



Vol 7, Nº 17 (diciembre/desembro 2014)

**THE ROLE OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES TO RESEARCH CONSOLIDATED
TOURIST ATTRACTIONS: THE CASE OF THE MUMMY MUSEUM,
GUANAJUATO, MEXICO.**

Dr. Rafael Guerrero Rodríguez¹

Dr. Agustín Ruiz Lanuza²

Abstract

In recent decades, tourism phenomenon is playing a more decisive role in social, economic, functional and territorial terms. Tourist destinations are continuously working to maintain a position in the world market, adapting their products and services to the emerging needs of the demand. In that sense, great efforts are being made to take advantage of the resources at their hand (natural and cultural). Over the years, tourism practices have been diversified leading to the emergence of new management forms that complement the traditional “sun, sand and sea” product, and thus expanding the scope. The best example of the former are the so called “heritage destinations”; these are cities with relevant historical heritage reflected in monumental landmarks (such as

¹ PhD in Development Studies, full-time researcher at the Universidad de Guanajuato, México; email: guerrerorafael1@gmail.com.

² Doctor en Geografía Humana, full-time researcher at the Universidad de Guanajuato, México; email: arlanuza@hotmail.com.

monuments, museums, architecture, etc.), that have played a key role in the creation of cultural tourism.

The cities designated by UNESCO as “World Heritage Cities” have become the main reference of this sort of tourism. Among these, Guanajuato stands out in Mexico since 1988, meeting the four criteria related to its wonderful landscape, its location, the heritage of past mining activities, and its overwhelming Baroque architecture. Nowadays, Guanajuato welcomes more than 1,300,000 visitors every year, lured by the heritage attractions, such as the case of the *Museo de las Momias* (Museum of the mummies), which possess more than 35 years of history, contributes with 10% of the total revenue of the city and receives approximately 600,000 visitors per year (Ruiz, 2013).

This article analyses and reflects on the role of new technologies to investigate the conflicts experienced by the visitors to this Museum. The former involves a series of issues related to the mismanagement of flows of visitors, carrying capacity, visitor experience, and so on. Through the application of both, qualitative and quantitative research techniques, this study sheds some light on important issues of this case, not only in terms of tourist attraction’s management, but also -and perhaps more importantly- the destination management as a whole. The main conclusion is that new technologies can contribute not only to better understand the issues behind the management of tourist attractions but also to generate useful information for decision-makers to devise appropriate strategies that improve the visitor experience.

Key words: Heritage, Management, Mexico, Technologies, Tourism.

El papel de las nuevas tecnologías para investigar atractivos turísticos consolidados: el caso del Museo de las Momias, Guanajuato, México.

Resumen

En tiempos recientes, el fenómeno del turismo está jugando un rol más decisivo en lo que se refiere a aspectos sociales, económicos, funcionales y territoriales. Los destinos turísticos están trabajando de manera continua para mantener su posición en el mercado global, adaptando sus

productos y servicios a las nuevas demandas de los clientes contemporáneos. En este sentido, se realizan grandes esfuerzos para aprovechar todos los recursos disponibles (naturales y culturales). A través de los años, las prácticas turísticas se han diversificado al punto de dar origen a nuevas formas de gestión de destinos que complementen los productos tradicionales de sol y playa, expandiendo de esta manera la cobertura de segmentos. El mejor ejemplo de lo anterior se puede atestiguar en los llamados “destinos patrimoniales”, que son ciudades con importante contenido histórico que se normalmente se refleja en monumentos icónicos (como Iglesias, parques, museos, etc), y que han dado origen al segmento del turismo cultural.

Las ciudades designadas por la UNESCO como “Ciudades Patrimonio” se han convertido en la referencia principal del segmento de turismo cultural. Entre estas, se encuentra Guanajuato desde el año 1988, cumpliendo con cuatro criterios relacionados a su paisaje, su ubicación, el patrimonio histórico relacionado a las actividades mineras y su arquitectura espectacular. Este destino turístico recibe aproximadamente 1,300,000 visitantes cada año atraídos por su atractivos principales como el caso del Museo de las Momias, que posee más de 35 años de historia y contribuye con aproximadamente 10% del total del ingreso de la ciudad a través de más de 600,000 visitantes por año (Ruiz, 2013).

