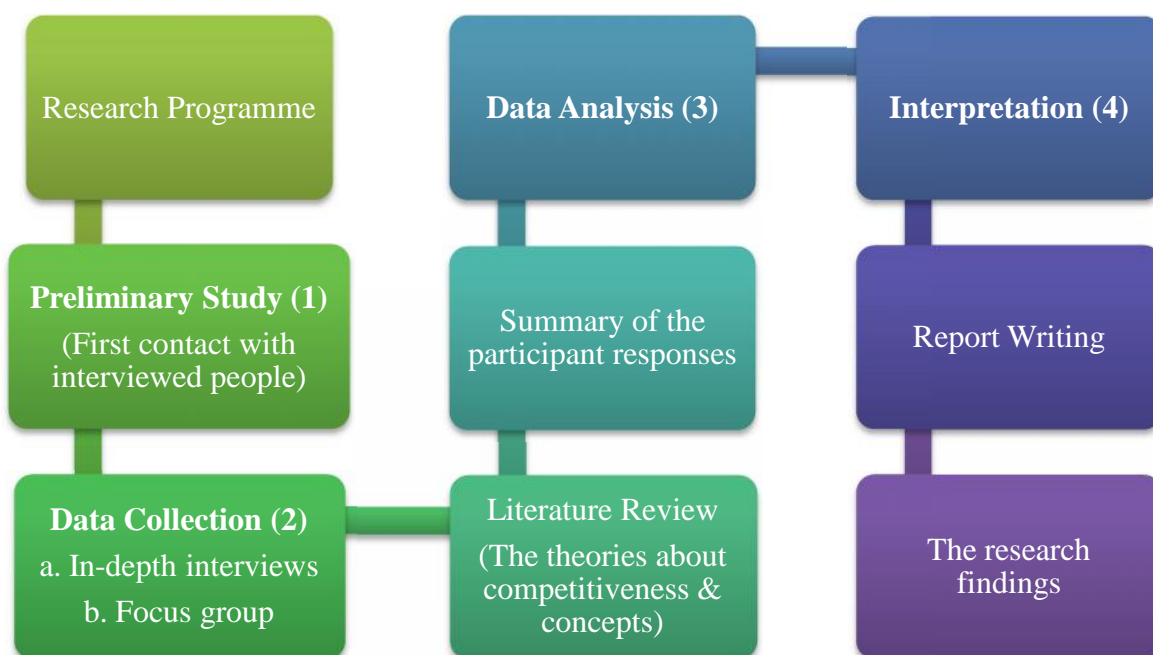


Figure 6: Research process. Source: self compiled

For the *in-depth interviews*, meetings were held during June 2016 with the main tourism representatives both public and private outlined at appendix C and appendix D2, so as previous contact to gain acceptance of their participation in the research, via e-mail and telephone. More specifically, the researcher came in touch with and asked them to participate in the research after explaining the nature and the scope of the study. In general terms the respondents were willing to participate in the research and the interviews were conducted between June and September of 2016. The in-depth interviews took place at the offices of the representative so that they got a comfortable environment and privacy enough. For owners of local companies was at their physical company office, most of them at their own house.

The in-depth interviews length has been approximately of thirty five to forty five minutes. During the interviews were mainly kept notes, in order to help the researcher to analyze the gathered data. During the conduction of the interview, respondents were free to express their views even in topics which were not included in previous sections and/or appendices. Finally, it should be noted that the conversations flowed smoothly and pleasantly.

Regarding the *focus group*, once the main issues were clear, and decided which topics may be included at the interview of qualitative type to be considered as a focus group, as well as the use and advantages provided by employing them as tool of qualitative research. The time factor and the researcher ethics were carefully reviewed. Care was taken with this type of tool, since it is not always proper to show it to an audience unless a principle is considered indispensable for the investigation (Morgan, 1997). During the focus group planning several decisions were taken about how the information will be collected. (Morgan, 1997) poses a "rule" that has useful results for assertiveness when making related decisions with the planning and design of the focal group. It is known as the "rule of the thumb ": refers to the action of positioning the thumb up as a form of approval and down as disapproval. According to this rule that projects involving the use of focus groups should have **(a)** participants that dont work together but share the same area of study, as it happens with Alcudia Valley and Madrona Mountain range; **(b)** the meeting was based on a relatively structured interview with a high participation of the moderator, **(c)** having 12 participants within the group **(d)** having more than one group was not possible due to lack of time and participation of the people (Morgan, 1997)⁴⁷. The selection of participants as well as question proposed and summary of the data collected can be checked by the reader in detail at Appendix E. As some authors pointed out: “the effectiveness of a focus group will depend on the success of the group and the results obtained by the researcher”.

⁴⁷ p. 43

3.5 Sample size selection

There are several compelling reasons for sampling, including: lower cost, greater accuracy of results, and greater speed of data collection and accessibility to the population (Cooper & Schindler, 2003). Traditional sampling method can be divided into two categories: probability and non-probability sampling (Hair, et al. 1998).

In order to conduct this sampling strategy, the researched defined the population first, listed down all the members of the population and then selected the members to make the sample. So, as (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007) pointed, this non-probability sampling technique is based upon the researcher subjective judgment.

In order to answer the research goals, the researcher opted to obtain the view of the organizations/bodies involved in tourism in the selected area of study, as currently they are responsible of development (in line with this topic).

Specifically, a total of 8 professionals where selected for the *in-depth interviews* among whom there were policy makers from the Natural Park, representatives of non-profit organizations formed and working for the development of sustainable tourism and local company owners. These selection was made based upon the current structure of the area stakeholder map, considering all towns of the area of study. Indeed a *focus group* for validation, formed by 8 policy makers and other professional representatives was organized. However to achieve pertinent information, certain inclusion criteria was imposed. The participants for the qualitative research were professionally involved in the area of study. This qualification ensured that the participants will understand the nature of the research and will be able to properly answer the survey.

In-depth interviews	8 participants
Focus group	8 participants

3.6 Analysis of data

Once the data begins to flow in, attention turns to data analysis. First, some activities are needed to ensure the accuracy of the data and their conversion from raw form to a reduced and classified form that are more appropriate for analysis. This kind of activities is called data preparation, which includes editing, coding and data entry (Cooper & Schindler, 2003).

The data analysis was an iterative process of interpretation of data based upon literature review, aggregation of data obtained through interviews and direct observation, then coding and clustering into new themes derived from the framework, and then further coding them into opportunities and constraints (Craigwell, 2007). The views of informants on opportunities and constraints for making competitive a small rural destination, contain rich and often specific information which is reflected in the discussion section.

In general terms, and after analysing all primary and secondary data these are the most important ideas extracted from the research, that will be further explained in section number 4 where a proposed competitiveness model will be outlined based upon the research and analysis of the data collected and the study on competitiveness of (Mazaro, 2006):

Economic competitiveness is a condition relating to the economic activity of an undertaking and it can be defined as a difference in profitability that makes one firm more profitable than another in the same market. A higher income translates into greater private wealth.

Understanding the properties of competitiveness and sustainability in the field of the destination and that will originate the variables that intervene in the tourist systems and in the local scope, and, therefore, the premises of the work. The study and design of the state of the question on the subject allowed to establish the relevant theoretical reference.

Analytical cross-checking of these variables and verification of the convergence between the two phenomena that characterize the management of the present and future destination, which was carried out through the comparative analysis of the theoretical models that interpret the phenomena of The management of the destinations and that allowed the delimitation of the analytical dimensions and the selection of the determining factors in each competitiveness dimension.

Definition of dimensions and factors - abstract construction that tries to translate the real, but expressing from reality only the essential, from the perspective of research. It is what Quivy and Campenhoudt (1998) classify as construction-selection: the construction of the concept is always an operation of selection of the real. Therefore, the crucial problem of any conceptual construction is the quality of this selection. A concept of quality is one that has a better heuristic capacity, that is, the contribution to the understanding of the phenomenon. This is the main contribution of conceptual models to scientific knowledge.

After the construction of the concept were defined the indicators through which each factor can be measured. In the social sciences, the factors or attributes of the phenomenon do not generally present the possibility of being expressed in observable terms, and this is the role reserved for the indicators in research: to allow concepts to be confronted with the real. In order to achieve this objective, for each of the factors already defined, a standard or limit was established, which represents the ideal state or level that can reach the destination in the process of competitive and sustainable development.

