

Coastal Tourism in **Natural Parks**. An Analysis of Demand Profiles and Recreational Uses in **Coastal Protected Natural Areas**¹

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Abstract | The main objective of this communication is to show that the tourist and recreational uses made of a protected area, such as the Ebro Delta Natural Park, that is located on the coast in a context of “sun and beach” tourism present certain particularities due to the fact that a significant portion of the demand is motivated less by aspects such as the area’s natural assets than by classic draws such as sunbathing or the beach. In order to test this hypothesis, a typology of the visitors to the Ebro Delta Natural Park was established, with regard to both their tourist profiles and the characteristics of their trip. An analysis of the results further allowed us to determine the uses made of, and behaviour shown in relation to, the park’s natural assets by the different visitor types found, as well as to verify differences in their perceptions and satisfaction levels.

Keywords | Natural Park, “Sun and Beach”, Catalonia, Ebro Delta, Tourism Demand.

Resumo | O objectivo principal deste artigo é mostrar que o uso turístico e recreacional de uma área protegida, tal como o Parque Natural do Delta do Ebro, que está localizado na costa, num contexto de turismo de “sol e praia”, apresenta certas particularidades devido ao facto de uma percentagem significativa da procura ser motivada mais por aspectos clássicos de “sol e praia”, do que pelos recursos naturais da área. Para se testarem estas hipóteses, foi constituída uma tipologia de visitantes do Parque Natural do Delta do Ebro, no que diz respeito aos perfis dos turistas e às características das suas viagens. Uma análise de resultados permitiu também determinar o tipo de utilização e o comportamento demonstrado em relação aos recursos naturais do parque pelos diferentes tipos de visitantes encontrados, assim como, verificar diferenças nas suas percepções e nos seus níveis de satisfação.

Palavras-chave | Parque Natural, “Sol e Praia”, Catalunha, Delta do Ebro, Procura Turística.

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1. Introduction

Catalonia has an extensive network of protected nature reserves that play a crucial role in the conservation of large swaths of its natural heritage. The great variety of landscapes in Catalonia helps to explain the diversity of its protected areas. In addition to their protective function, these parks also constitute an attractive tourism offer that attaches importance to a wide range of resources with ecological, natural and recreational value. There are currently 148 protected areas, spanning 21% of Catalonia's surface area (676 014 ha), a figure well above the Spanish average, which stands at 7,8% (Germain and Mallarach, 2001). In order to provide each of these area with an appropriate conservation and management system based on its specific scientific, ecological, cultural, landscape, educational and recreational interests, different means of protection have been established: national parks, natural areas of national interest, natural parks, partial nature reserves and comprehensive nature reserves. All of these special protection systems are provided for in the Natural Areas Act (Law 12/1985). At the same time, other protection systems have been established under sectorised regulations, such as those relating to the protection of animals, sea fishing, urban development, etc.

Most of the protected areas fall under the category of "natural parks", the most common form of protection. While natural parks are defined based on their natural assets, their management provides not only for their conservation but also for the orderly use of their natural resources and the traditional activities of their inhabitants. In Catalonia, a total of 12 natural parks span a combined area of 227 330 ha. This concept is quite common in European countries such as France and the United Kingdom. It is also the protection category best suited to the specific characteristics of the European territory. Moreover, these types of spaces have seen a significant increase in visitors in recent decades in keeping with the increased importance given to

environmental factors by tourists when choosing their destinations (Wearing and Neil, 2000). Indeed this is true to such an extent that currently a large number of people travel daily, on weekends and during their vacations to areas of high ecological or landscape value or areas subject to some form of protection in order to engage in activities or simply enjoy a singular tourism experience. In this sense, the recreational and tourist use of natural areas is also of growing importance in relation to economic development (Pulido, 2000 and Epler Wood, 2002).

The case of the Ebro Delta Natural Park in Catalonia, which is the focus of this study, offers a certain particularity. This park is located on the coast in a region with substantial tourism (Catalonia and, by extension, Spain), where the most common form of tourism is that traditionally known as "sun and beach tourism". The coastal regions of Catalonia (Costa Brava, Costa Daurada, Costa del Maresme, Costa del Garraf, etc.) receive an annual influx of 9.1 million tourists and have accommodation capacity, counting hotels, campgrounds and rural tourism facilities, for 375 740 visitors.

