



Contribution from Porrúa



THE IMPACT OF TOURISM ON SMALL TOWNS AND VILGES

Porrúa is located in the oriental area of Asturias in the North of Spain, where tourism is an important economical resort. In our region where there is only a few industry and where agriculture and cattle raising are not too productive, the rural tourism offer has had a spectacular growth in all the villages in the last years.

Our tourism is different from the rest of the country; we are in the green Spain, a place to rest and to enjoy nature. It's an area with the Cantabric sea around and near the Picos de Europa mountains with a National park and important prehistoric caves. Our slogan is: "Asturias Natural Paradise."

By chance, there isn't a massive tourism yet but it is only in the holidays season, and that origins many temporary jobs and that makes people arrange and work both in two different works, farmer and catering business. It is still a new sector which has his principal problem in lack resources and adequate infrastructure, though little by little they get better. Mostly in the summer, essentially in August, our calm life becomes a tourists and cars invasion. Population in our area is multiplied by ten. That's why our problem is the adequate infrastructure lack, with the preoccupation of keeping a quality offer that doesn't result easy.

It's interesting to comment that years ago only emigrants, specially those who lived in Latin America (Cuba, Mexico, Venezuela), were visiting us and thanks to them started the present touristy offer. Their role has been very important, they kept our traditional festivity and folklore which are now an important attractive in our cultural offer for tourists.

From a regional and little tourism, almost familial, we became in the last decade an important national reference and little by little international, where we don't specially offer nice weather but an important natural landscape ideal for rest and enjoy nature.

That's why villages like Porrúa have evolved towards rural tourism; little houses have been reformed in the last years to lodge people from big cities looking for calmness. If Spain is one of the most important destinations for European people, Asturias is a reference for national tourists who run away from massive tourism. Spain is a place where it is very hot in the summer, and it is difficult to sleep, and our temperatures are moderate and make easy resting.

One of the specialities offered with natural tourism is active tourism, activities like canoe in the rivers, speleology, routes on horses, or trekking allowing people meeting with nature. However this generates new problems and incompatibilities because of an use not always adequate; while farmers are nature conservative, massive tourism provokes degradation if there isn't a serious and restrictive control.

Some other times unforeseen catastrophes happen like last winter the oil tanker Prestige that has affected the entire Cantabric coast including our area and with a terrible impact in the Galician region, this mishap can still be seen in spite of the important cleaning work and the solidarity of many people; our wish is to recover ourselves as soon as it will be possible and that marine nature will be able to recover itself adequately. Today thousands tons of petrol are still in the sea and we don' t know what can happen; this experience has been very negative and all the population requires "NEVER MORE"

Another consequence of massive tourism is the construction of big residential areas, like those we can see in the Mediterranean coast. That' s why in our region the main political debate is the urbanism an edification norms and inclusive these norms have been annulated by the Spanish parliament. This problem is especially important in the coastal villages where tourism is the main economical resort and where we can see growing big residential housing development all around, this is not yet the problem in Porrúa where cattle- raising has been traditionally the main economical resort and where fortunately this problem hasn' t been stated yet.

Conservation of natural spaces, in this case the beaches, is very important too. That' s why there are ecologists and conservationists movements, opposite to the important speculation provoked by a massive tourism development, and there are confronts too because the neighbours haven' t always answers to their needs and to the improvement c their infrastructures.

Our big dilemma is to know if tourism is the solution for the big crisis that our farmers are still supporting or if we should let urbanism and second residences grow while our villages are getting old and keeping their population with difficulties. This is a controversial question that makes serious opinion confronts, but can be solved with a sustainable development politic always respectful with environment. It' s interesting to point out that many farmers from Porrúa work also in the construction sector.

At last, the tourism increase has favoured cultural exchanges and new initiatives development This has been the case of Porrúa with the creation of the Ethnographic Museum that doesn' t only try to investigate and recover our popular culture but also to offer more leisure opportunities to tourists. We can point out too the pictorial work of an important Spanish artist Agustin Ibarrola who has painted the concrete cubes of the port of Llanes called now ' The Memory cubes" and where different elements from our culture and local personality are symbolized.p

Finally, our wish is to make good use of tourism not only considering its negative aspects which can be very dangerous but learning more of mistakes made in other areas, and finding a sustainable economic development in the touristy sector, that will allow us to preserve our environment as an attraction and our future in the villages.

We almost have had the Easter week, and you can believe me in Spain there are more things to see than religious processions though these are an important touristy element. At last, we hope that English tourists coming with the ferries from Plymouth and Portsmouth that usually visit us in May and June will be able to go on coming for many years.