

# HERITAGE AS A DRIVING FORCE FOR THE SOCIOECONOMIC REVITALIZATION OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF EUROPEAN POLICIES. A PROPOSAL FOR TOURISM-BASED ACTIONS AND SUB-ACTIONS

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In order to identify actions and sub-actions that explain the relationship between heritage and tourism within the context of the European Union (EU), it is necessary to know which framework they are included in and the principles that drive their development for the European programming currently in progress (2014-2020).

The European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIFs) are the EU's main source of investment for helping Member States to re-establish and increase growth and to guarantee a recovery that generates employment, while also ensuring sustainable development, in line with the aims and application of the Europe 2020 Strategy (European Commission, 2010). One of the thematic objectives<sup>1</sup> of this strategy is 6) *Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency*, which is directly related with the aim of this study.

These objectives are reflected in the Partnership Agreements that are established at national and regional levels and which also include a series of strategic goals and a number of investment priorities (programmes) for each State (fig.1).

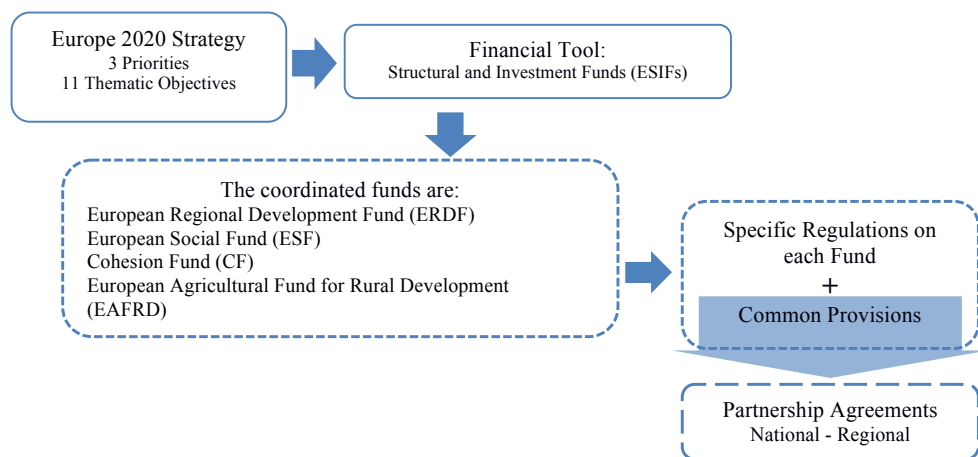
The Partnership Agreement with Spain 2014-2020 (Ministerio de Hacienda y Administraciones Públicas, 2014), with regard to goal 6, includes a series of proposals referring to natural and cultural heritage and to biodiversity. Thus, on the subject of heritage it talks about investing in infrastructures oriented towards the protection and improvement of heritage

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1 Regulation EU No 1303/2013 on the Common Provisions on the ESI Funds.

for public use, and promoting local development processes based on the enhancement of that heritage, with special emphasis on the network of rural roads. As far as biodiversity is concerned, priority is given to the application of the environmental policies in relation to protection and conservation and, more particularly, special attention is paid to the Natura 2000 network. The implementation of these issues is assigned indicatively at the national level to the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

Figure 1  
 DIAGRAM OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE EUROPEAN FUNDS IN THE EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY

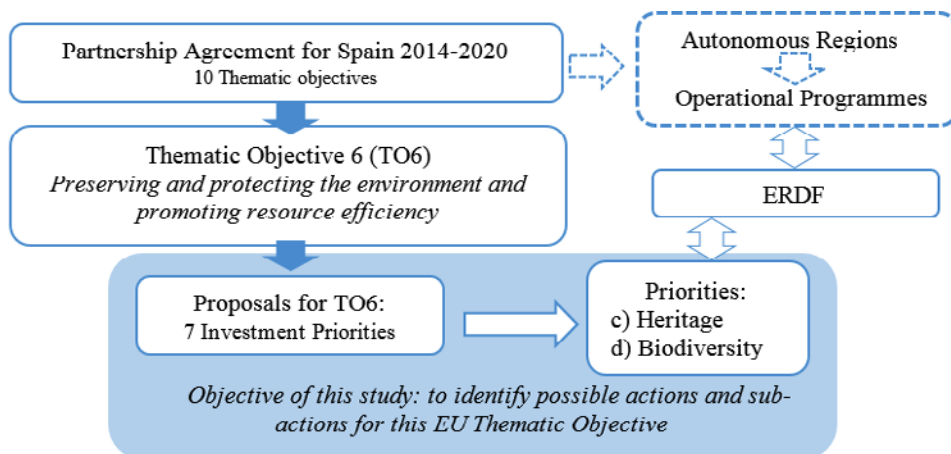


In parallel to the Partnership Agreement, the Autonomous Regions have drawn up their own Operational Programmes, which set out the strategic lines to be developed and the proposals for investment based on a diagnosis of the region's socioeconomic situation.