2. Objective and hypotheses

As proposed in other studies (Blázquez, 1996), the location of a protected area in a "sun and beach" context leads to certain specificities in terms of the recreational uses to which it is put and, therefore, to a series of needs with regard to facilities and management of its public use. Indeed, despite the designation of such places as "protected areas", one might hypothesise in general terms that a significant number of park visitors do not visit the park to contemplate and enjoy its natural assets, but rather for the same purposes and reasons common to conventional "sun and beach" tourism destinations. Thus, in addition to the traditional array of reasons offered by visitors for visiting natural areas (see Webb, 2002), one must

also add, in relation to these kinds of parks, the differentiating factor of the existence of a segment of the demand that is not actually interested in the park's natural assets yet, nonetheless, visits it and enjoys the benefits offered by its protected status. Moreover, should this hypothesis prove correct, one might conclude that this diversity among the public requires, from the point of view of the protected area's management, a clear assessment of the need to gear the park's facilities and the management of its public uses toward considerably different types of visitors. Indeed, that is the main question this study aims to address: what is the demand for a natural park located in a "sun and beach" context? To this end, Pinazzo (1995) affirms that most visitors to protected coastal areas prefer recreational activities to contemplative ones or ones involving environmental interpretation, whereas visitors to inland areas fit a different pattern, tending to engage in educational and formative activities.

Knowledge of the number and types of visitors, their characteristics, preferences and attitudes and their behavioural patterns is just as important for the management of a protected area as knowledge of the plant and animal species it contains. Knowledge of the demand is, in fact, prerequisite to equipping such an area with appropriate facilities and to ensuring proper management of its public use. Visitors are attracted by specific values attached to the protected area that condition their behaviour and consumption patterns. In short, if planning is crucial for a protected area, then a key first step is to understand the types of visits it receives. Ultimately, the goal is to ensure the viability of the established protection system and to design appropriate management strategies (Junta de Andalucía, 2002). To this end, an increasing number of studies are being conducted that analyse the profiles of visitors and consumers in protected areas (see, among others, Ryan, 2003; Dorwart, 2004; Piedad, 2004). It is with this same goal in mind that this study examines the characteristics of visitors to the Ebro

Delta Natural Park. The objective is to study the importance of reasons for visiting a protected area unrelated to contemplating its natural assets when the area is located in a context of "sun and beach" tourism. In other words, the study aims to determine whether visitors to the natural area attach more importance to classic reasons such as sunbathing and going to the beach or whether, by contrast, they are able to appreciate the park's natural assets.

With a view to testing the proposed hypothesis, the study aims to establish a typology for visitors to the Ebro Delta Natural Park both with regard to their tourist profile (origin, age group, type of group and social class) and the characteristics of their trip (planning, reason, type of accommodation, length of stay and loyalty). This main hypothesis can be further elaborated to include two additional, complementary hypotheses. In this sense, the second hypothesis to be tested asks whether differences among visitor types, should they be found to exist, must necessarily imply similar differences in terms of each type's use and behaviour in relation to the park's natural assets. In other words, the analysis of the demand must enable determination of the visitor-natural environment relationship found with each type, as well as the extent to which nature serves as an end in itself in relation to the activities carried out by each type (Fennell, 2003). Finally, the third hypothesis, derived from the second, proposes that, given that natural parks are especially geared toward conservation, interpretation and the communication of their environmental values, differences in perception and satisfaction should be apparent between the different types of visitors. Needless to say, this hypothesis is highly conditioned by the quality and characteristics of the park's interpretation facilities. Moreover, any assessment will also be the result of the relationship between the image visitors have of a park prior to visiting it and their perception of it once they have been inside (Donaire and Gordi, 2003). This question, however, is beyond the scope of this study.

3. Area of study

The focus of this study is the Ebro Delta Natural Park, one of the few stretches of the Catalan coastline and, by extension, of the Spanish coastline, that has not yet been developed. With a length of 100.6 km², it is one of the largest wetland areas in the Western Mediterranean, after La Camarga (France), and the second largest in Spain, after Doñana National Park. The park was one of the first protected areas established in Catalonia (Decreets 357/1983 and 332/1986). It spans a total area of 7 802 ha and contains a total of five municipalities in the province of Tarragona (L'Ampolla, Deltebre, Amposta, Sant Carles de la Ràpita and Sant Jaume d'Enveja), home to 48 175 people (Figure 1).