Este artículo analiza y reflexiona sobre el rol de las nuevas tecnologías en el ejercicio de investigar los conflictos experimentados por los visitantes a este Museo. Lo anterior esta relacionado a una serie de problemas de administración, capacidad de carga, experiencia del visitante, entre muchas otras. A través de la aplicación de técnicas cualitativas y cuantitativas, este estudio aporta información relevante acerca de la naturaleza de estos problemas, no solo en términos de la gestión del atractivo, sino también -y quizá más importante- de la gestión del destino en su totalidad. La conclusión principal es que las nuevas tecnologías contribuyen no solo al mejor entendimiento detrás de la gestión de atractivos como el Museo sino también a generar información relevante para los que toman decisiones para el diseño de estrategias apropiadas que mejoren de manera sustancial la experiencia del visitante.

Palabras clave: Patrimonio, Gestión, México, Tecnología, Turismo.

1. INTRODUCTION

The background of this study is based on the main findings of the doctoral thesis denominated "Dynamics and Structure of a Heritage Tourism Destination: the case of Guanajuato" (Ruiz, 2010) as well as previous research projects involving researchers from the *Universidad Complutense de Madrid*, *Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo* and the *Universidad de Guanajuato*. These projects focused their attention to analyse and describe the different ways in which heritage destinations are managed in the context of Mexico and Spain. These studies reflect that one of the main components of tourist destinations is the cultural factor, turning sites such as museums, churches, mines, buildings, etc, into the main attraction for visitors. According to Jansen-Verbeke (1986), these elements of the local landscape become a leisure product -directly or indirectly- for both, residents and visitors, due to their high heritage content expressed in tangible and intangible ways.

The results presented in this article stem from a research project denominated "The management of major monumental cultural resources for tourism in Guanajuato", focusing the attention on one of the main tourist attractions of the city of Guanajuato; that is the renowned *Museo de las Momias* (Mummy Museum)³. The main interest in this research was to investigate the prevailing managerial characteristics in this museum with the objective of evaluating these with regards to the local tourism development.

A common feature of tourism-related visits is that tourists do not possess previous knowledge of the places they gaze. According to De la Calle (2006), the relevance that these places acquire is associated with informal promotional processes that materialises in a greater significance over time. It has to be noted that not all cultural assets are designed or prepared for tourism visitation. Although most of the occasions, tourism constitutes the main survival strategy of these places, an overload of its use can severely deteriorate them, leading to the rapid exhaustion and trivialisation of destinations (Troncoso and Almirón, 2005). In many cases, new mobility patterns emerge from introducing specific temporalities and multi-spacial practices i.e. more places are visited but the

³ Website available at <http://www.momiasdeguanajuato.gob.mx/>

length of stay is reduced and often limited to a short visit leading the transit of tourists towards a different destination (Cazes, 1996)

A survey was designed to collect qualitative and quantitative data in this research. This questionnaire was applied to a sample of tourists who visited the Mummy Museum of Guanajuato City during the Easter holiday in March 2013. For this purpose, new technologies were employed such as data collection in the cloud, tablets and other electronic devices to investigate mobility issues. The results of this research strategy allowed us to identify the main problems experienced by the Museum related to different aspects (organisational, interpretative, managerial, promotional, etc). The identification of these problems helped the research team to trace the management process as well as to reflect on possible solutions in the short and medium term. The main objective was to contribute to the construction of a better experience to visitors of the museum as well as to achieve some development goals at the local level.

2. CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT

Cultural destinations are understood as those territories offering an important number of heritage attractions able to fulfil the expectations of their visitors (Brito, 2010). Leiper (1990) pointed out that tourist attractions represent cohesive elements between destinations and visitors and being decisive in the construction of a positive perception of tourism experience. Nowadays destinations are experiencing profound transformations that force existent offer to reconfigure management strategies in order to respond to the current demand, characterised by more autonomous and active tourists. The former implies the emergence of new tourism management forms capable to solve different issues related to territorial concentration, product diversification, commercialisation, just to mention some examples (Reyes and Barrado, 2005).

