Methodology for the **evaluation** of **cultural tourism routes**: A case applied to the cultural heritage of the province of Cádiz (Spain)

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Abstract | Tourist-cultural routes and itineraries have become one of the most widely used tools for the enhancement of cultural heritage. In this sense, national and international organisations have been concerned with recognising and promoting these products, as well as offering a conceptual framework for them. Despite the implementation of cultural tourism routes in the market, they often end up being underused or even unknown products, either due to their lack of equipment, dissemination or problems in the coordination and management of the elements that make up the route. Based on this hypothesis, the aim of this work is to offer a methodology for the evaluation of tourist routes organised into five areas of analysis (level of quality of the destination, level of promotion of the route, tourist use, impact on the destination and user satisfaction). Subsequently, the methodological proposal is applied to the route of the castles and monasteries in the province of Cadiz, offering an evaluation of the same through the study of the first three axes. As a result, the route analysed has not had a design methodology and, therefore, the results of its evaluation have been discrete.

Keywords | Touristic route, evaluation, cultural tourism, cultural itinerary, methodology

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1. Introduction

In recent years, cultural tourism has become one of the most developed tourism modalities in the sector, given its ability to adapt to demand, boost the economy of local and regional destinations, strengthen the identity of host communities and offer a sustainable management model (Escudero, 2021). The tourism sector linked to culture, as one of its main resources, has experienced a constant evolution and growth since the 1960s (Mansilla & Milano, 2018), being by the beginning of 2020 an economic pillar in developed countries (UNWTO, 2020). One of the reasons for this evolution is the breadth of the concept of culture itself (Calderón, 2023). As a consequence, especially since the 1990s, cultural tourism has fragmented into emerging niches (gastronomic, ethnographic, archaeological tourism, etc.), which have not only contributed to its expansion, but also to the awareness of intangible cultural aspects (Richards, 2018).

However, with the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism activity was interrupted, being one of the most affected economic sectors worldwide (Corbisiero & La Rocca, 2020). As a result, and in view of the already proven vulnerability of the tourism sector, the new reality requires the implementation of new management strategies that allow for better adaptation to possible adverse circumstances and, in turn, avoid past mistakes such as tourist overcrowding, the trivialisation of culture or the deterioration of heritage assets (Montanari, 2020).

The need to offer cultural products and experiences that enable differentiation in the market has led to the development of various promotion and dissemination tools (tourism fairs, virtual tours, mobile applications, etc.). Among the various proposals, it is worth highlighting the creation of cultural routes and itineraries, which have been used with some abundance as a versatile formula for the proposal of new fundamental tourism products in terms of heritage (Hernández, 2011). It is not difficult, therefore, to justify the proliferation of tourist routes and itineraries, given the growth of cultural tourism in recent years, not without some diverse developments. While tourist routes find their historical references in the Grand Tour of the 15th century and in Thomas Cook's organised tours in the 19th century, cultural itineraries were incorporated at an institutional level with the recognition of the Way of St. James by the Council of Europe in 1987 (Martín & Morère, 2019). Currently, both realities are part of the tourist offer of destinations, a valuable component for many territories that seek to enhance their tourist attraction through the creation of routes. In this sense, the proliferation of studies related to the analysis of various tourist-cultural routes has increased in recent years (Riquelme & Lazo, 2021), as well as the development of methodologies for their design (Calderón & Arcila, 2020). It follows, therefore, that the integration of various potential cultural elements, in the form of a route or itinerary, has become a strategic action of considerable interest (Navalón & Rubio, 2014). Likewise, and from the perspective of heritage management, the creation of routes and itineraries represents an opportunity to contribute, by aggregation, to improving the interpretation of the territory, reinforcing the links between the elements that make it up and, in turn, strengthening the cultural identity of society (Martorell, 2003).

However, despite the existence of methodologies for the evaluation of cultural heritage in the field of tourism, such as those carried out by Ramírez-Guerrero et al. (2021) or Mayordomo and Hermosilla (2020), the same is not true for the evaluation of (thematic) cultural tourism routes in their connection with tourism activity, considering their multidimensional nature and the broad territorial extension where cultural assets are located as components of a common territory. Likewise, there is a lack of methods of analysis to evaluate the implications that itineraries or routes have on the destinations in which they are framed and

whether they really function as a tourist attraction for the visit of the cultural assets that comprise them.

For all of the above reasons, the aim of this article is to offer a model for the evaluation of cultural tourism routes that takes into consideration their promotion, tourist use, impact on the destinations, as well as user satisfaction, applying the proposal to the Route of Castles and Monasteries promoted by the Andalusian Regional Government in the province of Cadiz (Spain). In order to achieve this aim, firstly, a bibliographical review is carried out on the concepts of cultural routes and itineraries, as well as existing techniques for their tourist evaluation. Secondly, a methodology for the evaluation of tourist routes is proposed which studies different sources of information (web pages, news, institutional documentation, etc.), and which is organised into five study axes (Quality level of the destination, level of promotion of the route, tourist use, impact on the destination and user satisfaction). The results obtained refer to the first two axes oriented to the level of promotion of the route and its tourist use, in order to validate the first steps in a real case study prior to its full application, which will be carried out in a subsequent study. Following the results obtained, an analysis and discussion of the implications of the methodology, its application and usefulness, as well as its limitations and deviations from the initial hypothesis will be carried out.