From an ecological perspective, the Ebro River Delta stands out for its great diversity of habitats and species, quite rare in the Mediterranean and European contexts. The international importance of its natural assets has been widely acknowledged. To this end, it should be noted that it was designated in 1987 as a Bird Special Protection Area for Birds in accordance with the EU's Bird Directive and that it has been included on the list for the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (the Ramsar Convention) since 1993, with special emphasis on its role as a habitat for waterfowl. Its biological value stands in contrast to, and must be made compatible with the human settlement of a large portion of its surface area and the importance of activities such as agriculture – the main regional economic activity – fishing, hunting, a small-scale agrifood industry and growing tourism activity. The main crop, rice, which is planted on more than 21 000 ha, covers 65% of the total surface area and plays a key role in the delta's economy and ecology and in the changing, dynamic and singular landscape of the Ebro River delta. Natural environments account for 20% of the territory, with approximately 10% comprised

of beaches and sandy areas and 10% comprised of lagoons and salt marshes.³

The park is home to 350 bird species. In summer, it is the largest waterfowl breeding ground in the Mediterranean, and flamingos can be found year-round. Additionally, several wildlife reserves and refuges have been declared inside the park (Fangar, Canal Vell, Garxal, Illa de Buda, La Tancada, Punta de la Banya and Illa de Sapinya, among others). The park forms a part of the Catalan natural park system, which is overseen by the Directorate General of Natural Heritage and the Environment of the Ministry of the Environment's Natural Park Service.

From the viewpoint of tourism and recreational activities, the absence of slopes makes the Delta an ideal place for walks and bike rides, although it can also be visited by car, stopping at the different lookouts. It should be noted that the areas comprising the park are scattered. Visits can also be made by boat to see the river's estuary. The park has two information centres, the *Ecomuseu* (Ecomuseum) and the *Casa de Fusta de l'Encanyissada* (L'Encanyissada Wood House), that serves as reference elements and are home to other facilities, such as the farm shop, a restaurant and a scenic lookout. The park also has an environmental education centre and a biology station. Visitors can, furthermore, sample the rich and varied local cuisine resulting from the quality of regional natural resources, above all, from the sea. According to the *Observatori de la Fundació d'Estudis Turístics Costa Daurada* (Observatory of the Costa Daurada Foundation for Tourism Studies), the Ebro Delta Natural Park receives 300 000 visitors each year.

² Source: http://www.depana.org/litoral/diagnosi_litoral.html: Neus Royo, Lluís Xavier Toldrà: *Diagnosi de l'estat de conservació de la costa catalana*. (Page visited on 27th May 2005.)

³ Source: <http://www.pangea.org/aeec/art48.html>: Carles Ibáñez i Martí (Birdlife) "Delta de l'Ebre: un microcosmos amenaçat". (Page visited on 1st June.)