The conceptual process was constituted at a previous level and then proceeded with the construction of the analysis of the secondary data collected. In this sense, the dimensions of analysis constitute a step prior to categorization, trying at all times to "descend" to "empirical observables" conceptions of the tourist system of a destination.

From these results the researcher has designed the analytical categories of competitiveness, trying, through them, to show the conceptions of tourism management that underlie the development of the destinations in rural areas in their first stage of development. In this way, the built categories emerge from the detailed analysis of the in-depth interviews, the focus group and the direct observation, but at the same time also arise from theoretical background detailed at sections one and two, where a few models and comparison of competitiveness theories has been developed. It is also the result of more than ten years been a “local tourist” as the researcher is part of a trekking group of people who make routes at least twice a month through the area of study.

The valuation of the subjective contributions in the construction of knowledge is one of the arguments from which it is proposed the elaboration of a conceptual model that is able to be represented in a simple and compact way.

These are, therefore, the characteristics that frame the model of competitive and sustainable tourism development and from which are extracted the critical factors that must be managed and evaluated to achieve success in a small scale rural destination.

Based on these principles, for each factor considered critical, a situation or superior condition of tourist success was forced that can be found in a tourist destination in which the integral fulfillment of the conditions and criteria that define that factor takes place.

3.7 Ethical considerations

The current study was subject to certain ethical issues. As it was mentioned before, all participants reported their written acceptance regarding their participation in the research, through a signed “Consent and Briefing Letter” in Spanish. The aim of the letter was to reassure participants that their participation in the research is voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from it at any point and for any reason, also that their personal data and opinions will be used for the purpose of this research. Next to this, participants

were fully informed regarding the objectives of the study, while they were reassured that their answers were treated as confidential and used only for academic purposes and only for the purposes of the particular research. Except from the above, participants were not harmed or abused, both physically and psychologically, during the conduction of the research. In contrast, the researcher attempted to create and maintain a climate of comfort.

3.8 Validity, reliability and limitations

Questions of validity and reliability arise when conducting primary data collection methods. *Validity* indicates the degree to which an instrument measures the construct under investigation. Content validity refers to the subjective agreement among professionals that a scale logically appears to reflect accurately what it purports to measure (Zikmund, 2000). Therefore, in this study content validity was strengthened through an extensive review of the literature. Thus content analysis of relevant policy documents and legislation was done when necessary; direct observation and participant-observation while cooperating with the Local Action Group, which permitted to engage in daily conversations with stakeholders and community.

Triangulation has been done simultaneously during the Focus Group D; therefore it increases the internal validity of the data. Data collected from in-depth interviews are cross-checked through observations and focus-group-discussion. In-depth interviews are also cross-checked with secondary data that has been collected. In-sights from one respondent is checked to other respondents. Result of cross-checking shows the same conclusion over variables being researched.

The survey guides instruments were revised, and to strengthen its validity, the questionnaire was circulated to the four member of the Local Action Group at the area of study. Based on the feedback received from the pretested sources, the questionnaire was modified. Misunderstandings were to be clarify too during the elaboration of in-depth interview and focus groups reports, when compared with the direct observation. In

addition, pilot guides were tested by a Spanish-English translator in order to test understandability. However, incorrect English grammar or choice of terms may appear in responses which are quoted accordingly.

The data is reliable in the sense of this particular research, but as discussed above, due to the subjective definition of competitiveness and the inability to influence people's minds, the future replications may be slightly diverse.

As competitiveness is a multi-layered and vast field, involving people, nature, institutions, power relations, complex social and natural processes, some *limitations* must be considered within this research study. All these aspects cannot be fully revealed and discussed in this thesis. While this is a case study of a given small scale rural destination, some implications of the research may apply to other protected areas and rural settings in Spain and/or Europe. While the model developed herein is intended to have generic import, specific problems may arise in particular applications.

Responses from the in-depth interviews might be biased as local stakeholders will tend to "prove" that their work is not a barrier to fulfill competitiveness and tourism development in the selected area. It must also be taken into account that the results might not be generalizable for all rural destinations, as it depends on the size of the territory, and the stage of development in which the destination is involved at the time of research.

The use of "convenience" sampling introduces bias as the research tends to converge around similar individuals. Thus the data collected through qualitative data collection methods was value-laden, in terms of the interviewer's own interpretation and assumptions. This does introduce bias into research.

Observational field research was indeed included as a way to validity and reliability of the research in the purposed area of study. Participant observation allows researchers to check definitions of terms that participants use in interviews, observe events that informants may be unable or unwilling to share when doing so would be

impolitic, impolite, or insensitive, and observe situations informants have described in interviews, thereby making them aware of distortions or inaccuracies in description provided by those informants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). (DeWalt, DeWalt, & Billie, 2002) believe that "the goal for design of research using participant observation as a method is to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study that is as objective and accurate as possible given the limitations of the method".

For this reason, the researcher decided to gather additional primary data in order to enrich present knowledge and design a strategic competitiveness model for small scale rural destinations.

Bearing in mind the advantages and disadvantages associated with each of the research methods used alongside this research, other expected limitations of the methodology used were:

- Regarding the *in-depth interviews*, it was expected that some people would not cooperate with the in-depth interviews due to a number of factors:
 - Lack of awareness of the importance of surveys;
 - Level of education in general and level of awareness about tourism in particular;
 - Some of the interviewed stakeholders might have some cultural constraints;
 - Politically, some respondents showed some reluctance in expressing their frank opinions about policies to strangers.

Participant observation is conducted by a biased human who serves as the instrument for data collection; the researcher must understand how his/her gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and theoretical approach may affect observation, analysis, and interpretation. Differential interviewer techniques might give different interpretations to

the same questions, which could be a source of bias (Zikmund, 2000). I took maximum care to coordinate and unify the interviewing techniques to ensure uniformity of style and interpretation.

The main limitation of these approaches lies on the empirical application of these models that bring holistically variables and indicators which in the other hand, are more suitable for assessing and measuring related aspects of the competitiveness concept.

Lack of specific literature or research already done so far related directly with competitiveness at small scale destinations, the undeveloped indicators as well as the broad definitions from economic perspective and tourism perspective about what might or not be considered as “competitiveness”.

Due to limited time and resources, the research took the study case of an area that had the characteristics of a “small scale rural destination”, as Alcudia valley and Madrona mountain range, in order to simplify the research in geographic, time distance as well as the huge lack of related literature.

Any shortfalls in quantitative and qualitative methods were dealt with by recognising their existence and taking precautionary measures to address them when they appeared. However, the purpose of the research is to shed more light on an aspect of networking with little previous research and to do this by interpreting the ‘stories’ told by the respondents. The theoretical sample, the following of a methodological approach, and the ability to compare with other findings would suggest that the scope of the research could be broadened to encompass a larger population (Tinsley R., 2001).

4. Competitiveness Model Purposed for Small Scale Rural Destinations

This chapter is the essence of the research. A competitiveness model for small scale rural destinations will be proposed to measure levels of tourism competitiveness and strategic sustainability of tourist destinations based on factors keys selected. The proposal addresses the need to establish mechanisms to assess sustainable development and tourism innovation at small scale rural destinations. The criteria must be adapted to their specific characteristics in order to reach success of the overall tourism development strategy at a local level.

The final indicators are measurable descriptions that are required for rural destinations to implement these approach to competitiveness or use it as a start point to develop their own ones.

Creating a tourism competitiveness model on the basis of sustainable strategic development it has meant to this research, to try to approach and develop a process for improving not only tourism destination per se, but also giving more quality to the living conditions of a given small scale destination as well as manageable tools for stakeholders to expand destination potential. With destination potential it is meant to be addressed economy, society and resources, as well as strategy, that may serve both to public administrations responsible or related to tourism and local communities. In this perspective, sustainable development may be achieved through local management.

These elements give rise to the term strategic small scale sustainability, that should be understood as a set of tools and indicators that represent a alternative to the management of small scale rural destinations. The intention is as well, positioning the destination towards global competitiveness and to achieve, maintain social and environmental sustainability, applying the approach of sustainable development as a strategic direction and long term planning, management and tourism development.

A competitiveness model for small scale rural destinations will be proposed in order to find small scale destination performance, assessing the reality of the tourism market conditions and a brief outlook towards the future scenario of the destination.