2. Routes and itineraries: conceptual differences and tourism contextualization

The conceptual differences between routes and itineraries, or their presence in the tourism market as complementary products, generates a constant confusion in the use of both terms, which makes it necessary to analyse their origin and context (López, 2022). This confusion arises from the decla-

ration of the Way of St. James as a European cultural route (1987), when the routes begin to be recognised and the need to understand the differences between the two realities arises. Some authors propose both terms, route and itinerary, as synonyms, based on the definitions proposed by the Royal Spanish Academy (Parrado del Olmo, 2002), however, it is possible to elucidate that the term route is related to the displacement (the journey or consequence of it) and itinerary is based on the materialisation of the displacement itself (the physical plane).

It was not until the 16th century, with the development of the printing press, that geographical descriptive documents based on routes with a strong geographical component began to proliferate, called Itinerarium, Descriptio, Ulysses, Deliciae, Commentarius. Thus, an important literature based on geographical documents was generated as descriptors of the main routes and with a strong geographical basis (Boyer, 2005). Itinerarium becomes a travel narrative (Itinerarium Curiosum in 1975 by William Stukeley) in which the route is conceived as the canvas on which the various aspects that make up the traveller's experience are represented as inventoriable or recapitulatory elements.

In the case of the itinerary, although it is also part of the traveller's experience, the main objective is geographical: layout and route. As Molinero (2012) mentions, after the creation of Cultural Routes by the Council of Europe, other meanings of the term have been generated, such as the artificial creation based on a specific theme. In spite of its physical vision, it will be on the route where the human factor materialises as an actor carrying out an activity in a geographical space on the route. The historians Mollat and Desanges (1988) defined historical routes, characterised by an itinerary and defined on the basis of the layout and its two extremes: the origin and destination (Mollat & Desanges, 1988). In this way, the limits and elements (milestones or stages) that make up

the route begin to be delimited.

2.1. The role of ICOMOS in the definition of the layout and its elements

The routes, as intangible values, were already elements of interest for ICOMOS as they were considered as spaces of coexistence between the physical or tangible, of a material nature (as goods or palpable historical evidence) and the route of the itinerary itself. In response to the above, the concept of cultural itinerary is conceived as the sum of the elements (strengths and tangible elements) that make up the route and give it its significance. This is expressed by ICOMOS in the Charter of Cultural Routes (2008), which states that routes are the sum of various elements (social, cultural, historical, etc.) that have an intrinsic and intangible value in the places where they are developed. Subsequently, the Council of Europe (2002), ICOMOS (2008) and MERCOSUR (2009) have continued to define the concept. The European institution considers them to be "a route covering one or more countries or regions, and organised around themes whose historical, artistic or social interest is shown to be European, either in terms of the geographical layout of the itinerary or in terms of its content and significance". As far as ICOMOS is concerned, it states that cultural routes refer to "any physically determined road, waterway or other means of communication, physically determined and characterised by its own specific historical dynamics and functionality in the service of a specific and determined purpose, which meets the following conditions: (a) being the result and reflection of interactive movements of people, as well as of multidimensional, continuous and reciprocal exchanges of goods, ideas, knowledge and values between peoples, countries, regions or continents, over considerable periods of time; (b) having generated a multiple and reciprocal fertilisation, in space and time, of the cultures con-

cerned which is manifested in both their tangible and intangible heritage; and (c) having integrated into a dynamic system the historical relationships and cultural assets associated with their existence. "Finally, MERCOSUR understands that they are paths "which over time exerted their cultural influence through transculturation, and which produced other means of expression different from those which originally existed in each place."From the reading of these definitions it can be deduced that, while the Council of Europe defends the European character of the routes, ICOMOS and MERCOSUR emphasise the layout as an integrating element of all the aspects involved in the route and of its intrinsic heritage value. This differentiation between route and itinerary are the first steps towards understanding and interpreting them as cultural resources with a strong potential for tourism.

2.2. Cultural routes as a product and their integration into tourism

Cultural tourism and its gradual rise in recent years has generated a large volume of products based on thematic cultural tourism routes and itineraries (Mota & Gonçalves, 2022). These products, with the territory as a nexus, favour the attraction of visitors to places that, due to their uniqueness or similar values, maintain an interrelationship between the elements that make up the space, this being a defined and delimited route (Hernández, 2011). Therefore, the design of routes and itineraries should pay attention to the theme, the objectives, the study of the destination, the inventory of resources, accessibility and communication, the degree of political support and funding, and also ensure a follow-up of the product after its implementation in the market (Pattanaro & Pistocchi, 2016).

Calderón et al. (2018) argue that routes are a tourism product, in which the route is of secon-

dary importance, since what is important are the elements that make it up. In the case of itineraries, the same authors argue that the route, perpetuated over time by human needs (military, religious, economic, etc.), has intrinsic heritage value, not all cultural itineraries being the object of tourist activity. Therefore, both realities are complementary elements that differ in purpose, use and intentionality.