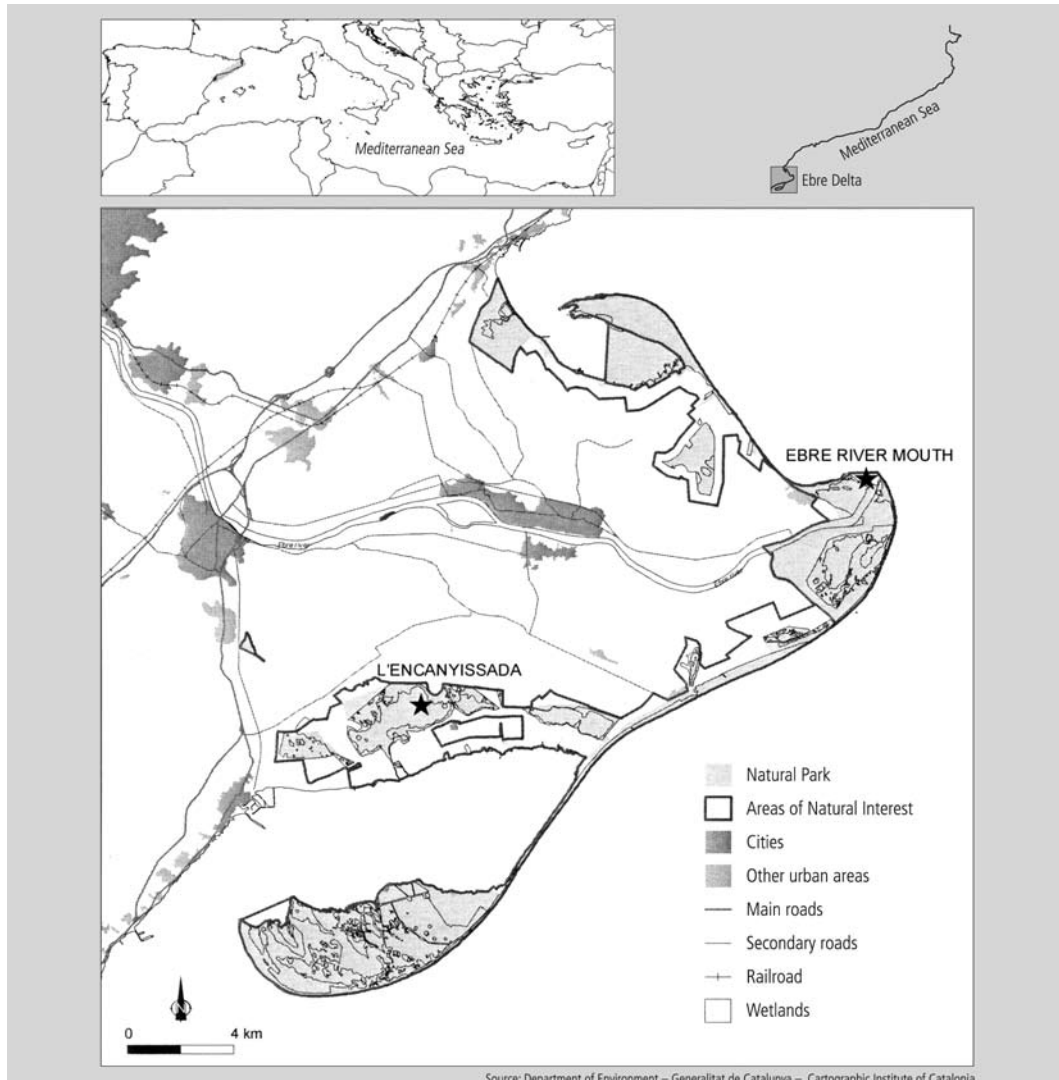


Figure 1 | Ebre Delta main features.

4. Material and methods

The analysis is based on a study conducted by means of a survey by the Observatori de la Fundació d'Estudis Turístics Costa Daurada. The study was commissioned by the *Direcció General del Medi Natural de la Generalitat de Catalunya – Parc Natural del Delta del Ebre* (Directorate General for the Environment of the Catalan Government – Ebro Delta Natural Park) and was carried out in summer 2004.

4.1. Questionnaire design

The questionnaire was designed in order to determine the main characteristics of the tourism demand for the Ebro Delta Natural Park and the recreational uses to which the natural areas under study are put. It consisted of eight closed-ended nominal questions with several single-choice options: origin, age group, type of group, socioeconomic level, planning of trip, type of accommodation and reason

for the trip. It also contained two numerical questions – length of stay and loyalty to the destination – which were subsequently classified, and two multiple-choice nominal questions regarding the types of activities carried out and the improvements participants would like to see to increase the enjoyment of their visit. The socioeconomic variable was obtained by crossing the education level and profession variables according to an adaptation of the occupational classification matrix of the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research. Finally, a Likert-type scale with five choices per question was applied concerning assessment of and satisfaction with specific items of the Natural Park in general and of the area visited in particular. The questionnaire was subjected to a pilot test in April. The same questionnaire was definitively implemented in July, August and September. The survey was conducted by professional survey takers and took an average of 6 minutes to complete.

4.2. Sample

The universe was comprised of visitors to the natural areas of the Ebro Delta Natural Park between July and September 2004. Both visitors who stayed the night in the natural park's immediate surroundings and visitors coming just for the day were included. The sample size was 451 surveyed visitors. The margin of error is not applicable, since the sample was not, strictly speaking, random; had it been applicable, given the size of the sample, it would have been 5%.

The sampling design consisted of defining morning and afternoon time slots, representing both weekdays and holidays. The two most visited areas of the natural park were determined: the "L'Encanyissada" area and the "Ebro River Mouth" area. The time, and day slots were randomly assigned to each area. The number of surveys conducted in each area was proportional to the number of visitors each one had. The subjects who answered the survey were chosen on a systematic random basis at the car-park points after they had visited the natural area.

5. Analysis and results

To test the first hypothesis, the relationship between the different categories that defined the visitor profile was established by means of a multivariate homogeneity analysis (HOMALS) carried out with SPSS for Windows, version 12.0. The aim was to reduce the data of the multiple nominal variables set to just a few dimensions that would make it possible to understand the pattern of relationships between them. Preference was given to reducing the information to a number of solutions that would allow for visual comprehension of the information. Therefore, the results were restricted to the two dimensions that best summarised the information contained in the categories. When summarising the said information, the first and second dimensions had an importance of 30% and 26% respectively.

The dimensions converged after 41 iterations, reaching a moderate fit of 56%. The variance of each variable explained by the dimensions was as shown in Table 1.

We can see that Dimension 1 is useful for discriminating, to a greater extent, among the variables relating to type of accommodation, length of stay and area visited. The reason for the trip plays a key role in explaining the first dimension, but also the second. In fact, the analysis provided below suggests that the two main visitor types can mainly be distinguished by the reason for their visit. The second dimension is primarily determined by the type of group and, therefore, by age.