The model addresses the need to establish specific mechanisms to assess to what extent the tourist destinations are effectively implementing their actions in compliance with the current criteria for competitive success in global tourism and accordance with the conditions of the local sustainable development.

4.1 Dimensions of the competitiveness model

Tourism Competitiveness, as a general definition has being widely used as a reference to achieve the ultimate goal that all tourism managent should aim at. Wether in the field of public and private organizations, competencies in the design, implementation and monitoring of policies and strategies, and the fact that for private this is a mean for increasing economic profitability and sucessful performance of their business (Osorio, 2005).

Likewise, as pointed out by many authors, reference has been made from different models of tourism competitiveness within a destination perspective, to the consideration that for achieving an competitive positioning is not enough to have a number of resources and initial attractions (Wilson, Fesenmaier, Fesenmaier, & C. van Es, 2001). Most of the literature resources revised, are based upon the comparative advantage which consideres that position is closely linked to the ability of the public and private stakeholders, to control resources at the destination assets and the capacity to manage them as a valuable, rare, difficult to imitate and replace.

From this premise, the dilemma to solve can be summarized in the following question, which at the same time has been the main topic used both at the in-depth interviews and focus group: if we know that management has an increasing weight in achieving competitiveness of tourism destinations, then, on what variables should

sustainable destination management of small scale rural destinations act primarily to achieve that goal? or, what management indicators might not be ignored by destination stakeholders in order to achieve a competitive and sustainable tourism development?

4.2 Key factor selection for evaluation

The number of factors that can be gathered to monitor the competitive and sustainable dynamics of a destination is potentially very extensive. To select a framework of manageable dimensions, it is useful to analyze the possible indicators from a series of evaluation criteria.

The criteria for selecting indicators were as follows:

- Obtaining the data that will constitute a certain factor should be feasible. In case the data are available but difficult to obtain, the usefulness of the indicator should be evaluated in relation to the resources (both time and money) necessary for its elaboration.
- These data should be credible and easy to understand and should aim to provide credible information to those responsible for tourism management, who have different perspectives, priorities and knowledge. It is, therefore, preferable to ensure that the indicators chosen are easy to understand for a non-specialist audience.
- Its importance must be able to be evaluated to indicate the state or level of development, competitiveness and sustainability that a tourist destination has reached and to describe the conditions that lead to it.
- It should be possible to perceive the trends that follow the tourist destination in time (its temporal character).
- The results will be comparable in order to disseminate the experience gained to the largest number of destinations.

- A summary will be produced based on integrated, composite and easy to understand factors, and the results can be communicated through a series of interpretations.

The factors are considered independent of each other and interpreted as having equal weight or value representation in the valuation, whatever the redundancy. Likewise, the factors within each category receive the same assessment, that is, they have the same importance for strategic sustainability.

In the literature on tourism, measuring competitiveness and sustainability is a pole of considerable attention and has been treated as a crucial factor in achieving success in tourism destinations (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Gooroochurn & Sugiyarto, 2005; (Kozak, Baloglu, & Bahar, 2009; and 1999, Mihali , 2000, Crouch and Ritchie, 1999, Ritchie and Crouch, 2000 and 2003). More important, as is well known, is the multidimensional perspective inherent in concepts, confirming that being competitive requires superiority in various aspects, and being sustainable incorporates social and environmental factors in addition to economic ones.

The schemes that propose to meet the criteria of competitiveness and sustainability for the study of tourist destinations are still in the first stage of theoretical development. However, some conditions are already confirmed, demanding from the new proposals a key approach to multidisciplinary criteria that reflect the complexity of sustainable development, involving environmental, socio-cultural and economic aspects.

At present, the close relationship between competitiveness and sustainability supports and influences the form of tourism planning that takes into account multidimensional criteria of tourism development. Understanding tourism as an open system and multidisciplinary, the compartmentalisation of data analyzes focusing on the environmental, economic and social elements are no longer enough to allow an understanding of their dynamics and evolution. Rather, the configuration of the tourism

system needs to be represented as a dynamic process and shaped in a logical sequence of interrelated and interdependent decisions and actions that can be identified and characterized by a set of factors that exert a determining force for the reach Of strategic sustainability.

4.2.1 Dimensions of the competitiveness model proposed

The approach that has been reached through primary and secondary data collection methods explained at **section** three where recognizes that competitiveness at small scale rural destinations is directly related to development and sustainable tourism. To assess the overall state of strategic sustainability of the destination for a competitiveness rural destination it is proposed a new model that tries to overcome the local economic, environmental and social dimmensions, thus to achieve an integral perspective of the tourism system at a rural destination.

This categorization contributes to the understanding of the functions of a tourist destination and to plan the strategies of the destinatination in an integral way at a small scale rural destination which is not positioned yet in the tourism market. The tourism system thus understood is represented in the figure below, proposing a more holistic view of the dynamics of tourism in a destination, accepting that its conditions of competitiveness are in permanent state of change and evolution (Hudson & Miller, 2003)



Figure 7. The Tourism system. Source: self compiled

Thus, strategic sustainability, a concept that represents the global condition of tourism competitiveness at a destination, is interpreted under three dimensions of analysis and evaluation that are named as follows in the Competitiveness Model proposed in the next chapter:

- Tourism Development Achievement
- Tourism Competitiveness
- Tourism Sustainability

The three key factors for competitiveness proposed constitute a situation of strategic sustainability of the destination and through them the proposal will be explained and the evaluation of the tourism conditions of the area of study "Alcudia Valley and Madrona mountain range", will be executed, as detailed below.

A small scale local development modeling requires assessing the sustainability of tourism destinations on the ground, providing tourism agents, researchers and social mediators with information on the reality in which they operate. Thereby helping those social actors to formulate development projects and policies is necessary as outlined in section three with the research methodology applied to this research. In practice, the number of factors actually controlled by those responsible for the management and or other related stakeholders of a tourist destination are much higher than the ones proposed in the competitiveness model in each factor. The reader must take into account that the proposed key factors have the objective of creating a starting point and indeed are representing result data.

4.2.2 Key factor 1: Tourism Development achievement (A)

It is pointed out as a main input of a small scale tourism destination and as determinant of the next key factors, the tourist development state of the destination. This factor's analysis comprises the primary conditions on which tourism is organized and

structured in a destination which may be considered as a small scale rural destination. The existence and degree of tourism planning and the shaping of policies and forms of management and cooperation are key factors in the level of tourism development as pointed out at the in-depth interviews and focus group⁴⁸. Figure 8 presents a summary of the key factor "Tourism Development achievement" with the conceptualization or definition of evaluation indicators and standards.

⁴⁸ See Appendix E and App. F

Key Factor I: Tourism Development Achievement								
Items to value		0	1	2	3	4	5	Strategic Development
I	<i>Future Prospects</i>							It is attributed to destinations that are characterized by a broad vision of the future and that follow the guidelines of the strategic orientations from supra organizations and plans of tourism, the regional and regional plans and programs, until the constitution Of the local tourism development plan in a competitive and sustainable way.
A1	Existence of a global strategic plan and degree of implementation of programs and projects towards tourism development.							
A2	<i>Level of compliance</i>							In addition, the plan continues to be implemented consistently with sustainable guidelines, and 100% of ongoing programs and projects continue to meet their objectives, targets and timeframes for tourism development.
	Degree of consistency between what is established in the plan and compliance with the programs and projects effectively carried out.							
A3	<i>Checking and Control</i>							The mechanisms of correction and control of the processes, results and impacts of tourism in the destination are foreseen and applied in the monitoring of the plan and are used as a guarantee of the fulfillment of the proposed objectives and goals, within the sustainable criteria.
	Existence of mechanisms to monitor compliance with the plan that makes it possible to correct actions and control over the performance of process actions, results and impacts.							
A4	<i>Strategic Vision</i>							Strategic level of implication: it sets the target development model on a sustainable basis, establishes criteria for action, engages all stakeholders in decision-making, and fosters relationships with other sectors to make agreed goals normative.
	Scope of the decisions involved in the implementation of the plan.							
A5	<i>Schedule</i>							The plan keep on working into the horizon in the long term, with a planned time for implementation over 10 years .
	Timing planned for the integral implementation of the plan.							

