

Whale watching in the Canary Islands: Current reality, **problematics** and needs

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Objectives | The Canary Islands (Spain) are known for their high cetacean species diversity: 28 species were identified. All-year-round favorable climatic conditions; numerous well equipped tourist facilities and wide range of services available for the visitor, makes a good place for the development of the activity. The excursions are offered in Tenerife, Gran Canaria, La Gomera and La Palma. Tenerife focuses about 70 % of the vessels, 65 % of the business operator and 75 % of passenger capacity (Sequeira *et al.*, 2011).

The main objectives of this study were:

1. To know how WW develops in the Canary Islands
2. To study the problems and need of the managerial sector

To analyze the demand profile.

Methodology | An exploratory and descriptive research has been carried out (21-months); to study how develops the activity in the Canary Archipelago. The techniques applied in this research were:

- I. Documentary collection of WW in the Canary Islands and around the world.
- II. In-depth interviews to experts, authorities and local entrepreneurship.
- III. Tourist surveys in Puerto Rico, Gran Canaria.

1. Documentary collection:

The literature review began in June 2010 and lasted until December 2011. Primary and secondary sources were used.

2. In-depth-interviews:

The realized interviews were not directed, the interviewee could speak with freedom, the interviewer was there to encourage him to talk (Ander Egg, 1995). The survey was anonymous; some businessmen were encouraged to talk about certain issues which, otherwise, would probably not express.

In Gran Canaria, were interviewed 3 entrepreneurs and 6 competent authorities on the subject, in Tenerife, 4 businessmen and 7 authorities; in La Gomera and in La Palma, 1 entrepreneur and 1 local authority each, with a total of 24 interviews.

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3. Design of the interviews:

All questionnaires included information about the interviewee, about the company or institution, information on marketing techniques, legislation, and conservation, questions of general interest, administration and proposals. The interviews were structured by these topics, so that it was easier to answer. All selected respondents were contacted by email, by submitting a brief research project report. Then, there was realized a telephonic contact to extend the information on the project, explain them the reason for the interview and finalized date of appointment.

The complete business sector of WW in the Canaries was invited to participate in the project. Some entrepreneurs expressed their desire not to do it. From 100 % of companies in the Canary Islands (25 were enabled to 04/04/2011¹), only 36 % answered the questionnaire. The businessmen who less wanted to collaborate, were in Tenerife, collaborating only 25 % of the businessmen.

A single interviewer conducted all the interviews, in person. They were designed, two types of questionnaires, the first one aimed to the businessmen and the second one addressed to the competent authorities and experts. Tenerife's questionnaire also added questions about the Charter of Quality.

In all cases, the principal researcher moved to sites concretized the persons selected for conducting the interview. Depending on each respondent, the average duration was one hour and a half. All questionnaires were conducted during working hours of the leaders.

4. Surveys:

Between 27th June to 2nd July 2011, 210 surveys were conducted in 12 trips on board of the crafts. Surveys were organized in this way, due to the limitations of time and budget to perform them. They were carried out in Puerto Rico, Gran Canaria.

The surveys were realized of personal form, on board of the crafts and were delivered to the return of each trip, counting with approximately from 30 to 50 minutes to complete it. To analyze them, a database in SPSS was created.

5. Survey design:

The questionnaire was structured on the model used in previous studies, to enable comparison with previous surveys in Tenerife. **The questionnaire was reviewed by experts and entrepreneurs contributed to the translation into english and german.**

The Spanish Cetacean Society (SEC) conducted two studies inTenerife including 268 questionnaires in 2002 and 141 surveys in 2004 in Tenerife (Servidio *et al.*, 2002, Servidio and Elejabeitia, 2004). In Gran Canaria this information doesn't exist. For this reason, it was decided to do the surveys in Gran Canaria.

The survey consisted of a brief introduction and 18 questions, 17 were closed and 1 was opened. In a final section, introduced the respondent's socio demographic characteristics (age, sex and occupation).

To know if the survey was understandable between the tourists, it was realized on May 17th 2011 a pre-test with students of the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria².

For the collection of information there was a person per boat. A comparative analysis was performed with the surveys of the "Study of follow-up of whale watching activity in Tenerife" (Servidio and Elejabeitia, 2004).

Results | The results of the interviews in depth emphasized the problematic that concern the activity in all the islands, which are the disloyal competition, the deceitful advertising and the lack of control of the activity. In Tenerife, there adds the problematic of the *illegal sale* that takes place in sites not paymasters for it and the *pressure* that the tour operators and the sellers exercise on the local businessmen (tour operators demand specific products to very low prices and the sellers demand commissions of up to 50 %). This is the *most pressing situation*. The authorities invoke they lack economic resources for monitoring. Nevertheless, the businessmen have offered their crafts for control activities, but haven't received answers yet. The results of the surveys confirm that the tourists' quantity of WW has fallen down noisy with regard to previous years, entering a phase of maintenance and regulation of the activity.

The profile of the tourist who does this tour is english and german, the duration of the stay is one week approximately, his opinion is positive in 75 % and they would recommend her. The tourists travel through travel agencies and the occupations

¹ Council of Tourism of the Government of Canary Islands <http://www.gobiernodecanarias.org/turismo/>.

² Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria www.ulpgc.es.

are varied. The principal motivation is to visit Canary Islands for the “sun and the beach” and as additional excursion, they do the whale watching, but they don’t have a specific motivation of seeing cetacean.

Limitations | Some entrepreneurs would not participate in the study. Occasionally, the tourists were reluctant to collaborate; in some cases they were ill. Another limitation was that some ports didn’t have information on the quantity of visitors performed the tour. Also, the duration of the in-depth-interviews was long because there was only one interviewer and it had to coordinate in advance and travel to the site of the interviewee (Ander Egg, 1995).

Conclusions | The final conclusions of the study are in full production, and they will be reflected in the doctoral thesis of the author. Nevertheless, a priori, it is possible to conclude that the tourist who making up WW’s excursion is in the main Englishman or German, visits the islands with travel agencies and with the contracted excursions. Nonetheless, the satisfaction of the excursion is high.

This research has focused in the current problems that suffer the business sector of whale watching in the Canary Islands and it has demonstrated that the major problematic is the lack of control of the activity. Added to this, employer’s lack of an association that “supports” the sector, being this one of the recommendations given. On the other hand, the relation businessman – competent authority is void. Once it is solved the administrative corresponding negotiations for the development of the activity, relation does not exist anymore. Because of it, the formation of an agreement is suggested between the businessmen and the local government, of commitment and of collaboration between both sectors for the sustainable development of the activity. The actions of raising awareness, conservation, environmental education and awareness of the local population, they might be exercised across a center of interpretation in collaboration with an association.

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