Table 1 | Discrimination measures of variables

	Discrimination measures	
	Dimension 1	Dimension 2
Origin	0.3	0.2
Age group	0.3	0.4
Type of group	0.1	0.7
Social class	0.2	0.1
Reason for trip	0.5	0.4
Accommodations	0.4	0.1
Length of stay	0.4	0.1
Loyalty	0.1	0.3
Area	0.4	0.0

Figure 2 situates the set of factors contributing to the inertia of each dimension within two-dimensional coordinates. An analysis of these factors shows several groupings between categories

that define the types of visitors to the park. The discrimination ratings along with observation of Figure 2 allow for the conceptual definition of the axes.

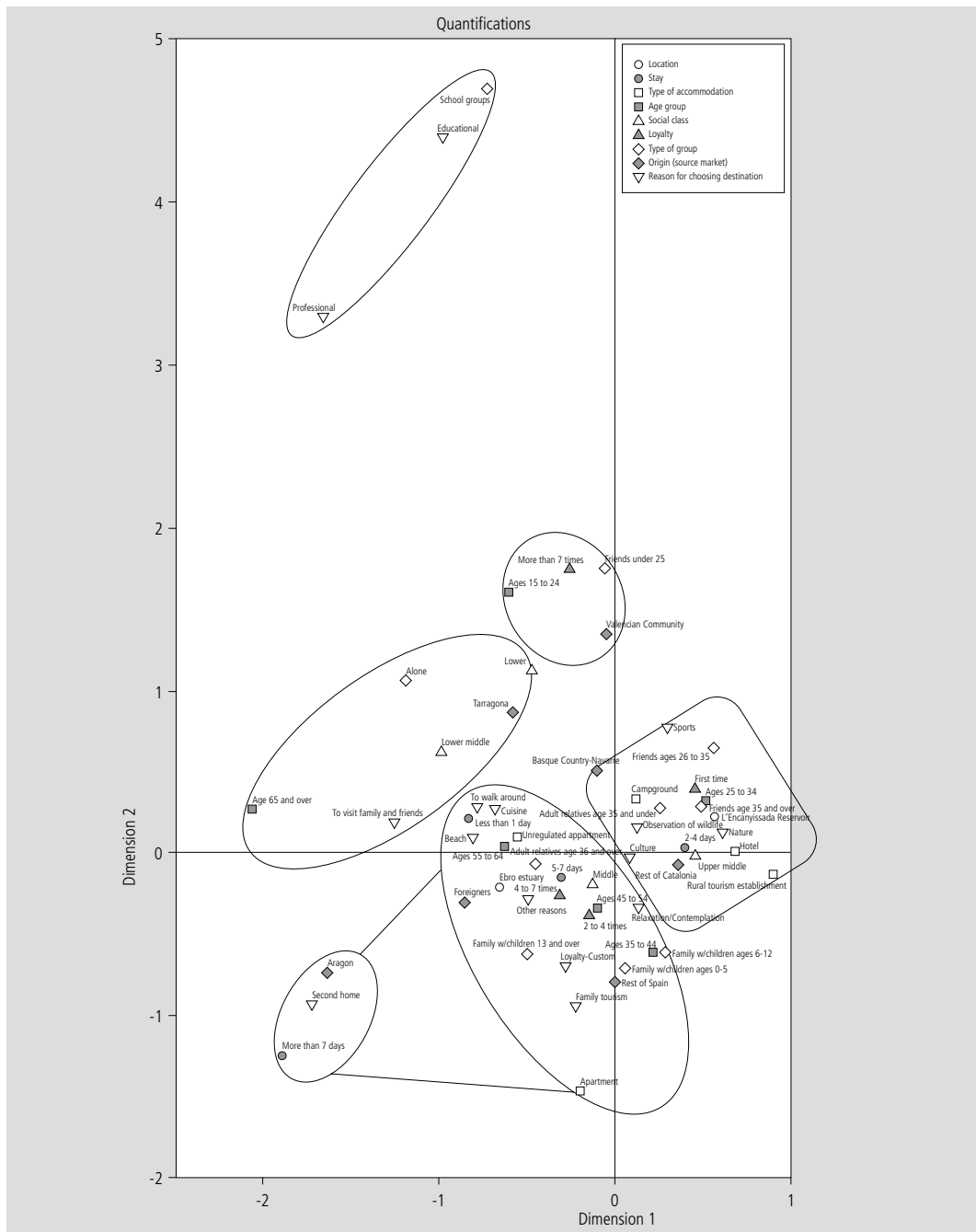


Figure 2 | Typological synthesis of the homogeneity analysis.