A6	<i>Strategic Multidimensionality</i> Existence of programs of action focused on environmental, cultural and economic issues, in relation to the degree of total execution of the plan.							Environmental, cultural and economic issues are covered by specific strategies to guide, empower and control tourism processes and impacts.
A7	<i>Management and organization</i> Interpretation of the role of tourism in the field of policies and local management decision-							Tourism occupies a place within the local politics and its management of active policies, of marketing resources, etc., it is incumbent on a superior organ of the structure of government.
A8	<i>Tourism financing</i> Amount and regularity of budgets for tourism and funding of tourism development funding.							The tourism body receives resources and participates with budgets in conformity and proportion of their needs and attributions.
A9	<i>Coordination and cooperation</i> Involvement of agents and integration of coordinating functions in the service of planning and management of tourist destinations.							The destination presents a strong cooperation and integration between the agents of the tourism, even organized in forum, polo / cluster - or another format of regional organization towards the tourist development.
Tourism Development Achievement		Maximum 45 points						14 points: To develop 15 to 29 points: on the track > 30 puntos: Developed

Figure 8. Key Factor I. Source: Based on Mazaro, R. (2006) and self compiled.

Perhaps the most important is to define, under criteria of efficiency, how the management tools are used and applied towards the enhancement of tourism activity, overcoming the limited capacity of resources and endogenous attractions that can affect some destinations, specially small scale rural destinations. Comparative advantages and articulating strategies focused on sustainable competitive advantages . will imply a greater or lesser degree of sustainability counted in its development. (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003, Crouch & Ritchie, 1999, Cooper & Schindler, 2003).

In these studies, and especially in the reports of the World Tourism Organization (2001), the structuring of a local tourist supply acts in the medium and long term as an important factor of development, which accentuates the challenges of tourism Destination

and requires long-term planning, a vision and strategic posture towards the future and the ability to organize to face it.

4.2.3 Key Factor II: Tourism Competitiveness (B)

This section will summarize the indicators related for achieving competitiveness at a small scale destination. The indicators reflect the results of the tourism stakeholder focus group linked to the in-depth interviews and the previous key factor "Tourism Development Achievement".

The following figure that presents the key factor "Tourism Competitiveness" includes indicators that reflect the results of the tourism sector in the destination, defined and evaluated based on representations of the ideal conditions of competitiveness that could reach, under the effect of the management and coordination strategies implemented towards its development. These factors are attributed to the efficiency patterns that management and production processes can achieve within the tourism system. These indicators are evaluated with reference to the concept and principles of efficiency in the processes and the implications that this criterion implies. It is through the efficiency in the processes that sustainability can be made operative, that is to say, depending on the form of the intentions and actions oriented towards the tourist development.

Key Factor II: Tourism Competitiveness at small scale rural destination								
Items to value		0	1	2	3	4	5	Strategic Competitiveness
B1	<p><i>Tourism Resources</i></p> <p>Relevance of the set of resources and attractions in terms of the capacity to attend to the motivations and expectations of the actual and / or potential significant demand.</p>							The destination presents an exclusive set of resources and tourist attractions, with potential of competitive projection at the level of its maximum competitors
B2	<p><i>Potential Activities</i></p> <p>Relevance and diversity of tourism activities, innovation, combination and optimization of the potential of the resources of motivation and</p>							The set of resources and attractions are maximized, with diversified activities, integrated and consistent with the arguments of motivation and retention.
B3	<p><i>Tourist Offer</i></p> <p>Performance of the productive sector analyzed from the lodging: supply of total regulated places in relation to the number of inhabitants of right in the destination.</p>							Destinations whose offer registers above 5 places of accommodation regulated for each inhabitant of right.
B4	<p><i>Infrastructure</i></p> <p>Infrastructure conditions and adequacy to real and potential tourist flows: accessibility, receptivity and hospitality in the destination.</p>							The destination has a satisfactory infrastructure to meet the tourist demand and the residents.
B5	<p><i>Responsible Marketing</i></p> <p>Efforts undertaken in building a good reputation and realizing the anticipated benefits in marketing strategies to promote and carry out competing tourism.</p>							Strategies, actions and marketing tools correspond in form and content to sustainable claims and achieve a prominent position in the main tourism segment.
B6	<p><i>Seasonality</i></p> <p>Trend of tourist flows in the different periods of the year; Seasonal variations from a perspective of tourist demand.</p>							The total number of tourists in the month of maximum flow is up to 1.5 times greater than the total number of tourists in the month of least flow in the destination.

B7	<i>Flow Performance</i> Trend of average daily tourist expenses during the stay at the destination.						Higher levels of profitability for destinations that record average expenses per tourist / day over 120 euros.
B8	<i>Retention Capacity</i> Analyzes the tourist flows in the destination by means of the indicator of average stay of the tourists in the destination.						Average stay over 5 days of stay of the tourist in the destination.
B9	<i>Visitor Satisfaction</i> Perception of the tourist in terms of the comprehensive offer of experienced travel and evaluation of their satisfaction.						Level of satisfaction of the tourist on the overall experience of travel in the destination superior to 90%.
Competitiveness of the rural destination:		Maximum 45 points					Strong: > 30 points Medium: 15 to 29 points Weak: < 15 points

Figure 9. Key Factor II. Source: Based on Mazaro R. (2006) and self compiled

4.2.4 Key factor III: Tourism destination sustainability (C)

Considering that sustainability is inexorably linked to the long-term perspective and that impacts are represented by factors that are only possible to evaluate over time, a third category of analysis is established in the model proposed here called “Tourism Sustainability”. The factors in this dimension are equivalent to the outputs of the tourism system, interpreted as the impacts that the development of the sector may cause in the destination and that can be positive or negative from the environmental, economic and social, order. (EEA, 1991). The impact is the result of the cause-effect relationship between the indicators that form the overall key factor developed in this section

Figure 10 summarizes the factors of this dimension of evaluation which, by extension and complexity, is divided into two sub-dimensions, as follows:

Key Factor III: Tourism destination sustainability								
Items to value		0	1	2	3	4	5	Strategic Competitiveness
C1	<i>Environmental behavior</i> General use of the Environment in the destination by all the economic activities carried out.							More than 80% of the destination's locality is organized by a Global Environmental Plan, Local Agenda 21, Reserve and Management Plan or equivalent.
C2	<i>Water</i> Eco-efficiency in the use of water (evolution of per capita consumption, pollution, supply and quality).							The rates of water consumption and waste at destination are markedly decreasing and reuse and treatment rates are remarkably upward.
C3	<i>Energy</i> Eco-efficiency in the use of energy sources (consumption, participation of the type of sources, etc).							The rates of consumption of non-renewable energy in the destination are markedly decreasing and the use of clean energy is increasing.
C4	<i>Clean Production</i> Eco-efficiency in the processes of production and delivery of products and in tourist activities (reuse, recycling, treatment, evacuation).							The number and diversity of types of environmental management systems and joint self-regulatory initiatives implemented by tourism companies at the destination is increasing.
C5	<i>Transportation</i> Types and conditions of transport used and available for tourist activities (public transport, ecological transport alternatives, etc.).							The predominant type of transport is the collective-public of quality and is used, mainly, as well as the ecological transport alternatives for tourist trips.
C6	<i>Urbanism and Landscape</i> Existence of urbanistic norms of occupation of the territory and of space occupation, with areas of leisure, mobility, etc.							
Ecological environment		Maximum 35 points					Strong: > 25 points Medium: 12 a 24 points Weak: < 11 points	