Regulation (EU) No 1301/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), develops the specific provisions concerning the type of activities that can be financed with this fund. Among them (Fig. 1), it is significant the Investment Priority c, which focuses on *conserving, protecting, promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage, as well as priority d, which deals with protecting and restoring biodiversity and soil and promoting ecosystem services, including through Natura 2000, and green infrastructure.*

The aim of this study is to propose possible actions and sub-actions related to this thematic objective (TO6). Special emphasis is placed on considering heritage as an economic asset, particularly as a tourist asset. A number of studies have been conducted in recent decades on the outcomes and economic impact of cultural tourism which endorse the success of these proposals. Some of the most important are those carried out by institutions such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2009), International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS, 2011), United Nations Environment Programme and the World Tourism Organisation (UNEP and UNWTO, 2012), or the International Union for Conservation of Nature (Osipova et al., 2014).

Figure 2  
 DIAGRAM OF THE MAIN OBJECTIVE OF THIS STUDY WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK  
 OF THE EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND (ERDF)



## II. METHODOLOGY

The work method followed in this study consisted in an in-depth review of all the strategic documents and regulations of the European Union Structural and Investment Funds for the period 2014-2020, an analysis of the document on the Partnership Agreement with Spain (2014-2020) and the Operational Programmes of the different Autonomous Regions that have publicly disclosed them.

From the point of view of natural and cultural heritage, the study is based on the authors' own academic and professional experience in the field of heritage conservation and management. In addition, the different possible actions and sub-actions are identified and analysed, and then presented in an orderly, structured and sequential manner in order to endow them with the coherence needed when it comes to their possible programming and implementation.

## III. BACKGROUND: HERITAGE AS DRIVING FORCE OF THE SOCIOECONOMIC REVITALIZACION

The natural and cultural heritage is one of the landmarks of many local communities and the basis for revitalizing the socioeconomics of certain territories. This stimulation has usually gone hand-in-hand with the tourism sector, which, with greater or lesser success, has acted as a catalyst in the development of some places (García et al., 2016). This topic is not new and a number of organisations, such as the European Union, have debated on the role that heritage plays as a socioeconomic engine (Lähdesmäki, 2014). From the natural heritage perspective, it can be seen that the Strategic Plan of the Convention on Biological Diversity 2011-2020 and the Aichi Targets and the EU Biodiversity Strategy (2011) note that natural

heritage and biodiversity are important factors of well-being, of socioeconomic growth and of territorial articulation. As regards cultural heritage, emphasis should be placed on the Paris Declaration on Heritage as a Driver of Development, adopted at the 17th General Assembly of ICOMOS in Paris (France, 2011). Furthermore, culture was also included, for the first time, within the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda during the 70th UN General Assembly (United Nations, 2015). Within the framework of the European Union, important measures include the Communication from the Commission on the need for an integrated approach to cultural heritage, COM (2014) 477 (European Commission, 2014). This document highlights the different cross-cutting tools that the EU has for supporting the protection and intrinsic and social enhancement of heritage with the aim of facilitating economic growth and creating employment.

What is new is that heritage is considered an objective of the ESIFs, more particularly of the ERDF. In fact, it appears among the specific goals of the Operational Programmes included within Investment Priority 6c.

In this context, it is important to remark on the potentialities Spain has as regards applying for these funds because, for example, the value of the Spanish biodiversity is the highest in the European Union and with regard to cultural heritage it should be noted that the total number of sites included in the UNESCO World Heritage Convention amounts to 45<sup>2</sup>. With this figure Spain ranks third among the countries with the most declared assets. It is therefore quite logical to think of the link between this significant amount of heritage on offer and the tourism phenomenon.

#### **IV. RESULTS: PROPOSALS FOR ACTIONS TO BE INCLUDED IN EU INVESTMENT PRIORITY 6C: CONSERVING, PROTECTING, PROMOTING AND DEVELOPING NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The results of this study are aimed at identifying actions and sub-actions that fit in with this investment priority. Yet, the intention is not just to provide an assortment or cluster of initiatives, but to highlight the fact that it is also very important to bear in mind the sequence in which they have to be carried out, so that they can really achieve the final outcomes expected of them.

Hence, in the following we put forward a sequence of actions organised around three thematic blocks that, in turn, include sub-actions, and follow the structure of an operational programme. Thus, we have:

- Block 1: Conservation and Protection of Natural and Cultural Heritage (Table 1)
- Block 2: Tourist Enhancement of Natural and Cultural heritage (Table 2)
- Block 3: Tourist Socioeconomic Revitalization of Natural and Cultural Heritage (Table 3)

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2 <http://whc.unesco.org/fr/list/stat#d2>