Currently, the tourist offer based on the visit of cultural spaces is diversified by marketing not only specific elements, but the territory in its entirety, as a strategic element where the space is extended to places that are little travelled, highlighting certain suggestive aspects through a specific narrative.

The phenomenon of route creation is part of two distinct social dynamics: 1) the growing interest in visiting natural and cultural environments with values based on authenticity and uniqueness; 2) the emergence of new heritage categories such as those related to landscapes and cultural itineraries (Hernández, 2011). This context underlies the proliferation of cultural tourism routes in territories with cultural assets and natural spaces with potential for tourism. As a result, and through territorial marketing based on the competitiveness of tourism activity in specific areas, the aim is to position destinations in the market in an international context. It is in this context of territorial competitiveness that tourist routes become products of great value for the promotion of specific destinations. To reinforce the above idea, reference should be made to the work of the Council of Europe in promoting European cultural routes. The difficulty involved in managing them and coordinating them with the countries and institutions involved led the European body to publish in 2013 the Resolution CM/Res(2010)53 establishing an Enhanced Partial Agreement (EPA). The document, in addition to improving management, has an impact on social cohesion, is committed to sustainable local development and, in turn, promotes cultural exchanges

and the participation of universities, professional organisations and institutions at national and regional level.

The integration of cultural routes and itineraries as products within tourist circuits requires systems for evaluating the results of promotional strategies. This evaluation should be understood as a systematic process that allows the implementation of tools in a product that facilitate the verification of the fulfilment of the initial objectives, enabling the adoption of improvement measures (Schianetz et al, 2009). In this sense, extensive literature has been developed (Arnandis, 2018; García et al, 2019; Martínez & Boujrouf, 2020) which, in similar terms, argues that evaluation requires the identification of the product, as well as the characteristics of the area in which it is located, the adapted methodological development and finally the analysis of results and proposals for improvement. From the perspective of the evaluation of cultural tourism routes and itineraries, published works are scarcer. The Council of Europe, in its document Impact of European Cultural on SMEs' Innovation and competitiveness published in 2011, offers one of the first approaches applied to cultural routes. Through the evaluation of different cultural routes (Cultural Route of the Hansa, Routes of the Legacy of al-Andalus, Routes of the Olive Tree, Via Francigena and Transrománica), the European body does not claim to offer an evaluation methodology. Despite this assessment, the in-depth research carried out by the institution evaluates the repercussion of these products by studying their contextualisation, the impact they generate in the territory, their sources of funding, their coordination with heritage brands, the socio-economic effect of the routes, the level of cooperation with other cultural institutions, marketing, the frequency of contact between sponsors, the existence of training plans, merchandising activities and the planning of future activities.

It is appropriate to include in this analysis the tourism route evaluation model created by Božić

& Tomić (2016), applied to the Roman Emperors' Trail (Serbia) and embodied in the Cultural Route Evaluation Model (CREM). The CREM methodology is developed within two axes, the first being the route-specific values formed by the economic values of protection and conservation, while the second axis, called Tourism-specific values, encompasses the functional and additional values of the tourism product. The main methodological contribution is to obtain a matrix of results, which shows that not all the elements assessed are of equal importance for the development and evaluation of the route.

From the reading of the aforementioned works, it can be concluded that the tourism evaluation process consists of three phases, which have been broken down in Figure 1.

The first refers to the identity of the tourism initiative, which requires a study of the geographical area and the product to be evaluated. This approach consists of taking into account the re-sources, their classification and ranking, as well as the inclusion of market studies that include the supply and demand of the product as variables (Cebrián & García, 2010). The second phase of the process consists of the elaboration of a methodology that incorporates the data obtained in the first step, allowing its adaptation to the area and products under study. The evaluation methodology should include quantitative and qualitative elements so that, in its application, the aspects that have an impact on tourism activity are considered, allowing flexibility in the selected criteria. As a final stage, the results are analysed, since tourism product evaluation systems must be a living procedure in constant transformation and adaptation, as is the territory itself, allowing the selected indicators to be adapted to the product typology, identifying its weaknesses and strengths, as well as facilitating its planning and inclusion in the market.
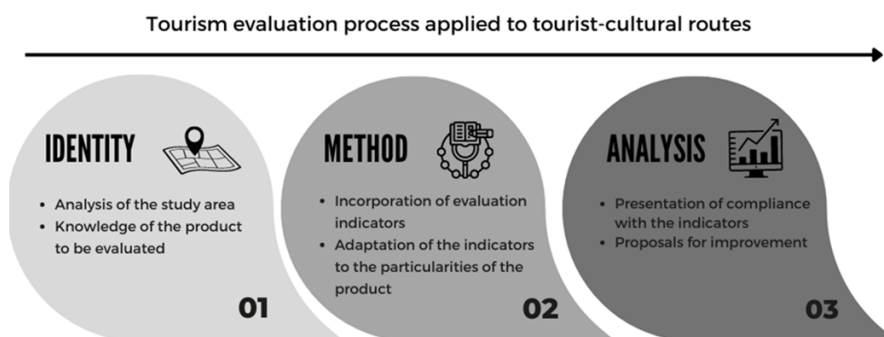

Figure 1 | Tourism evaluation process applied to tourist-cultural routes
Source: Own elaboration based on several authors (Schianetz et al, 2009; Arnandis, 2018; García et al, 2019; Martínez & Boujrouf, 2020).