C8	<i>Social Environment</i> Indicador general de las condiciones/calidad de vida y de prosperidad de la comunidad (seguridad, infraestructura, servicios sociales).							Satisfactory levels of human and security development, without major contrasts in the socio-economic structure.
C9	<i>Culture and Heritage</i> Initiatives for valuing and preserving culture, heritage and local and regional authenticity.							Significant positive evolution in the number and diversity of activities for the enhancement of patrimonial resources and interventions for the protection of heritage in the destination.
C10	<i>Citizen Participation</i> Mechanisms of representation and participation of local community agents in the development of tourism, through the legitimate exercise of citizenship.							The community actively participates in debates and decisions affecting tourism development in the destination, through at least one official mechanism established, acting and deliberative.
Social environment		Maxium 45 points						Strong: > 30 points Medium: 15 to 29 puntos Weak: < 15 puntos
C11	<i>Tourism Training</i> Existence of policies for personnel management (opportunity, education, training, incentives) and hospitality.							Between 90% and 100% of the workers in tourism are trained at an appropriate level to the exercise of the attributions and of the decision making required by the function.
C12	<i>Employment and Occupation</i> Proportion of legal residents who contribute by contributing their labor to the production of tourist goods and services, even if they work outside the premises intended for that purpose.							Between 80% and 100% of the workers in tourism are legal residents in the locality or micro tourist region.
C13	<i>Performance</i> Direct economic impact of tourism employment, as measured by the comparison between the average annual salary of the sector and the average annual salary at the destination.							Average levels of income of employees in the tourism sector is 50% higher than that of employees in other economic activities of the destination.
C14	<i>Benefits</i> Participation of businesses of regional origin in the supply of the tourist activities that are being carried out.							Major participation of businesses of local and regional origin, which achieves a better distribution of tourist benefits.
C16	<i>Resident Satisfaction</i> General perception of the local community regarding the effects and impacts of tourism development on the destination.							Levels of community satisfaction above 80% with tourism development in the locality.
Tourism Sustainability		Maximum 60 points						Strong 50 to 60 points Medium: 30 to 49 points Weak: < 30 points

Figure 10. Key factor III. Based on Mazaro R. (2006) and self compiled

The indicators describe the interactions between the environmental, social and economic structure of destination and tourism. They also show the positive actions and standards adopted by the agents towards sustainability. There is a need for progress to be made in each of these areas of tourism development, and therefore, the Model Model is the instrument that indicates how the expected result has been achieved in each of the dimensions evaluated and in relation to their factors.

In other words, this category of factors fulfills the mission of assessing levels of local sustainability by observing the effects of tourism activities which, in the end, can reveal the degree de competitividad estratégica de un destino turístico que se propone evaluar como sigue.

Above all, in addition to environmental issues, a preventive approach to clean production must also be applied in the treatment of social and economic aspects of tourism, such as the impact on local customs and culture, architecture and income distribution, among others . Because tourism is a sector heavily embedded in services, it can benefit more from the potential of clean preventive production than the goods and manufactured goods industry (Mihali , 2000).

4.3 Application of the model to Alcudia Valley and Madrona Mountain Range

As part of the research a study of an small scale tourism destination has been done in orther to shed some light into competitiveness when applied to destinations of similar characteristics or defined under a similar frame. Alcudia Valley and Madrona Mountain Range.has been evaluated using the three figures that represent the Competitiveness Model further explained at the previous sections. The evaluation is the result of the primary and secondary data collected and introduced at sectins one, two and three, as well as at appendices C, D and E, done in collaboration with the main stakeholders and social representatives. The information provided by these participants

has been used to complete the evaluation, through data extracted from the reports produced by the in-depth interviews and focus group.

The following figure represents the results of the application of the model fully explained at the previous section and object of this research (See Appendix F)

Global Rating: Strategic Destination Sustainability							
Key Factors	0	1	2	3	4	5	Points
Key Factor I: Tourism Development achievement	10 points						Developed: > 30 points In development: //15 to 29 points To develop: < 14 points
Key Factor II: Tourism Competitiveness	14 points						Strong: > 30 points Medium: 15 to 29 points Weak: < 15 puntos
Key factor III: Tourism destination sustainability Ecological, social and economic environment	20 points						Strong: > 60 points Medium: //30 to 60 points Weak: < 30 points
Global Rating: Strategic Destination Sustainability	170 points						Strong: > 120 points Medium: 60 to 119 points Weak: < 59 points

Figure 11. Global rating of the Competitiveness Model applied to the area of study.

Source: Mazaro, R. (2006) and self compiled

Alcudia Valley and Madrona Mountain Range is a small scale rural destination in its first stage of development, still without statics which reflects the reality of the destinations, real infrastructure and arrival of regular tourists. It is not positioned at a province level, nor at a regional or national level despite its Heritage and unique values.

5. Discussion

5.1 Summary of key research findings

Attention needs to be paid to the accompanying measures designed to boost tourism and how they have influenced the dynamics of the sector at the regional level. The LEADER programs are progressively implemented but small scale rural tourism lacks on a specif plan and communication and alliances between Natural Park Head Office, LAG

and local stakeholders under construction. Actions aimed at rural tourism in the twelve municipalities weren't present from the beginning, but since 2014 there exist a more real intention of improving the rural space.

The previous key factors analyzed make up the tourism destination level of development, which are conditioned by the capacity of public and private management and tourism policies adapted to rural areas. In this respect, there is only one vision of directives, actions and programs of the European Union, although they are also valued in a relatively incentive policies of regional governments as a development of the offer and of the tourist activity in general. Between the aspects that count with a little positive perception the acceptance and willingness of stakeholders of the need of a common strategic and defined sustainable tourism plan for achieving competitiveness.

The need of an appropriate communication between stakeholders, and a work plan for structuring the destination as well as the creation of a brand fostering more promotion are clear to the participants and important factor to bear in mind in competitiveness management (Bravo Cambria, 2004).

Probably that is why there is no good understanding of the rural tourism product by the demand side. The potential travellers do not recognize the destination, nor do they perceive an image, which may lead to a lack of confidence.

This current phase can be considered as structuring, since the elements of tourism planning and organization are being worked mainly and they characterize a transition context between a disorganized state of local tourism, and a condition of professionalization and definitive fixation of tourism as an alternative activity fo the economy of the area of study.

However, some of the strategic determinants needed to achieve a favorable condition for global competitiveness have been poorly managed, largely due to the short time that tourism has been organized based on active policies unique to the area.

Critical strategic failures are concentrated in terms of coordination, integration and cooperation among the various tourism agents and should therefore be treated as an immediate priority to reach and solidify a situation of effective tourism development.

However, in spite of these efforts, it is observed that because of the relative short time of incorporation of the territory to the Natural Park, due to its characteristic and distance from the main cities, due to the scarcity of financial resources to meet the demands of the territory, for the desirable but unfeasible self-sufficiency of the local administration to satisfy the community needs.

The motives, among others, may be the lack of economic and electoral representativeness of the territory, the demands for effective coordination and management action still unresolved from the central and provincial government, which results in a relative difficulty in articulation between the Administration of the Natural Park, area of study of this research.

Information and communication as factors potentially capable of overcoming this distance are little exploited and the absence or error in the messages derives a situation of conflict caused by interests and divergent visions on the tourist development in the area as well as the “use of the land” by the different sectors of the economy. This situation compromises the fact that it is necessary for a tourism development that shelters the capacity to improve the conditions of life of the population, as advocated by the Key Factor III within the social dimension, conditioned in great part by the capacity for articulation, coordination and cooperation among tourism agents.

The financial and consultancy contributions of the provincial government are insufficient, as has already been commented, largely because of the small representativeness of the whole area in comparison with other territories of the province.

However, LAG has received the confirmation from the European Union funds of a financial programme that will be accessible from 2017 until 2020.

Regarding the coherence and fulfilment of the tourism activity, the formal document includes mechanisms for correcting the progress made in implementing the necessary actions to adapt tourism to sustainable criteria. However, most of the programs and implementation projects necessary for the consolidation of sustainable and competitive tourism does not advance, and those who advance, do so very slowly.

As a conclusion on the dimension of tourism development, Alcudia valley and Madrona mountain range seems to suffer the syndrome of the "drawer plan": there is a strategic plan, whose content aims at a vision of the future framed by the sustainability . In Definite, the actions do not correspond to the intentions, in great part by the lack of implication of all the agents.

A synthesis of the Key Factor I, Tourism development achievement allows to verify that the tourist destination of Alcudia valley and Madrona mountain range, presents all the conditions to reach a level of sustainable tourist development. But it needs to improve the performance of factors that are essential, such as the integration and cooperation between local tourism agents and the coherence and fulfilment of the plans already elaborated. From the maximum of 45 points, the area of study has achieved 10, which places it at a very weak position regarding sustainable tourism development.

As for the Key factor II, regarding Tourism Competitiveness the correlation between supply and demand and assesses whether the tourism activity at the destination is compatible with its purposes of sustainable and competitive tourism development. Once again, consistency is an elementary criterion, since it is assumed that it is the demand that influences the supply, but it is the supply that conditions the demand. The attracted profiles will be a consequence of how the destination is positioned at a competitive level, on what arguments it is based and what type of motivation it suggests.