In the terms used by Fennell (2003), Dimension 1 places the different types along a continuum that begins at the far right, corresponding to types for whom nature is an end in itself, and moves to the far left, corresponding to types for whom nature serves merely as decoration. This dimension forces us to interpret that for educational groups, which are found at the far left, nature is a means and learning is the end. The types of visitors who have chosen to dedicate their free time and leisure to nature are found on the far right. This axis could be labelled "Degree of involvement with nature" and refers to aspects relating to the visit and to the consumption pattern.

Dimension 2 differentiates family tourism groups from other types of tourism. Therefore, it maps groups that require different degrees of facilities both with regard to accommodations and to other tourism services. It could be labelled "Degree of involvement with services" and refers to the characteristics and tourism needs of individuals.

With the ratings obtained by the objects for each dimension, each individual was assigned to a type. This process yielded the frequency distribution shown in Table 2.

Table 2 | Frequency of each type

	n	%
Type I Ecotourism	150	44,6%
Type II Beach Tourism	132	39,3%
Type III Residents	37	11,0%
Type IV Youths	12	3,6%
Type V Educational-Professional	5	1,5%
	336	

6. Discussion

Taking into account the size of each resulting type, and in keeping with the study's stated objectives, the two main types are discussed in detail below. These types have been labelled

"Ecotourism" and "Beach Tourism". It should be noted, however, that these results refer to summer months. Their consistency with the established research hypotheses is, thus, notable. Furthermore, this circumstance explains the meagre presence of Type V "Educational-Professional" visitors, since summer is not a useful period from the point of view of the school year. The two main types can be described as shown in Table 3.

The main reasons given for visiting the park by visitors falling in the "Ecotourism" category were nature, observation of wildlife and cultural factors. These types of visitors are young and upper class. In particular, they belong to the very specific age group of ages 25 to 34. They are mainly from Barcelona, other points in Catalonia and the Basque Country and they travel straight to the area without making reservations, preferably in the company of friends. This segment chooses to stay at hotels, campgrounds or rural establishments in the area. The stay lasts between 2 and 4 days and generally constitutes the first time they visit the park. The area most often visited is L'Encanyissada, one of the park's reference points with most leisure and educational facilities.

The other main visitor type visits the park for reasons relating to the beach tourism or because he or she has a second home in the area. Consequently, this segment has been given the name of "Beach Tourism". It is composed of visitors who, unlike Type 1 visitors, come from the Autonomous Community of Aragon, other points in Spain and overseas. The average age is between 35 and 64, and it is a more family-oriented, middle-class type of tourism. The trip is planned directly with a reservation. The preferred types of accommodation differ substantially from those preferred by Type I visitors, in that the most common choices are rental apartments and second homes. Another significant difference involves the length of stay, since, according to the data, this type of visitor stays in the area for 5 to 7 days or, when staying at a second home, for more than 7 days. This type also includes visitors coming to spend a day of leisure, generally at the estuary area. Finally, mention

Table 3 | Profile of the two main types

Typology of visitors to the Ebro Delta Natural Park		
	Type I – Ecotourism	Type II – Beach Tourism
Base	150	132
A. Tourist profile		
Origin	Mainly Barcelona and other points in Catalonia The Basque Country	Aragon Other points in Spain Foreigners
Age group	Ages 25 to 34	Ages 35 to 64
Type of group	Groups of friends ages 26 to 35 Adult relatives age 35 and under Friends age 35 and over	Families with children Adult relatives age 36 and over
Social class	Upper middle	Middle
B. Trip profile		
Planning of trip	Direct Almost 1 in 2 had no advance reservation	Direct with reservation
Reason	Nature Observation of wildlife Culture Sports	Beach Cuisine Loyalty and custom Family tourism Second home
Accommodations	Hotel Rural establishment Campground	Directly rented apartment Apartment rented through an agency Second home
Length of stay	2-4 days	5 to 7 days More than 7 days at second home Daytrips
Loyalty	First time	Between 2 and 7 times
Area	Encanyissada	Ebro Delta Mouth

Source: Observatori de la Fundació d'Estudis Turístics Costa Daurada, based on a study commissioned by the Direcció General del Medi Natural – Parc Natural del Delta de l'Ebre.

should be made of the strong loyalty expressed by this type.

Therefore, with regard to the first hypothesis, the results suggest that the park does indeed attract highly different types of visitors. They further suggest that those who come for nature-related reasons predominate, although there are also many who visit for classic “sun and beach” related reasons.

In keeping with the second and third hypotheses, it is also of interest to determine, first, whether the two main types detected present differences with regard to the use they make of the natural area, and, second, whether any differences exist in their perceptions and assessment of the natural environment. To this end, the two types representing most cases and of most relevance and interest to the study, namely, the “Ecotourism” and “Beach Tourism” types, were subjected to a bivariate analysis.