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Case study: the Route of the castles and monasteries in the province of Cádiz

For the proposal and application of the methodology for the evaluation of tourist-cultural routes, the geographical, cultural and tourist particu-larities of the different municipalities of the province of Cádiz (Figure 2), located in the Autonomous Community of Andalusia, have been taken into account. In this context, the Route of the Castles and Monasteries (divided into two sections: El Atlántico Cádiz and La Frontera Cádiz and Málaga), promoted by the Junta de Andalucía through the Regional Ministry of Tourism, whose

route is partially located in the province of Cádiz, has been selected.

The province borders Seville and Huelva to the north and Malaga to the east. It also borders the Atlantic Ocean to the southwest, the Mediterranean Sea to the southeast and the Strait of Gibraltar to the south. Given their location, the different municipalities of the province share common features, as well as determining geographical differences, characterised by the diversity of landscapes that exist between the territories that make up the area.
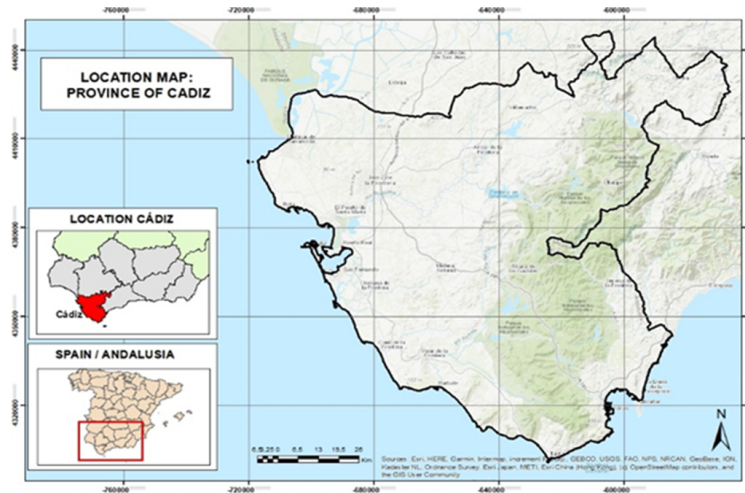

Figure 2 | Location of the study area. Province of Cádiz (Spain)
Source: Own elaboration

The municipalities are classified into six regions: the Bay of Cádiz, the Jerez countryside, the Northwest Coast, the Sierra, La Janda and the Campo de Gibraltar. The main economic activities throughout the provincial territory are activities linked to the tertiary sector, especially tourism, followed by industries (petrochemical, naval, aeronautical, etc.), construction and agriculture (INE, 2021).

The scope or influence of each of the elements that make up the route (Table 1) depends, to a large extent, on the visitor attraction capacity of the municipalities where they are located. Considering that the province of Cádiz is one of the territories of the Andalusian community with the greatest influx of visitors, it is to be assumed that visits to the route are favoured by this influx. In the last year alone, 2022, the province of Cadiz received around 14.1% of the 30.7 million visitors to the autonomous community of Andalusia (IECA, 2022).

The selected route includes both coastal and inland municipalities, covering a diversity of landscapes related to agricultural, urban, rural and/or coastal environments. Table 1 below shows an initial classification of the different elements that make up the route and its layout (Figure 3), based on the geographical area in which they are located, coastal municipalities (CM) or inland municipalities (IM), and the predominant tourist typology in the area according to the surveys carried out by the Institute of Statistics and Cartography of Andalusia (IECA, 2022).

Table 1 | Route of the castles and monasteries in the province of Cádiz

Geographical area (comarca)	Municipalities	ID	Items	Type of landscape	Predominant tourist typology
Atlantic Coast (MC)	Alcalá del Valle	01	Convent of Caños Santos	Rural/Agricultural	Gastronomic/Rural
Sierra de Cádiz (MI)	Olvera	02	Castle of Olvera	Rural	Gastronomic/Cultural
Campo de Gibraltar (MI)	Jimena de la Frontera	03	Castle of Jimena de la Frontera	Rural	Rural/Cultural
Campo de Gibraltar (MI)	Castellar de la Frontera	04	Castle of Castellar de la Frontera	Rural	Rural/Cultural
Campo de Gibraltar (MC)	Tarifa	05	Castle of Guzmán el Bueno	Coastal	Coastal-maritime
Bay of Cádiz (MC)	Chiclana de la Frontera	06	Castle of Sancti Petri	Coastal	Coastal-maritime
Atlantic Coast (MC)	Cádiz	07	Puerta de Tierra	Urban	Coastal-maritime/Cultural
Atlantic Coast (MC)	Cádiz	08	Headquarters of Santa Elena and San Roque	Urban/Coastal	Coastal-maritime/Cultural
Atlantic Coast (MC)	Cádiz	09	Bastion of Candelaria	Urban/Coastal	Coastal-maritime/Cultural
Bay of Cádiz (MC)	El Puerto de Santa María	10	Castle of San Marcos	Urban	Coastal-maritime
Northwest coast (MC)	Rota	11	Castle of Luna	Coastal	Coastal-maritime
Northwest coast (MC)	Sanlúcar de Barrameda	12	Castle of Santiago	Coastal	Coastal-maritime
Jerez countryside (MI)	Jerez de la Frontera	13	Alcázar	Urban	Cultural
Jerez countryside (MI)	Jerez de la Frontera	14	Cartuja de la Defensión	Agricultural	Cultural
Sierra de Cádiz (MI)	Bornos	15	Castle of Fontanar	Rural	Cultural/Gastronomic