Due to the natural and historical resources that will mark the distinctive trajectory of this tourist destination, Alcudia Valley and Madrona Mountain Range has a strong appeal. All towns has specific and unique natural resources with a uniqueness factor. To frame its tourism foundation in the resources and attractions related to nature, preservation of the environment is the most compelling argument for the implementation of tourism projects in the key of sustainability. However there is not a consensus between hunters organizations and tourism stakeholders about the use of the territory, plus local community still does not believe in the positive impacts derived from rural tourism.

Particularities of identity of the place, enable the destination to position itself competitively beyond benchmarking, and based on a competitive strategy of differentiation that makes it unique and with added value for visitors and residents.

The exclusive set of resources and tourist attractions that combines natural and historical-cultural elements, enhance an advantageous situation to define incomparable attractions and with ideal conditions to project itself in the competitive environment, at the same level of its maximum competitors.

From this perspective and considering the environmental and ecological differential of the destination, it is necessary that the tourist, when he / she considers the option of visiting it, relates it with environmentally clean experiences and can at all times of its stay verify the singularity and the preservationist care present in The activities

available for tourism, community life and government management actions. Although at first glance it may seem a diversified list of activities, most do not correspond to responsible tourism.

This means that the principles of the combined offer are not being applied, the variety and diversity of potential activities and entertainment given to the resources and attractions of the area of study are not being exploited, a fact confirmed by the focus group. It should be remembered that the Natural Park is located in the south of Spain, with low temperatures in winter and very high ones, atmospheric conditions very appropriate for the enjoyment of a great diversity of activities during all the months of the year. Something that has, obviously, decisive implications in the seasonal imbalances.

This is one of the strongest indicators of a set of activities lagging behind in their potential. The opportunities are clear and the competitive environment requires an entrepreneurial stance, especially when such precious resources are available.

The voracity of market interests in a context of absence of a tourism policy that establishes the tourist concept of the destination and the patterns of the offer of equipment and services adapted to its characteristics, has resulted in a "no model".

In fact, a small scale tourism destination such as Alcuia valley, does not present a favorable competitive condition for the standards established by the Competent Model, in relation to the supply of equipment and services as well as the demand side, due to a lack of information mainly. However, one must consider the physical limits of the destination and the estimated carrying capacity before judging the index as negative. This limitation is compensated, for example, by a positive evaluation in the criterion of exclusivity, in addition to keeping under control the potential environmental and social impacts by the increase of the flow and that will be discussed in the opportune section.

As for segmentation, data on the lifestyle of the visiting public are not discussed, a technique that allows a greater knowledge of the potential markets for an adequate adjustment between supply and demand.

This factor also highlights the importance of communication and the need to maintain permanent channels of information exchange between tourism promoters and their public. A sustainable strategy envisages the world reporting on the attractiveness and providing data to the community on its benefits, which presuppose the existence of an external public that is desired to attract and an internal public to those who benefit (McIntoch, 2003).

Communication channels between tourism promoters and the community in Alcudia Valley and Madrona mountain range are reduced to assemblies, meetings of organized sectors, a local television channel and the very effective ear mouth. There is an effort to make different interests converge. However, induction to the proper use of natural resources requires, apart from the work of communication, the adhesion of all tourism promoters. The commitment of all is won when together they decide what must be stimulated and supported.

5.2 Requirements of tourism and small scale rural destinations

The application of the indicators requires specific knowledge since the use of existing data and the sources of information available enables changes in environmental, social and economic conditions to be detected. This information allows, in turn, to permanently assess the sustainability of a destination and to improve decision-making regarding planning and management. Small scale destinations, lack on specific data as tourism has never been developed or due to a non existence of plans and/or human resources. Frequently, tourist destinations have data and information that, if interpreted, can serve as indicators. The most used measure economic aspects, such as income and expenditure of tourism or reference data of the tourism sector such as tourist arrivals,

overnight stays, accommodation capacity, are not the proper indicator to this specific kind of destinations.

Therefore, the case study outlined as an example of small scale rural destination in its first stage of tourist development can be considered rich in data, but poor in information. Indicators can help to select, process, analyze and present data to better relate them to issues related to sustainability.

The application of indicators at this type of destination, is therefore considered basic when assessing the public initiatives on tourism. The creation of a proposal that can be applied to areas with an incipient tourist development is the main objective of this research. Its character as a methodological proposal explains its use and application to other small scale rural destinations.

In each indicator objectives and achievement of the main key factor has been taken into account, the formula to apply it and the units used (e.g. points), as well as sources of information has been design as simple as possible due to a lack of real data, appart from the information extracted from the in-depth interviews and the focus group. This will allow other destinations to apply it to their specific area as a basis, and to carry out a methodological proposal that should added in their rural territory, where the implementation of policies aimed at promoting tourism activities should have specific requirements.

From the nineties studies on indicators for tourism destiantions (Vera et al , 2001; OMT, 2005; Declaración de Rio, 1992) both from the point of view of positioned destiantions and less developed areas, have been articulated in three thematic areas (economic, social and environmental) that have to evaluate the changes that these initiatives have had in the productive structure, but also as they have had an impact on social issues (improvement and / or impact on population conditions) and environmental issues (impacts generated by activities in the landscape and resources , for example).

6. Conclusion

Planning and action at the strategic local level, according to Valls (2004), offers the ability to set a destination development model and to promote the consensus among the direct stakeholders and the collective values, at the same time as it allows the establishment of performance criteria for the sector, Fostering relations with other sectors favor synergies and harmonious economic development, and put pressure on the different public spheres to make the agreed objectives normative.

The strategic and sustainable development plan has the following characteristics: Considers all of reality, incorporates natural, social, economic and political in an integral, non-sectoral way.

Competitiveness models in small scale rural destinations are an instrument for flexible planning and maximizing the efficiency of the decision-making process and it is a way to fulfill a sustainable strategy in agreement with the key factors of competitiveness towards the future as pointed out Zoreda (2003).

There is a need to advance in terms of tools for development in rural areas in order to reach sustainability and quality enough for differentiation of products and destinations. Acquire both singularity and size, reinforcing economies of scale and synergies of the sector, as a means of specialization or via mergers, alliances, joint ventures, franchises, etc.

There exist an imperious need for diversification of products, markets and, above all, channels for access and more direct access to the final consumer. Also there is a need to evolve the culture of the sector: both business and public, depoliticizing the latter the most technical management and marketing decisions, specially at small scale destinations.

The management of these competitive elements must always be linked to a vision of the future, with the scope of the strategies and the level of the decisions involved in the plans.

The indicators of the key factors analyzed serve as reference to evaluate the levels of tourism development at small scale rural destinations. They were chosen based on the criterion of responsibility for decision-making among agents and managers of local tourism destinations, taking into account that they are responsible for systematizing the processes.

The application of the indicators that defined in section four and applied to the area of study has been quite moderate. There are several causes that explain this fact. The difficulties in finding and / or accessing the data of the indicators mentioned above is one of them. This statement does not mean that they do not exist, in some cases there may exist, although very fragmented. In addition, in some cases the available information is very recent, which makes it difficult to carry out evolutionary studies and therefore to diagnose and evaluate the impact of policy implementation oriented to the diversification of economic activities. One of the main obstacles is access to them. The opacity of the administrations, the moderate and / or low predisposition to provide data to outsiders than to public agencies is an element that complicates the evaluation processes of these initiatives.

The suspicion to be evaluated and that this process evidences dysfunctionalities is a reason that can explain the distrust to contribute information. It is understandable, on the other hand, that they sometimes do not have staff to collect data and develop certain indicators, which is less justifiable is that they do not provide or facilitate their consultation for non-profit studies. More difficulties have been the application of economic and environmental indicators. From some of the economic indicators presented, the information is only available for tourist destinations of first order, coastal spaces and heritage cities. For the study area, the sample records are insufficient for the data to be representative. The available data are very recent or nonexistent.

On the other hand, some of the environmental indicators information at the regional level and much of the information is prepared and managed by private companies with tenders in public projects, information that has an economic cost and whose dissemination is not free. According to the methodological proposal and its implementation in an area of study, it is obvious that it is vitally important to have data, to conduct surveys, to carry out records, etc.