Cultural attractions, such as historical museums, are becoming more relevant in the consolidation of cultural destinations since they epitomize important local identity features (Chinchilla, 2007). In many occasions, these types of attractions turn into differentiation elements helping in this way to transform the identities of destinations as well as their functioning and management dynamics. Most of these entities focus their efforts exclusively in conservation issues without taking into account the

tourism consumption processes that may lead to the trivialisation of heritage. This is a special issue in cultural destinations since the main tourism product is linked to the preservation of heritage and the issues related to its correct management. In this sense, Minguez (2013) points out three management objectives of heritage attractions for tourism purposes: 1) to secure heritage conservation in the collection; 2) to secure a satisfactory experience of visitors under a sustainable framework due to the fragility of the resource, and; 3) to secure profits in order to face the managerial costs of the attraction.

Guanajuato can be considered a consolidated destination in spite of its short existence. Ruiz (2010) affirms that this destination has reached a maturity stage according to its evolutionary dynamics. Guanajuato receives almost two million of visitors per year and 80% out of these are motivated to gaze and consume cultural tourism products linked to the local and national heritage (SECTUR-GTO, 2013).

One of the main attractions in Guanajuato is the Museo de las Momias (The Mummy Museum from now on) that possess more than 35 years of history, contributes with 10% of the total revenue of the city and receives approximately 600,000 visitors per year (Ruiz, 2013). Given the economic and social relevance of this attraction, the interest of this research was focused to learn more about its tourism dynamics and management processes. As a consolidated attraction in this destination, one might assume that management issues should be minor and intervention not necessary. However, was this the case? If not, how could it be effectively investigated?

3. HYPOTHESIS

The main hypothesis of this research was that consolidated cultural attractions, such as the Mummy Museum, present profound operational and managerial deficiencies in spite of being renowned elements of the tourism product. Nowadays, heritage managers face the great challenge of creating a sustainable management environment to achieve economic, social and environmental outcomes. No doubt that consolidated cultural attractions often contribute to shape the preference of the visitors, turning these into tourism landmarks that often eclipse other social, functional and historical elements of the destination. In this sense, we consider a continuous planning and managerial

strategy crucial to make these attractions a key factor in the process of destination development, enabling the assemblage and preservation of an attractive tourism product.

4. OBJECTIVES

- To reflect on the characterisation of tourism attractions such as the Mummy Museum.
- To devise a methodological route to describe current management practices at different levels, identifying the main actors in this resource.
- To explore the situation experienced in the museum, identifying the main effects generated by tourism dynamics.
- To study the functionality, operation and main problems experienced in this space through the use of new technologies available at the present.
- To analyse the main implications on the functioning of destinations and attractions that are part of the high influx of visitors and sketch some conclusions aimed to identify its benefits and some of its negative impacts.

5. METHODOLOGY

The primary interest of the research group was to analyse those social, economic and demographic characteristics of the visitors to this museum. The research group was interested to know the main features of the general profile such as the average age, nationality, place of residence, education, gender, average income, etc. In addition to this profile, this research wanted to explore the mobility patterns as well as to learn more about the level of satisfaction of both, the museum and the destination visitation. It should be noted that most of the analysed methodological frameworks, including the proposal of this research team, are in line with the recommendations made by the World Tourism Organization in its study "International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics" (UNWTO, 2008: 25-40).

Following the former, a survey was designed in order to collect the proposed information, formulating 25 questions which were framed into three main themes:

- Social, economic and demographic profile of the visitor.
- Expenditure composition.
- Visitor satisfaction levels.

The first section of the questionnaire was related to explore general aspects of the interviewee such as sex, age, place of residence, motivation for travel, type of lodging, stay projected, mobility within the destination and travel group conformation. The second section of the questionnaire focused on the expenditure composition, investigating the main categories within the whole travel stay. The third section of the questionnaire was composed by a sequence of questions within an evaluation matrix of different variables such as accessibility, safety, public services perception, among many others. The fourth section of the questionnaire was related with the perception of the destination and a general evaluation of promotional campaigns. Finally, the last section of the questionnaire focused the attention to the social and economic aspects of the interviewee such as his/her education, marital status, occupation, income, and average travel intentions in the short term.