Source: Own elaboration
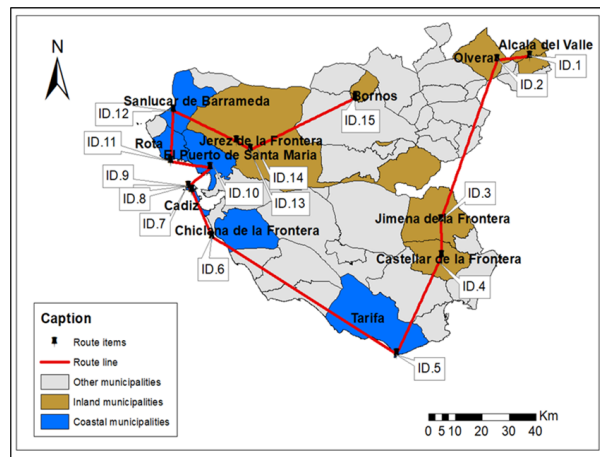
Figure 3 | Route of the Route of Castles and Monasteries in the province of Cadiz
Source: Own elaboration

3.2. Methodology for the evaluation of tourist-cultural routes

The proposed methodological system constitutes a general model for the evaluation of cultural tourism routes (hereafter METCR), which is based on the proposal of Nesticò and Marselli (2020), which studies the fulfilment of evaluation indicators. The METCR is structured in five indicators classified by five axes: level of quality of the destination, level of promotion of the routes, their tourist use, impact on the destination and user

satisfaction. In this sense, the proposed methodology requires the study and review of the scientific literature carried out to date, as well as fieldwork. The analysis model uses a technical sheet which synthesises the aforementioned axes and makes it possible to check compliance with the parameters included in them (Table 2). To this end, the first four axes use an alphabetical scale from A to C, where A is the maximum exponent and C the minimum. For its part, the fifth axis consists of a user satisfaction survey, where elements and factors of the route susceptible of social valuation are selected, again using a range A-C, representing the maximum and minimum qualification. With regard to the elements included in each axis, a distinction must be made between elements considered internal and external. The former are those whose origin is related to the implementation of the route, while the external ones have not had their raison d'être in the existence of the route. In reference to the above, the elements classified as external will be included in axis 1, while the rest of the axes include the external elements. Finally, it should be noted that no reference will be made to the size of the samples used to verify the different sections of the axes. The justification for this omission is that, given that the route passes through municipalities of different sizes and levels of development, it is sufficient to check that at least one establishment in each of the categories mentioned (accommodation, shops, complementary cultural offer, etc.) is in operation in order to assess the section.

The five axes are explained below:

Axis 1. Quality level of the destination: Analyses the existence in the study area of a complementary offer consisting of restaurants, accommodation and shops (A1), for which the data provided by the Institute of Statistics and Cartography of Andalusia (hereinafter IECA) is checked. Thus, statistics on the number of restaurants and hotels by category, as well as the total number

of shops, are included in a proprietary database. Hotel and restaurant services have been included as part of tourism potential index models, which are a sine qua non condition for the tourism development of destinations (Calderón et al, 2020, Rodríguez et al, 2021). Likewise, and following this premise, connectivity (A2) is studied by determining whether there is an airport, railway station and bus service within a radius of 50 km along the route. In order to obtain connectivity data, it is necessary to use a GIS to determine the infrastructures located in the area of influence of the municipalities by designing a buffer.

A section is incorporated to study the universal accessibility of the route (A3). Today's tourist destinations must be able to offer services and infrastructures that guarantee access to tourism for people with temporary or permanent disabilities so that all users can participate on equal terms (Melijosa et al, 2022). Compliance with the universal accessibility of the MERTC index will address the absence of physical barriers, the adaptation of exhibition resources to cognitive needs and, finally, the organisation of activities aimed at all users. The identification of the elements that impede universal accessibility requires an on-site verification of the heritage assets included in the itinerary.

Axis 2. Level of promotion of the route: analyses the level of tourist promotion of the route (A4) through various channels such as websites and whose information includes data such as the route or route of the visit, landscape and cultural elements, the assets that make up the route, as well as links or availability of information (articles, books, complementary offer and related websites). In turn, their presence on the main social networks (A5) in the last year, such as Instagram, Twitter and Facebook, is considered. To conclude axis 2, the viability of visits to heritage assets is verified (A6), reviewing data on prices and opening hours, while also checking the promotion of reduced ra-

tes. The analysis to be carried out in axis 2 must be considered holistically, taking into account the promotion carried out by the public sector and private initiatives. Given the complexity and breadth of the information studied in this section, the MERCT methodology requires its organisation in a database, in order to facilitate its integration within the proposed system.

