Chapter 16

Scenarios for a Smart Tourism Destination Transformation:
The Case of Cordoba, Spain

Robert Germain Lanquar
Cordoba Horizontes, Spain

ABSTRACT

Reluctance and even resistance for the city transformation into a smart tourism destination (STD) may occur on the edge field of smart systems, even if over time, often with political changes, this resistance breaks down. This situation is occurring in Cordoba (Spain) which held the record of four inscriptions in the World Heritage Lists granted by UNESCO. The concept of smart tourism is recent. As a research domain, it is only emerging. So, few analyses and case studies were elaborated on it. This chapter shows how this reluctance is coming from stakeholders and how the transformation of Cordoba into a smart destination can be made harmoniously. Three scenarios are possible for this transformation either following actual tendencies or looking for two other paths, the green one or the intercultural one; how it could be done and its impacts on the City and the Province of Cordoba’s economy, society, culture, and environment.

INTRODUCTION

Cordoba has insufficient economic growth. Agriculture and tourism are its main activities. This Andalusian city loses its population with 328,547 inhabitants in 2010 and 325,916 in 2018. Cordoba finds more and more challenges for global issues such as unemployment, digital divide, inequalities and poverty, but also for its environmental problems as energy inefficiency and waste management.

Cordoba rides the wave that raises Spanish tourism, reaching in 2018 the record number of 82.6 million arrivals of international visitors, that places Spain in the 2nd world rank. In addition, Cordoba’s tourism was improved by an accentuated return of domestic tourism: the Spaniards who begin to recover from the crisis of the years 2008-2014 (OECD, 2018). The World Economic Forum gives to Spain the first place for tourism in terms of global competitiveness. Moreover, Cordoba and its Province have not

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-2112-0.ch016
reached in 2018 the record of 2017, attracting 1 181 279 visitors (INE, January 2019), i.e. - 4.27% less than the previous year and 1 956 159 nights, i.e. 2.12% less. The main objectives of Cordoba Municipal Tourism Institute (IMTUR) are to increase the number of nights and to fight seasonality. No policy seems to emerge in favor of a transformation into a smart tourism destination. The massification perceived as overtourism begins to be obvious, especially during the spring season with the “Festival of the Cruces de Mayo” and the “Festival of the Patios Cordobeses”. No strategy was developed to manage it.

Cordoba is an inner tourist destination that has not benefited from Spanish mass tourism based on the “Sun, Sea and Sand” coastal model. The climate factor, with temperature frequently exceeding 35-40 ° from mid-June to mid-September, drives the City and its Province to limit the tourist season from March to mid-June and from mid-September to December. Two pillars are the main selling propositions: the sites and monuments of the two UNESCO Lists of World Heritage, tangible and intangible, and the gastronomy based on its renowned agri-food production. Four inscriptions in the World Heritage Lists are granted: the Mosque-Cathedral (1984), the historical quarter surrounding it (1994), the Festival of the Patios (Courtyards) (2012) and the Caliphal city of Medina Azahara (2018). In addition, with the rest of Spain, Cordoba shares the titles of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity awarded to Flamenco (2010) and the Mediterranean Diet (2013). Nevertheless, despite some municipal and entrepreneurial initiatives, no holistic strategy has really been put in place for the digital transformation until 2019.

The notion of Smart Tourism Destination (STD)

The concept of smart city finds its origin in the 1990s to foster economic, social and environmental prosperity. It flourished significantly after 2007 according to Hollands (2008). The perception of smart tourism appeared as a major component of a smart city around 2010. As underlines by Gretzel (2011) as well as by Boes, Buhalís & Inversini (2016), the concept emerges from the rapid development of ICT and the goings-on of the smart cities: “With technology being embedded on all organizations and entities, destinations will exploit synergies between ubiquitous sensing technology and their social components to support the enrichment of tourist experiences” (Buhalís 2014). UNWTO, the World Tourism Organization, a United Nations Agency dedicated to tourism, considered smart tourism destinations from 2012 (UNWTO 2012). It organized two international seminars, the first in Murcia in 2017, the second in Oviedo in 2018 with the strong assistance of SEGITTUR.

Spain is one of the first European countries focusing on smart tourist destinations. Since 2008, SEGITTUR, the State Enterprise for the Management of Innovation and Tourism Technologies, under the supervision of the Ministry of Energy, Tourism and Digital Agenda, supports professionals and the Spanish public sector, especially local authorities, to develop the use of ICT, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Big Data and Internet of Things (IoT), to enhance their competitiveness. On smart destinations, SEGITTUR (2018) works in connection with the CTN178 Committee of AENOR, the Spanish Association for Standardization and Certification for creating effective norms in accordance with ISO international standards, especially for the management and processing of databases (big data or open data) around four characteristics (volume, speed, veracity and variety) that will be used by these destinations.