The availability of human resources was a constant concern for the research team because a budget to pay for data collection services was not considered. The participation of the people involved in the project entirely depended on their willingness and interest.

The fieldwork involved a total of 27 individuals: seven researchers and twenty students from different semesters from the Bachelor of Tourism Resources Management of the University of Guanajuato. This process included the development of six major phases: 1) design of the instrument, 2) team training, 3) pilot test of the instrument, 4) collection of information, 5) presentation of preliminary results, and, 6) integration of results in a technical report. It is important to note that students involved in this research participated only in phases 2, 3, 4 and 5, while the research team did in all phases.

The training process was in charge of the research team and this activity took place prior to the fieldwork phase. In a series of meetings, the proposed instrument was delivered to the students in order to familiarise them with both, the purpose of the investigation as well as to the final structure of the questionnaire. As a result of these interactions, different suggestions were adopted by the students to improve the content of the instrument derived from the discussion of different scenarios.

A trial period of data collection was called "pilot". This pilot phase aimed to observe the operation of the instrument in practice and to identify potential problems during its implementation. The survey team was divided into four sub-groups: two groups working during the first week (March 22 to March 31), while the remaining two groups worked the second (April 1 to April 10). There were two shifts per day: one with hours from 10am to 2pm and the second from 2pm to 6pm.

This information was recorded by the research team and then discussed in several meetings, recognising the great value of the different narratives to the better understanding of the research process

The research design included a strategy for incorporating new **Information and Communication Technologies** (ICTs) into the research process. This included the design of a virtual questionnaire platform available in the "cloud" and accessible to any mobile and stationary device with Internet access. The objective of this strategy was to replace a paper-based survey and thus reduce costs associated with printing, capturing, encoding and storage of instruments. For that reason, the research team acquired a total of 13 mobile devices (tablets with Android operating system) so they could be used as the main tool for data collection. In addition to these devices, four mobile phones with IOS and Android operating systems were used, helping to test the flexibility of the platform chosen by the research team.

Regarding the issue of Internet access, the research team formally asked the Museum to use their service as well as the installation of a local wireless network to extend the signal at the entrance and exit areas of the museum where the survey was conducted. Two routers and 50 meters of cable to complete the communication circuit were acquired for this purpose.

The information and subsequent analysis of collected data was concentrated within the technological platform chosen by the research team (cloud), allowing an automatic data storage with an accurate record of the user, including time and date of completion of questionnaires. Similarly, the platform allowed the generation of a database that could be worked automatically in any spreadsheet program. For the integration of the database, the research team used the Microsoft Excel program, processing and analysing the collected data through different tests of descriptive statistics.

Regarding to the codification process of open-ended responses, it was carried out manually after the identification and grouping of major themes in these responses. The relevance of these responses was estimated according to their representation in the sample.

A total of 6,045 questionnaires were recorded in this process, analysing 2,538. Out of these, 1,037 were oriented to study the visitor profile (social, economic and demographic and composition of spending) and 1,401 were oriented to evaluate the visitor satisfaction.

Regarding to the investigation of tourists' mobility in the Museum, several infrared devices were installed within the Museum halls in order to measure visitor numbers, room density and mobility. These devices were programmed to report any movement in the Museum between 9am and 7pm (open hours). The produced data was collected on a daily basis and uploaded in the cloud platform. For space reasons, the results of this data collection strategy are not discussed in this paper; these will be part of a new article upcoming next year.