Axis 3. Tourist Use: the existence of products generated from the implementation of the route is analysed (A7), such as the presence of guided tours, the sale of souvenirs or elements related to the theme of the route. Moreover, as an indicator, statistical data referring to the number of visitors is incorporated as an element of evaluation as representative data of its tourist use. Finally, the existence of alternative spaces created as a result of the route (interpretation centres, museums, exhibition spaces, etc.) is considered (A8). The verification of these factors is carried out by means of field work in each of the municipalities along the route, complementing the data obtained with the information available on the web. As this is an *in situ* verification, a field notebook has been used with tables that allow the results to be incorporated into the main matrix.

Axis 4. Impact on the destination: Tourist-cultural routes have an impact on destinations which can be studied from different perspectives. From the social point of view, the parameter analysed is the level of cultural identity of the route (A9). In this way, the relevance of the theme of the route to the history, its identification with the resident community and also its inclusion in social plans (educational and cultural) are ascertained. With regard to the economic impact (A10), it is checked whether there are data on the jobs created by the route by consulting the IECA databases, the income generated by the route and whether aid has been received for its promotion or heritage conservation.

Axis 5. User satisfaction: once the routes have been presented to the tourist market, it is necessary to carry out studies that analyse the perception of the users. In this methodology, a satisfaction survey is carried out among users who have taken some of the routes partially or completely. This survey assesses the web information, accessibility, heritage value, information on social networks, presence and quality of in situ resources (exhibition panels, brochures, audio guides, etc.), as well as the existence of complementary services.

In order to validate and contrast the METCR, a first application of the first three axes will be carried out in the selected case study, with axes 4 and 5 being the target of a subsequent validation.

Table 2 | Evaluation sheet for tourist-cultural routes

Axis 1. Quality level of the destination				
Parameter analysed	**Integrated elements**	**Valuation**		
(A1). Existence of complementary offer	• Shops • Restaurants • Accommodation	**Three elements**	**At least one element**	**No element**
		A	**B**	**C**
Parameter analysed	**Integrated elements**	**Valuation**		
(A2). Connectivity	• Airport • Railway • Bus	**Three elements**	**At least one element**	**No element**
		A	**B**	**C**
Parameter analysed	**Integrated elements**	**Valuation**		
(A3). Universal accessibility	• Physical Barriers • Adaptation of resources • Activities	**Three elements**	**At least one element**	**No element**
		A	**B**	**C**
Axis 2. Level of promotion of the route				
Parameter analysed	**Integrated elements**	**Valuation**		
(A4) Route promotion	• Web presence • Tour • Further information	**Three elements**	**At least one element**	**No element**
		A	**B**	**C**
Parameter analysed	**Integrated elements**	**Valuation**		
(A5). Social media presence	• Instagram • Twitter • Facebook	**Three elements**	**At least one element**	**No element**
		A	**B**	**C**
Parameter analysed	**Integrated elements**	**Valuation**		
(A6). Visits to heritage assets	• Timetable • Price • Reduced admission	**Three elements**	**At least one element**	**No element**
		A	**B**	**C**
Axis 3. Tourist use				
Parameter analysed	**Integrated elements**	**Valuation**		
(A7) Products generated	• Guided tours • Merchandising • Visitor statistics	**Three elements**	**At least one element**	**No element**
		A	**B**	**C**
Parameter analysed	**Integrated elements**	**Valuation**		
(A8) Cultural spaces	• Museums • Interpretation centres • Exhibition spaces	**Three elements**	**At least one element**	**No element**
		A	**B**	**C**
Axis 4. Impact on the destination				
Parameter analysed	**Integrated elements**	**Valuation**		
(A9) Cultural Identity	• Themes • Identity • Social plans	**Three elements**	**At least one element**	**No element**
		A	**B**	**C**
Parameter analysed	**Integrated elements**	**Valuation**		
(A10) Economic impact	• Employment • Income • Grants and subsidies	**Three elements**	**At least one element**	**No element**
		A	**B**	**C**
Axis 5. User satisfaction				
Elements	Very good	Acceptable		Poor
Web presence assessment	A	B		C
Accessibility	A	B		C
Heritage value	A	B		C
Information on social networks	A	B		C
Presence and quality of on-site resources	A	B		C
Complementary services	A	B		C

Source: Own elaboration

4. Results

The main and most interesting general result obtained after the methodological proposal is the actual application of the developed model in a territory. The technical results of the application are shown and analysed in the following section.

The technical evaluation carried out for the Route of the Castles and Monasteries integrates the 15 elements that make up the route according to the various axes analysed (Table 3). The different criteria contemplated by each axis are assigned a score between A and C, equivalent to 0 and 3 points, determined by the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of the variables of which they are composed. In this way, the resulting matrix shows the scores for each thematic axis according to the elements evaluated.