Table 1  
ACTIONS AND SUB-ACTIONS REFERRING TO THE CONSERVATION AND PROTECTION OF HERITAGE

ACTIONS	MEASURES
1.1. Guarantee the legal protection of heritage elements	1.1.1. Creation of a suitable official protection schemes if none currently exist
	1.1.2. Application of a appropriate protection status for the site
1.2. Carry out active conservation of heritage	1.2.1. Inventory and Intrinsic Assessment of heritage elements
	1.2.2. Development of standards for the conservation of heritage elements
	1.2.3. Restoration and/or rehabilitation of any heritage elements that need it
	1.2.4. Implementation of suitable physical protection in places where this is necessary (fencing, etc.)
1.3. Development of technical tools for heritage conservation management	1.3.1. Drawing up a Conservation Management Plan according to the protection schemes
1.4. Prevent, mitigate and correct impacts that affect heritage	1.4.1. Adoption of preventive measures that forestall or lessen the impacts
	1.4.2. Fostering the development of traditional activities that keep the heritage active and, thus, in good condition
1.5. Increase the awareness (social protection) of the resident population and visitors in order to achieve proactive attitudes and behaviours reflecting appreciation of heritage	1.5.1. Organising awareness-raising campaigns for the local communities about the value of heritage
	1.5.2. Performing activities aimed at raising visitors' awareness
	1.5.3. Development of codes of best practices for the tourism sector

Table 2  
ACTIONS AND SUB-ACTIONS REFERRING TO THE ENHANCMENT OF THE HERITAGE VALUE

ACTIONS	MEASURES
2.1. Development and implementation of technical tools for the management of public usage	2.1.1. Inventory and Tourism Assessment of the heritage elements
	2.1.2. Spatial Zoning, determination of the Recreational Carrying Capacity and designing the Touring Pattern
	2.1.3. Drawing up, approval and implementation of a Public Use Plan
2.2. Facilitate physical as well as intellectual and emotional access to the heritage	2.2.1. Development and/or improvement of the minimum numbers of basic infrastructures and recreational facilities required for visits (access roads, car parks, etc.) and application of the criteria of universal design for all whenever possible
	2.2.2. Drawing up and implementing Heritage Interpretation Programmes
	2.2.3. Development of interpretative facilities (signage, paths, interpretation centres, interpretive routes, museums, eco-museums, information centres, etc.)
	2.2.4. Training of the human resources involved in public use (guide-interpretors, etc.)

Table 3  
 Actions and SUB-ACTIONS referring to THE SOCIOECONOMIC REVITALIZATION

ACTIONS	MEASURES
3.1. Creation of the bases for developing a Tourism System based on heritage	3.1.1. Drawing up and implementing Strategic Plans for tourism development based on natural and cultural heritage
	3.1.2. Drawing up and implementing Tourism Revitalization Planning tools
	3.1.3. Development of legal rules for regulating tourist activities and tourism companies linked with heritage
3.2. Creation of a quality tourism offer based on heritage	3.2.1. Identification of the heritage resources with the greatest potential for tourism, which represent the investment priority
	3.2.2. Design and/or improvement of experiential and unique tourism products based on heritage
	3.2.3. Creation of a portfolio of tourism products by blending the offerings of different providers of tourism services
	3.2.4. Supporting the launching, development and/or improvement of tourism companies (training, tax incentives, etc.)
3.3. Promoting the destination and heritage-based tourism products	3.3.1. Identification of essential identity features and creation of a brand image based on them.
	3.3.2. Drawing up and implementing a Strategic Communication and Media Plan (on-line and off-line)
3.4. Marketing and Commercialization of heritage-based tourism products	3.4.1. Drawing up and implementing a Marketing Plan
	3.4.2. Implantation of new technologies (ICT) for e-commerce, booking systems, etc.
	3.4.3. Identifying the potential demand and designing strategies to reach markets

## V. CONCLUSIONS

Nature and Culture are not given the consideration they deserve in the ERDF Funds, taking into account that the EU offers an impressive potential for development based on these elements. If these topics are not clearly addressed among the specific aims and investment priorities, it will be very difficult for them to become a driving force and catalyst of sustainable development in the national programmes and in their budgets.

Moreover, Nature and Culture are not considered from the same heritage management perspective; if this were the case, it would be much easier to understand and apply the regulations and documents related with the ERDF, where these aspects are currently dispersed over several thematic objectives and different investment priorities.

Landscape is not mentioned in these official documents, when attempts are being made by other community platforms to boost their protection as a trans-regional element of the European territory identity.

Moreover, mention must be made of the fact that, although we can sense a systemic, cross-cutting, sequential consideration of the actions that EU is proposing, this is not made explicit in the wording of the documents. Clarification of this situation would be a valuable

aid to offer clear proof of the need to address projects that are going to be carried out to their ultimate consequences and are not only going to perform occasional actions that are not even going to meet the existing productivity indicators.

More proposals for actions related with the enhancement of heritage are needed in the ERDF, which are fundamental as a phase prior to the stimulation of tourism socioeconomics and which ensure the good implementation of tourism activities.

With regard to the indicators, it is necessary to highlight their importance to be able to orientate the actions and sub-actions. Hence, both the productivity and the specific indicators must faithfully reflect the outcomes.

Emphasis must be placed also on the little attention given to the participatory processes, bearing in mind the importance of the local actors in implanting and developing tourism revitalization projects based on small-sized enterprises, as in the case we are dealing with here.

For all these reasons, it is estimated that the next European programming period, which will be established as of 2020, will have to refine these contents and grant heritage the importance it deserves, judging by the countless documents that endorse the relevance of considering it a key element in European development, some of which have even come from the European Commission itself.