In short, know the starting point where the destination is in order for the area under study to have an information system that is reliable, truthful and useful, it is essential that all entities, both city councils and companies related to the tourism sector, know the benefits of their municipalities and their Companies can report having a good information system. The availability of quantitative information is essential when carrying out the territorial diagnosis of an area of action, but also to assess the repercussions associated with the implementation of actions with public funding. This makes it possible to show the results derived from it, but also its weaknesses. In this line, in order to complete a territorial diagnosis and to show the repercussions that a tourism dynamization plan might have, in addition to a quantitative study through the indicators proposed as has been carried out in this research, it is necessary to carry out A qualitative and particularized analysis, since each territory has its own characteristics.

Creating an integrated system where the different dynamization plans of the tourism product applied in rural areas could be evaluated and diagnosed is necessary, but this integrated system can not be homogenized in its entirety. It must incorporate the specificity of the territories.

The reasons are several. Not all emerging destinations start from the same point. some already have infrastructures created, complementary offer, etc. In this same line, the attraction of tourist resources is not the same and, for example, the existence of brands with a certain degree of consolidation is fundamental. Introducing some flexibility in the

indicators is necessary, in order to assess various starting points. The proposal for basic and complementary indicators could be an option that partly solved this weakness.

Despite these points, it is clear for emerging destinations that it would be a good pilot experience, to follow up on these plans and to urge the local authorities to send the General Secretariat of Tourism reports evaluating through indicators the repercussions that the Implementation of these plans and also that the preparation of these reports by the pilot destinations was an essential requirement to continue receiving the funds.

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Appendix A

Local Action Group Alcudia Valley and Madrona Mountain Range

Local Action Groups (LAGs) are the mainstay of the implementation of the LEADER approach. Their responsibilities include the development of local strategies, supporting stakeholder networking and the appraisal and approval of individual LEADER projects.

Find below a summary of registered LAGs including their objectives and contact details.

LAG DETAILS

Country	Spain
LAG Code	L-ES006-015
LAG Name	Asociación para el Desarrollo Sostenible del Valle de Alcudia
Address	Glorieta del Carmen s/n, 13580 – Almodóvar del Campo
Lag Manager	Ms. María del Carmen González
e-mail	cedercam22@local.jccm.es

Main objectives

- To implement a Sustainable development strategy within the area
- The management of environmental and cultural Heritage
- The management of services and infrastructure
- To process and manage external resources
- Land management

European Programmes

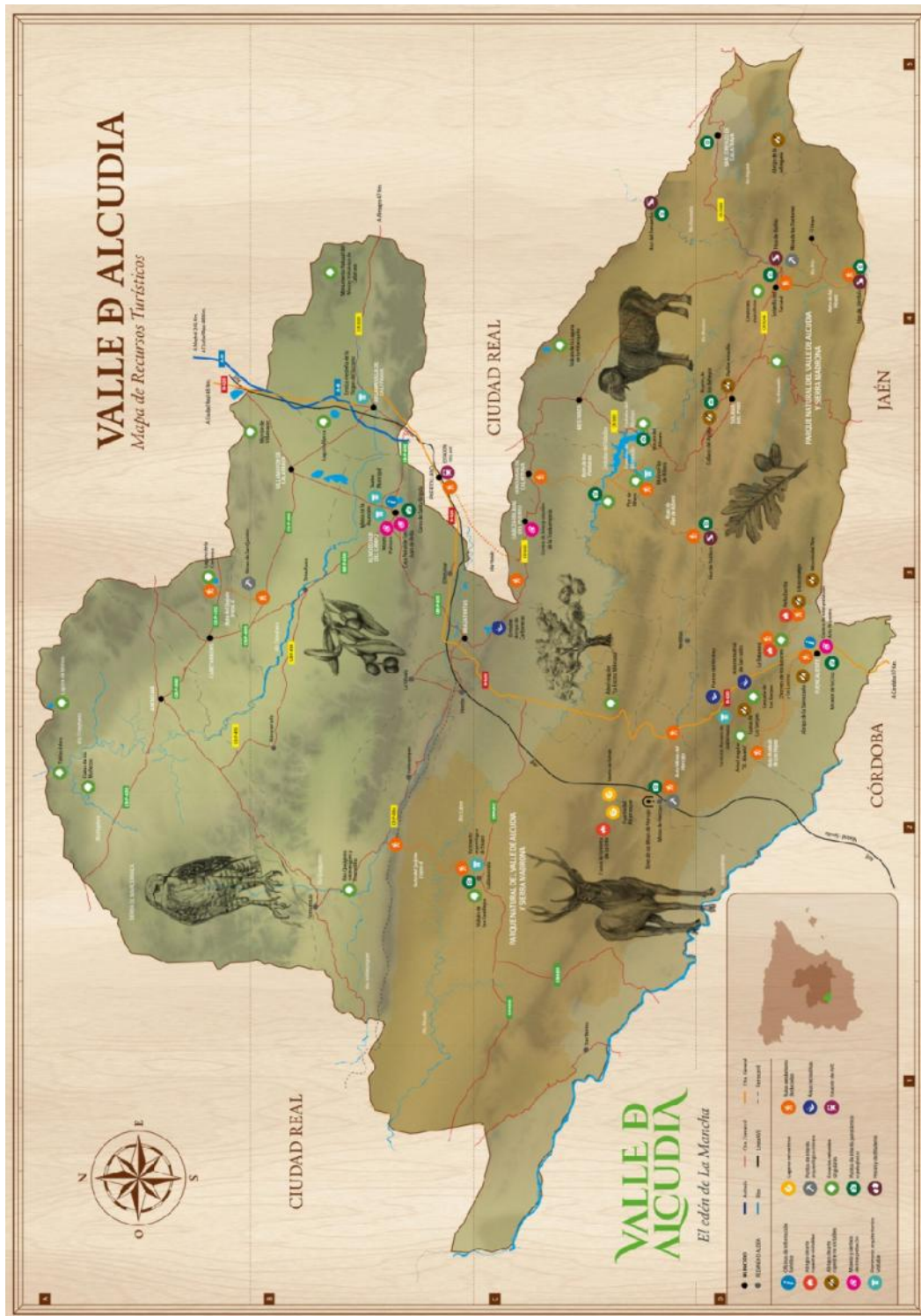
- European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).
- European Social Fund (ESF).
- European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

Financial EU Programme

LEADER 2014-2020

Appendix B

Cultural and Natural Heritage



Source: LAG “Asociación para el desarrollo sostenible del Valle de Alcudia y Sierra Madrona”

Appendix C

Process for Conducting in-depth interviews to key stakeholders

The following presents the process followed for conducting the in-depth interviews within Alcudia Valley and Madrona Mountain Range:

- 1) Plan
- 2) Develop instruments
- 3) Collect data
- 4) Analyze data
- 5) Disseminate findings

1. Plan

- Identify and list stakeholders who will be involved and interviewed

	Name and surname	Position	Interviewe date
1	María del Carmen González	Head Office at Alcudia Valley LAG	12 th May 2016
2	Mr. Juan Ruiz	Director of the Natural Park Alcudia Valley and Madrona Mountain Range	26 th May 2016
3	Ms. Ester Serrano	President of the “Ecotourism Regional Organization”	2 nd June 2016
4	Mr. David Oliver	President of the “Tourism Companies at Alcudia Valley and Madrona Mountain Range”	10 th June 2016
5	Mr. Vicente Luchena	NGO “Ecologistas en Acción”	20 th June 2016
6	Ms. Concha Sánchez	Owner of Rural house “Sisapo”	25 th June 2016
7	Mr. Antonio Martín	Partner of Madrona Activa company	26 th June 2016
8	Ms. María José Sendarrubias	Owner of Rural house “El nido de Alcudia”	10 th July 2016

- Information needed from each stakeholder
 - 1) Position
 - 2) Availability
 - 3) Place for the meetin
 - 4) Role at the destination
 - 5) Latest work and future prospects
 - 6) Perspective of the situation at the area of study
- Ethical research standards are ensured

2. Develop instruments

The following instructions were taken by the interviewer when developing the interview protocol:

- What to say to interviewees when setting up the interview?
- What to say to interviewees when beginning the interview, including informed consent and confidentiality of the interviewee
- What to say to interviewees when concluding the interview
- What to do during the interview

Interview guide was translated into Spanish

3. Collecting Data

Right after each interview the data was carefully edited. The protocol followed after each interview was as follows:

- a) Summarize key data immediately following the interview
- b) Verify information given in interviews as necessary (revising implemented tourism plans, laws and regulations, among other institutional documents)

4. Analyze the data collected

Transcription and review of data, was classified according to:

- a) Patterns or themes among the participants.
- b) Trying to group possible variety of themes.
- c) Responses that seem to have been given with enthusiasm, as opposed to those that participants answered in only a few words.