Table 3 | Results

Axis 1. Quality level of the destination				
Parameter analysed	**Integrated elements**	**Valuation**		
(A1). Existence of complementary offer	• Shops • Restaurants • Accommodation	**Three elements**	**At least one element**	**No element**
		A	**B**	**C**
Parameter analysed	**Integrated elements**	**Valuation**		
(A2). Connectivity	• Airport • Railway • Bus	**Three elements**	**At least one element**	**No element**
		A	**B**	**C**
Parameter analysed	**Integrated elements**	**Valuation**		
(A3). Universal accessibility	• Physical Barriers • Adaptation of resources • Activities	**Three elements**	**At least one element**	**No element**
		A	**B**	**C**
Axis 2. Level of promotion of the route				
Parameter analysed	**Integrated elements**	**Valuation**		
(A4) Route promotion	• Web presence • Tour • Further information	**Three elements**	**At least one element**	**No element**
		A	**B**	**C**
Parameter analysed	**Integrated elements**	**Valuation**		
(A5). Social media presence	• Instagram • Twitter • Facebook	**Three elements**	**At least one element**	**No element**
		A	**B**	**C**
Parameter analysed	**Integrated elements**	**Valuation**		
(A6) Visits to heritage assets	• Timetable • Price • Reduced admission	**Three elements**	**At least one element**	**No element**
		A	**B**	**C**
Axis 3. Tourist use				
Parameter analysed	**Integrated elements**	**Valuation**		
(A7) Products generated	• Guided tours • Merchandising • Visitor statistics	**Three elements**	**At least one element**	**No element**
		A	**B**	**C**
Parameter analysed	**Integrated elements**	**Valuation**		
(A8) Cultural spaces	• Museums • Interpretation centres • Exhibition spaces	**Three elements**	**At least one element**	**No element**
		A	**B**	**C**

Source: Own elaboration

Axis 1. Quality level of the destination

The results of the analysis of the first axis have yielded positive results, as tourism is a key strategic sector for the municipalities along the route. The data provided by the IECA in its latest Tourism Situation Survey (2022) show that the first parameter (A1) obtains the highest rating (A). There is a wide range of restaurants catalogued between one and five forks in all the municipalities, with the municipalities of Chiclana de la Frontera, Jerez de la Frontera and Puerto de Santa María standing out for their concentration. As far as hotel accommodation is concerned, it is concentrated in the municipalities with the largest populations or those close to the coast, with Chiclana de la Frontera, Jerez de la Frontera and Cadiz being the municipalities with the largest offer. To conclude the assessment of parameter A1, the presence of commercial activity was established. Apart from the data on the number of shops per municipa-

lity, the latest labour force survey was taken into account. This document reveals that commercial activity in all the municipalities is high, employing more than 20% of the active population, with the case of Cadiz being the most noteworthy, with a result of more than 35%. Achieving good results should not ignore the regional differences between inland and coastal municipalities. The presence of a large part of the hotel-commercial offer in coastal areas is explained by the area's specialisation in sun and beach tourism and, consequently, it will be necessary to promote other inland tourism models.

The connectivity of the municipalities with means of transport (A2) obtains worse results (B). Despite the fact that all the municipalities have at least one of the infrastructures considered (airport, railway station and bus station), it is detected that the smaller municipalities or those located in the interior of the province are far from airports and

railway lines, which is an obstacle for the arrival of international visitors. This brief analysis can be contrasted with the conclusions of the territorial model of tourism potential of Calderón et al, (2020) applied to the province of Cádiz. According to this study, the low potential of inland municipalities in the province as a whole is due, among other reasons, to the lack of connectivity due to the concentration of investment in transport in cities and large municipalities. Apart from this assessment, it should be pointed out that the province of Cadiz and Andalusia have historically had a transport model centralised in Seville and, therefore, it is necessary to promote a radial communication network.

The results related to universal accessibility (A3) show average values (B). There is a lack of adaptation of resources to the needs of users and a lack of promotion of activities. In recent years, legal and tourism planning initiatives have been developed in Andalusia, such as the Integral Strategy for the Promotion of Sustainable Inland Tourism in Andalusia (Horizon 2020) or the 3rd Plan for Tourism Quality in Andalusia 2014-2020, where elements related to universal accessibility are incorporated. This strategy represents a complete framework for action that is very useful for the study area considered, although it is true that the results obtained are still not sufficient to achieve full accessibility, which can be explained by the lack of specific plans at local and regional level (Clemente et al, 2018), which makes it difficult to implement measures to improve accessibility in an integrated manner.

Axis 2. Level of promotion of the route.

The route analysed has a well-structured promotion (A4), with an extensive web presence which, as indicated by Beltrán (2019), invites tourists to organise their trip via the Internet, taking into account all stages of the journey. However, there is very little basic information on the route analysed, such as the route itself, available infras-

tructures or the opening hours and access to the different elements. The official tourism website of the Junta de Andalucía limits itself to listing the municipalities along the route without providing a map and, therefore, makes it clear that the route does not follow a pre-established order, being left to the user's choice. With regard to the availability of complementary offers (hotels, restaurants, etc.), this is present through links to booking pages or through advertisements publicising the organisation of nearby events. All of this would fulfil the main function of institutional tourism websites of providing information on the range of activities on offer at the destination, thus boosting the supply of these activities (Coll Ramis et al, 2021). As a critical reflection on this promotion, it is understood that it does not take advantage of all the potential that the route can offer since, in addition to the lack of information, no links are offered to the tourist websites of the municipalities and, therefore, the promotion of the route at the municipal level is non-existent.