With this goal in mind, a Chi-square test was performed in order to determine whether significant differences exist between the types in terms of the variable concerning their relationship with the environment, the activities carried out in the natural area, their assessments of it, the importance attached to different components of the environment, their satisfaction levels and the improvements they would like to see made. The null hypothesis with which we began the Chi-square test states that the two variables are independent: that is, whether or not a given subject belongs to one of the defined types will not condition his or her relationship with the environment or yield differences in relation to his or her assessment of the analysed items.

Table 4 shows the variable crosses performed using a contingency table, indicating those that were significant with the relevant degrees of freedom $(\text{rows}-1) \times (\text{columns}-1)$ with a confidence

level of 95%. Therefore, with regard to the second hypothesis concerning the relationship of the two main types detected with the environment, one might reach the following conclusions. The activities most often engaged in by “Ecotourism” – type users are photography, observation of wildlife and

bike riding, while Type II users engage in more conventional beach-related activities. Consequently, the hypothesis that visitors to a natural park situated on the coast find recreational uses for the area that coexist with intrinsically contemplative nature-related ones can also be confirmed. The difference in

Table 4 | Relationship with the natural environment and assessment according to the two main types

Typology of visitors to the Ebro Delta Natural Park		
	Type I – Ecotourism	Type II – Beach Tourism
Base	150	132
C. Relationship with the natural environment		
Activities	Frequency	Frequency
Beach*	3,3%	25,0%
Relaxation and contemplation	18,7%	26,5%
Wildlife observation*	32,7%	18,2%
Guided visit of the park	1,0%	1,0%
Bike-riding*	26,7%	15,9%
Sports	2,0%	2,3%
Boat rides down the river	10,7%	11,4%
Photography*	38,7%	14,4%
Unguided walks	71,3%	73,5%
Other	7,3%	13,6%
Real time spent in natural area	1 hour and 4 minutes	37 minutes
D. Assessment		
<i>Importance of aspects of the delta in general</i>	Frequency of high ratings (rating of 4 or 5 on a scale of 1 to 5)	Frequency of high ratings
Climate	62,7%	72,0%
Activities and services	54,7%	50,8%
Local cuisine*	52,0%	68,2%
Friendliness of locals	59,3%	68,9%
<i>Importance of aspects of the natural area visited</i>		
Adequacy of signage at access points*	56,7%	68,9%
Aesthetics of signage	52,0%	61,4%
Cleanliness of the protected areas*	60,7%	73,5%
Conservation of lookouts	58,0%	60,6%
Information on the flora and fauna	54,0%	53,0%
Large crowds/Too many visitors	54,7%	65,2%
Parking convenience	58,0%	66,7%
Virginity of the landscape	58,0%	67,4%
Biodiversity	55,3%	59,8%
Bike lanes	50,0%	49,2%
<i>Satisfaction with aspects of the delta in general</i>		
Climate	74,0%	68,2%
Activities and services*	60,7%	32,6%
Cuisine	63,3%	71,2%
Friendliness of locals	83,3%	77,3%
<i>Satisfaction with aspects of the natural area visited</i>		
Adequacy of signage at access points*	42,7%	31,1%
Aesthetics of signage*	50,7%	31,1%
Cleanliness of the protected areas*	57,3%	39,4%
Conservation of lookouts*	70,7%	42,4%
Information on the flora and fauna	56,7%	50,0%
Large crowds/Too many visitors	78,0%	69,7%
Parking convenience	90,0%	82,6%
Virginity of the landscape	67,3%	67,4%
Biodiversity*	68,7%	53,0%
Bike lanes	32,7%	25,8%

* Statistical significant differences with Chi-square testing. Chi-square statistics are significant at a level of 0.05.

Source: Observatori de la Fundació d'Estudis Turístics Costa Daurada, based on a study commissioned by the Direcció General del Medi Natural – Parc Natural del Delta de l'Ebre.

the real time spent in the areas of natural interest by each type is also quite significant. Users who came for reasons related to the park's natural attractions stayed for over an hour, while those who came for other reasons stayed for only just over half an hour.