Appendix D

Stakeholder Interview Guide

The following interview guide was used as the research in-depth interview guide during the primary data collection among key stakeholders within the area of study (Alcudia Valley and Madrona Mountain Range). It contains an introduction (including the informed consent), a set of questions and closing comments.

<p>Introduction</p> <p>Key Components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Thank you ▪ My name ▪ Purpose ▪ Confidentiality ▪ Duration ▪ How interview will be conducted ▪ Opportunity for questions ▪ Signature of consent 	<p>I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today.</p> <p>My name is Nuria Mohedano and I would like to talk to you about your experiences as a key stakeholder in Alcudia Valley and Madrona Mountain Range. As one of the components of this tourism master thesis research, I am trying to assess how must be competitiveness addressed within small rural destinations, in order to capture lessons that can be used in future research.</p> <p>The interview will take approximately one hour. I will be taping the session because I do not want to miss any of your comments. Although I will be taking some notes during the session, I can't possibly write fast enough to get it all down. Because we are on tape, please be sure to speak up so that we do not miss your comments.</p> <p>All responses will be kept confidential. This means that your interview responses will only be shared with the tutor of the master thesis and the committee which will be review for grading it up. I will ensure that any information included within the report, will not identify you as a respondent. Please remember you do not have to talk about anything you do not want to and you may end the interview at any time.</p> <p>Are there any questions about what I have just explained? Are you willing to participate in this interview?</p> <p>Interviewee Witness Date</p>
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<p>Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No more than 12 questions ▪ Ask factual before opinion ▪ Use probes as needed 	<p>Q1: What strategies, interventions and tools are needed in the area to make it a distinguishable rural small scale tourism destination? Would you please give me some examples, if possible?</p> <p>Q2: Which of these strategies would you consider to be the key for competitiveness?</p> <p>Q3: To what extent did stakeholder participation would advance or hinder a competitiveness project?</p> <p>Q4: What worked well until today when trying to implement tourism?</p> <p>Q5: What strategies, interventions should be discontinued?</p> <p>Q6: What are the barriers, if any, that you encountered when trying to implement some tourism standards in the area?</p> <p>Q7: What is the relation between stakeholders in the area and how do you perceive the role of the community?</p> <p>Q8: How is the current state of the natural resources, and how do you think they should be used for a tourism goal?</p> <p>Q9: How is the current state of the natural resources, and how do you think they should be used for a tourism goal?</p> <p>Q10: What strategies should be implemented in order to preserve natural resources while position VA as a tourism destination?</p>
<p>Closing Key</p> <p>Components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Additional comments ▪ Next steps ▪ Thank you 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there anything more you would like to add? • I will be analyzing the information you and other stakeholders gave me and you could always ask for checking the process and final results of this research. I will be happy to send you a copy of the results from the research, if you are interested. • Thank you very much for your time and help.

Appendix E

Focus Group Guide

The purpose of the study is to conduct evaluative research to determine (in order of priority):

- Analyze the gap between requirements of tourism and characteristics of small-scale rural destinations
 - Which are the variables that affect or influence small scale rural destinations.
-

Before the group begun, the researcher conducted the informed consent process.

Introduction (10 m)

- Welcome participants and introduce yourself.
- Explain the general purpose of the discussion and why the participants were chosen.
- Discuss the purpose and process of the focus groups
- Explain the presence and purpose of recording equipment.
- Outline general ground rules and discussion guidelines such as the importance of everyone speaking up, talking one at a time, and being prepared for the moderator to interrupt to assure that all the topics can be covered.
- Review break schedule.
- Address the issue of confidentiality.
- Inform the group that information discussed is going to be analyzed as a whole and that participants' names will not be used in any analysis of the discussion.
- Read a protocol summary to the participants.

Discussion Guidelines:

I would like the discussion to be informal, so there's no need to wait for me to call on you to respond. In fact, I encourage you to respond directly to the comments other people make. If you don't understand a question, please let me know. I am here to ask questions, listen, and make sure everyone has a chance to share.

If we seem to be stuck on a topic, we may interrupt you and if you aren't saying much, we may call on you directly. If we do this, please don't feel bad about it; it's just our way of making sure we obtain everyone's perspective and opinion is included.

As discussed, we will be tape recording the discussion, because we don't want to miss any of your comments. No one outside of this room will have access to these tapes and they will be destroyed after our report is written.

Let's begin. Let's find out some more about each other by going around the room one at a time. Tell us your first name and the job you have and your role at Alcurdia valley and Madrona mountain range. I'll start.

Topic Generation (50-90 minutes)

The focus group facilitator will explain:

This group is convened to generate a comprehensive list of topics surrounding competitiveness at small scale rural destinations taking as an study case Alcurdia valley and Madrona mountain range. This focus group's task will be to generate a list of relevant topics and issues surrounding destination competitiveness. This will help us understand the issues a small scale rural destination faces.

The questions and topics:

- What comes to mind when you think about "being a competitive destination"?
- What are the main problems you face when trying to develop tourism strategies?
- What is in your opinion the difference between small scale destinations and positioned ones?

- Which indicators of the following suggest to you an appropriate tool to measure competitiveness?
- What are the main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of rural tourism at Alcudia valley and Madrona mountain range?

Record the topic list on the white board for reference and give constant prompts to make certain this is a complete list of potentially relevant topics.

Issues for focus group exploration:

- Perception that all participants knew what is competitiveness about, but not sure on how to measure.
- Opinions about the competitiveness of the area of study depends on the job position and area of work.
- Lack of awareness of competitiveness tool for small scale rural destinations.
- Ability to explain latent issues affecting the area of study and possible solutions.

Closing (10 m)

- Closing remarks
- Thank the participant

Annex F

Focus Group Report

This report presents the results from one focus group conducted the 15 of September with a group of 8 professionals and technicians involved in the destination Alcudia valley and Madrona mountain range.

The focus group was set up specifically to find out about small scale rural destinations competitiveness. Because the group was facilitated through personal and community liason, the participants were able to talk openly about how to approach competitiveness in the rural destination Alcudia valley and Madrona mountain range without concern about their identities being revelealed.

For the meeting, an agreed topic guide was used and the discussions were noted during the session. Respondents were assured that the final report would be written in such a way that views could not be attributed to individuals and participants were not expected to comment in detail on their personal circumstances.

Focus group major findings

- a) Majority of the surveyed stakeholders are more or less aware about the definition of competitiveness and sustainable tourism, though when asked about it, most of the surveyed participants find it difficult to clearly identify the main characteristics for small scale destinations.
- b) Most of the stakeholders highly evaluate being sustainable as a tourism competitiveness potential for their villages, though once it comes to specifying the resources the villages have to reach a competitiveness position among tourism rural market, they emphasize the lack of tools and human resources.
- c) The majority of the surveyed emphasize the importance of competitiveness for the future of the territory and the local community. As explained by them, it will result in

“positive impacts for the economy, local community, however hunter sector will be difficult to manage within a tourism competitiveness strategic plan”.

d) The regional government implementing different projects in the rural areas to support sustainable tourism development is deemed to be of great significance. All the participants agreed that the infrastructure in the village have to be improve: roads, water systems, waste management.

e) Public awareness and attitudes towards promotion of sustainable tourism is dramatically distinctive from one village to another as well as their awareness and attitude towards tourism development and the use of the public areas of the Natural Park. Once it comes to promoting the area and the potential of their territory only half of them believe on it. They seem to be well aware of the resources but they seem too very pessimistic when describing them.

f) Settle indicators for all the villages composing the whole area of study was defined by them as “almost impossible”. However as shown at the Key Factors figures in section four, focus group was able to design with the help of the researcher common indicators applicable to all villages involved.