6. THE CASE OF THE MUMMY MUSEUM

The Mummy Museum is located in the *Trozado* Hill, next to Santa Paula Municipal cemetery. The Santa Paula cemetery is a magical place with a mysterious atmosphere, and the beauty of its niches, tombs and mausoleums transport the visitor in time and space, capturing the imagination of the wary and incredulous. From its inner depths come the mummified bodies that are exhibited in the Mummy Museum of Guanajuato. On June 9th, 1865, to the amazement of the gravediggers, the mummified body of Remigio Leroy, a French doctor, was exhumed from the niche 214 of the

cemetery's first series. This body was the first and therefore the most ancient of the Guanajuato Mummy Museum's collection. In the early days, visits to the catacombs of the Santa Paula cemetery to observe the mummified bodies were informal and clandestine. This practice detonated a growing interest of visitors who were attracted by mysticism and curiosity. Over the years, more bodies were found and a format of organised visit emerged, giving birth to the museum which based its operation on the exhibition of these mummified forms. Considering the former, this museum opened its doors during the 20th Century and although it was not planned or prepared to receive visitors, it began its operations.

Nowadays, the Mummy Museum exhibits more than 100 corps extracted from the Santa Paula cemetery, and constitutes one of the main tourist attractions of the city of Guanajuato. It is important to note that the Mummy Museum is considered a must-see attraction not only at the local but also at the national and international levels, attracting visitors from all over the world. The current exhibition includes an introductory video displaying images that give some meaning to visitors about the death for Mexicans and their way of accepting it.

These mummified bodies have also generated great scientific interest, leading to the conduction of several studies attempting to explain the causes of this dehydration process which by the way, is completely different to the other known mummification processes in the world (for example Egypt) because these bodies were unintentionally preserved through a natural process.

7. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The visitor profile of this museum has an average age of 36 years, possessing university education, most of them married and dedicated to work on the private sector, reporting an average income of 12 to 36 thousand Mexican pesos (940-2,800 US Dollars). It is important to note that this profile reflects only general characteristics and is based on the average response, however, the construction of statistics showed significant variations according to the category under analysis.

The percentage representation of male and female respondents obeyed a principle of gender equity, reporting a total of 570 surveys of 567 men and women respectively. The main travel

motivations were "rest / recreation" with a significant 89% response, "visiting family / friends" with 9% and the third to "business / employment purposes" with a 1% response.

The main types of accommodation refer to "hotel" (44% of total responses) and "house of relatives and friends" (10% of total responses). These percentages acquire more relevance when 41% of travelers are excluded due to the absence of accommodation within the destination, an issue that was grouped into the category of "excursionists".

In this study, the Distrito Federal was identified as the main origin of tourists with 18% of response. The second origin is the state of Guanajuato with a significant 17%. Other visitor origins are: the State of Mexico, Queretaro, Michoacan, Nuevo Leon, Jalisco and Coahuila. With the exception of the State of Mexico, the justification in the representation of the other states seems to have its explanation in the geographical proximity to the state of Guanajuato.

The results of the penetration levels of marketing strategies for the promotion of this destination show a significant representation of informal means of dissemination of information such as the "recommendation" (38%) and "family / friends" (22%). One thing that is important to note in this question is the important role that electronic marketing is acquiring through Internet platforms.

The loyalty theme to the destination usually is estimated according to the number of times a tourist visits a particular destination. The results of this study show that 58% of respondents had previously visited this destination. The last section of the questionnaire focused on knowing a little more about their motivation for visiting the destination in particular. To do the former, the research team designed two simple open questions about what the visitor the most liked and least liked features. Since Guanajuato is a distinctively cultural destination, responses were directed mostly to the appreciation of architecture, museums, and historical monuments in general. It is important to note that the response of the "Museum of the Mummies" reached a significant 3% on its own, an issue which confirms the high value of this attraction for the destination. In contrast, the responses of the least liked mainly focused on issues of infrastructure and public services. The main issues that emerged were accessibility, waste management, regulation of tourist services and more effective strategies for mobility within the city, as these aspects appear to be significantly affecting the image

of this destination. The main results of the characterisation of visitor profile are summarised in

Table 1.

Item	%	Responses
Marital status	22	Single
	76	Married
	2	Alone
Sex	50	Men
	50	Woman
Travel Motivation	89	Cultural motivation
	9	Others
Kind of tourist	41	Visitors
	59	Tourist
How day meet the destination	65	Recomendation
	12	Internet
	23	Others
The Best of destination	33	Architecture
	16	Attractions
	51	Everything
Destination Grade	38	Excellent
	56	Good
	5	Regular

Table 1. Visitor profile.