With regard to the third hypothesis, we will now explore whether the perceptions of each type presented any differences. In terms of which aspects are given most importance by each group, it can be seen that Type II "Beach Tourism" visitors attach more importance to cuisine, adequate signage and the cleanliness of the protected areas than Type I "Ecotourism". In terms of aspects relating to their perception of the natural environment, Type I "Ecotourism" visitors expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the activities and services offered by the natural park, as well as with aspects relating to signage, cleanliness and, above all, the conservation of lookouts and the park's biodiversity. These results corroborate that the expectations of this segment are met. In other words, as no differences in final satisfaction with the trip is seen, it can be concluded that the image held by this group prior to visiting the park is not substantially different from the reality. In generic terms, it can also be observed that ecotourism visitors were more satisfied with almost all items analysed. Differences were found only in the importance attached to cuisine, the adequacy of signage at access points and the cleanliness of the protected areas.

7. Conclusions

The results obtained make it possible to confirm the initial hypothesis that tourist and recreational use of a natural park located in a context of "sun and beach" present unique characteristics due to the fact that a significant segment of the demand for such parks is motivated less by aspects such as the area's natural assets than by classic draws such as sunbathing and the beach. Analysis of the origin variable moreover suggests that at parks like the

Ebro Delta Natural Park, which is of average standing in the attractiveness hierarchy and offers no singular facilities, the segment that can truly be classified as "Ecotourism" is limited to certain market areas that can be considered "proximity markets". The main attraction for this segment is the observation of wildlife, and it is this segment that prefers rural tourism establishments – the establishments that best preserve the area's cultural identity – in keeping with the cultural reasons it offers for visiting. Mid-distance visitors prefer the Ebro Delta area, as it better caters for their sunbathing and beach-time expectations in summer. In other words, it would be interesting to test, in future studies, the hypothesis that, with mid- and long-distance trips, natural parks that are not renowned for their singular resources or facilities exercise scant drawing power. Finally, the results also underscore the importance of sunbathing and beach time as basic reasons for tourism-related and recreational visits to the Mediterranean coast and the capacity of parks, in this case, the Ebro Delta Natural Park, to act as decisive complementary factors.

To this end, it should be noted that the segment motivated by the beach also visited natural areas – indeed, the survey was conducted in a natural area – and that such visitors make practically as much use of the park's trails as visitors belonging to the ecotourism segment. This must be taken into account in the management of natural spaces located on beaches, given that this segment can also be of use in meeting economic dynamics and regional identity preservation targets (in the case at hand, with the added and distinguishing identity element of the regional cuisine). One might, thus, conclude that the facilities of a natural area near the beach should be equipped with a view to accommodating different depths of environmental knowledge in order to meet the visit expectations of the two main segments of the demand. Needless to say, they should also be designed and conceived of to ensure that the area is not used in any way that might be detrimental to its natural assets.

In addition, the results show that the "Ecotourism" type is less demanding with regard to aspects having to do with tourism development, such as access points, possibly because ecotourists are more understanding of the desire to conserve the virginity of the landscape. They are also less demanding with regard to cleanliness. Visitors of this type attach importance to this aspect, but they are also satisfied with it, almost certainly because they have a better grasp of the dynamics of a land-sea ecosystem. Thus, in general terms, the "Beach Tourism" segment would like to see improvements in the access points, better signage and more tourism services, while the "Ecotourism" segment is, in general, satisfied with what the park already offers by way of enabling wildlife observation, bike-riding and photography.

As a result of the foregoing, it is clear that a natural park located on the coast must strive to make different types of demand compatible within a single space. This means that the park's management must be geared toward accommodating and harmonising different positions in the nature dimension, such that nature can serve both as an end in itself and a more decorative function. This in turn means that the natural park must offer infrastructure, facilities and services to meet the demand. For a significant portion of the demand, the park's natural assets do not offset the low intensity of facilities for tourist visits. Such facilities must be provided without hindering current satisfaction with regard to the virgin state of the landscape. In any event, it is clear that some of these considerations should be explored in greater detail on an ad hoc basis.

To this end, it would be interesting for future researches to determine what other potential markets would come to a natural space if it were to offer a wider array of services, where possible, related to nature tourism. It would also be interesting to study whether visitors to the Ebro Delta Natural Park are ecotourists with a relevant and related "curriculum" or whether this park, due to its characteristics, location and meagre facilities, is

capable only of attracting "sun and beach" tourists who are aware of the value of nature. In fact, it would be worth studying whether the Ebro Delta Natural Park projects the right image to attract "hardcore" ecotourists or whether it lacks a plan for tourist visits that could meet the expectations of the potential demand from markets further a field that the park is not currently capable of attracting. These considerations concerning this specific park are equally applicable, on a point for point basis, to other parks, in that they underscore the fact that appropriate tourism management can change both the parameters of the behaviour of the demand and the park's own drawing power. Current findings and those that may result from complementary studies could lead to the adoption of a series of changes in park management and the need to implement appropriate tourism policies beyond those concerning environmental protection (Stein, 2003).

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