Source: Own elaboration.

In terms of visitor satisfaction, the response "good" is the constant but the research group believes that this is very ambiguous and should be treated as a neutral response because does not reflect the reality that is going on surrounding the museum. Participatory observation techniques were

relevant for this research group to reach this conclusion. The former helped to verify and constantly contrast the information obtained through the survey.

In terms of the evaluation of services in the museum, the "Good" response dominates, however interviewees often expressed their discontent outside the interview frame. This issue was extremely relevant for the research team in terms of data interpretation. Regarding safety issues, facilities and organisation, respondents showed an indifferent attitude, as these aspects were not considered important issues directly affecting the whole tourism experience according to the respondents. The available information of the Museum and the destination as a whole was considered scarce and somehow irrelevant in general terms. Likewise, the resource-price ratio was not viewed by many respondents as fair. Most of respondents felt they overpaid for the service provided, because they were forced to visit the museum in groups, and have to pay for extra services such as photography, video recording permits and car park facilities.

The recommendations from museum visitors were multiple and correlated with the evaluation of services. The visitors stressed the need of higher quality in terms of information, facilities and the entrance fee. Another issue that was not mentioned by the interviewees but that was identified by the research team was the problem of exceeding the carrying capacity especially in holiday seasons. The museum clearly exceeds the number of visitors in a ratio of 3-1 generating unmanageable queues and extending waiting time, which leads to hire more staff as well as to increase the time of the visit without necessarily investing in better contents in the museum.

The general conclusion is that a better management is imperative in this museum despite of relevance as tourist attraction. How important is this museum for the city? The natural response is: extremely important if not crucial. In the words of the current director of this museum, it has an annual influx of 600,000 visitors and generates over 20 million pesos of revenue (1.5 million US Dollars).

Positive valuation	Regular Valaution	Negative Valaution
Experience in the attraction	Museum Facilities	Employee service
Security	Mainteinance	Restrooms, Information
Cost	Small Groups	Parking
Original	More Mommies	Queues

Table 2. Destination evaluation.

Source: Own elaboration.

8. CONCLUSIONS

Regarding to the practical aspects, this study presents some important contributions. One of them is the **use and application of new ICTs** in the process of design, data collection and processing of information. The fact of taking advantage of the technological resources available at the time, not only represents an option but also a priority given the difficult economic conditions to conduct exploratory tourism studies in Mexico and elsewhere.

In addition to reduce the costs of processing of information, ICTs contributed to a better planning and control over all the resources used in a research exercise. For this reason, it is believed that the transition from traditional forms of research towards the use of ICT is both desirable and irreversible.

In management aspects of the museum, the research team identified the following issues:

- Current geographical location of the museum presents important growth and development limitations in the short and medium term.
- Visitors experience is increasingly unsatisfactory due to the lack of attention to managerial issues such as waiting time to enter and visit the museum.
- Better interpretation and rejuvenation of contents within the collection need to be considered in order to secure the interest of visitors in the near future.

- Lack of investment from local authorities might jeopardize the future of the museum as tourist attraction.

It is important to note that these are only some the issues that require immediate attention; nevertheless this research identified other important issues that will need some sort of intervention in the medium and long term that could guarantee the permanence of the museum as a major tourist attraction. We include some recommendations in this regard:

- To strengthen public support to diversify the local market utilising the museum as a development platform.
- To improve staff service, heritage interpretation and the construction of an integral cost.
- To reallocate the museum to a more accessible part of the city considering that the cemetery is not significant for the visitors. This might open the possibility to improve the facilities and provide more services for visitors.
- To create and operate an electronic mechanism to sell and control admissions through the web.
- To control the flux of visitors through new mobility frameworks in order to enhance the experience of visitors
- To regulate the formal and informal trade surrounding the museum through the elaboration of a business plan, considering the achievement of local development goals.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all Museum personnel for the facilities provided to carry out this research. Likewise, we wish to thank all the students that participated in this process.

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