Analysing the presence of the route on social networks (A5) shows a lack of promotion of the route through this medium. Checking the publications of the Regional Ministry of Tourism on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter did not reveal any mention of the route and, therefore, the opportunity to promote the route to a wider public was wasted and, furthermore, no information was obtained on the opinion of users (Iñesta & Sixto, 2020). Likewise, and related to the reflection in the previous paragraph, no retweets, likes or comments have been detected on municipal publications, which shows a lack of coordination between regional and municipal strategies.

Axis 2 ends by approaching the parameter of visits to heritage assets (A6), with a poor result. The official tourism website is limited to listing the assets, contextualising them chronologically and highlighting the identity of that heritage within the social context in which it is framed. Information on prices, opening times and reduced entrance

fees is not available on the website of the Regional Ministry of Tourism, and the user has to consult the tourism pages of the local councils. It can be deduced, therefore, that there is a lack of planning of the route and, furthermore, evidence of a lack of coordination between the agents involved.

Axis 3. Tourist use

No tourism products associated with the route (A7) have been offered, and this lack has been detected in the services offered by both public and private companies. This can be explained by the interest of private companies in offering their own products that differentiate and position them in the market and, in the case of the public administration, by the lack of resources earmarked for this purpose. Likewise, it has not been possible to verify the commercialisation of thematic products of the route, which could be an indicator of the low or non-existent consolidation of the route as a product. In this sense, the possibility of generating complementary income is lost, as well as the publicity that these products provide.

One aspect that reflects the weaknesses in the planning of the route is the lack of statistics showing the number of visitors, their profile, or the income received by the route, among other aspects. This assertion is supported by a review of the statistics available at the IECA, the Cadiz Tourist Board and the Andalusian Ministry of Tourism. The lack of monitoring of the implementation of the route prevents knowledge of its behaviour in the market and its impact on users, thus making it impossible to improve it or adapt it to changes.

With regard to the existence of interpretation centres, museums and exhibition spaces (A8), they will be analysed as a whole, as their results can be explained by the same cause. The castles and monasteries route is located, as described above, in a consolidated tourist area. This means that the presence of museums and interpretation centres is numerous and, in general terms, well distributed geographically among the municipalities

(Arcila & López, 2015). However, the existing resources would be of a secondary nature, as they do not originate from the implementation of the route and, therefore, could not be accounted for in the evaluation methodology.

5. Discussion of the results

The implementation of the proposed methodology has allowed the evaluation of a tourist-cultural route located in the province of Cadiz, incorporating various axes closely related to the tourist nature of the route itself. The evaluations and scores obtained should not be considered as comparative elements between the different axes, but should be observed and analysed indistinctly, as they include variables of different natures. The main novelty of the proposed method is its capacity to evaluate tourism-cultural routes from different perspectives. Although evaluation in tourism is consolidated as part of the process of creating tourism products (Qingwen et al, 2022), in the case of cultural tourism routes, no studies have been carried out to evaluate their integration into the market.

The approach of the model shows, firstly, the importance of studying the destination from a perspective that encompasses its universal accessibility, complementary offer and connectivity. This analysis has been emphasised in various studies of tourism potential related to the resources potentially exploitable for tourism (Toselli, 2019; Ramírez et al, 2021; Bogan, 2022), demonstrating that a knowledge of these resources makes it possible to determine their viability as tourism products.

Moreover, the proposed method has made it possible to evaluate tourism promotion by analysing the presence on the web and social networks of information about the route and the heritage that makes it up in a systematic way. Apart from the easy access to these resources and, as mentioned above, being a main source in the planning of

visits, the use of the web and social networks has given users a greater role, as they can share information and experiences during and after the trip (Ávila & Ugalde, 2020). Therefore, checking the presence on the web and social networks shows, on the one hand, the interaction of the managing body with users and, on the other hand, the allocation of resources to maintain and promote the routes online.

The methodology used takes into consideration the tourist use of the routes, as proposed by García et al. (2019) or Martínez & Boujrouf (2020), where the analysis of the impact of the route in the study area is conceived, considering that these products should be able to generate direct employment, improve the existing infrastructure, as well as expand the supply of cultural or museum spaces.

The inclusion of a cultural tourism route in a destination is not exempt from having a certain impact on it. This is why METCR approaches it from two perspectives: the social and the economic. The social impact is determined by the cultural identity of the route within the study area, which implies checking the coherence between the history, culture or traditions of the destination and the product offered. The economic aspect, requires an analysis of the availability of statistics showing the income generated, the associated jobs, or the existence of by-products. Finally, the environmental impact is checked, as the integration of the product in the destination must be carried out in a sustainable manner. The product-destination interaction must be taken into account since, as Soini and Dessein (2016) argue, the cultural product has an inherent relationship with the environment and, in turn, is a mediation tool between the various actors in achieving sustainability.

Although its application is being carried out in a subsequent study, it is proposed in subsequent technical axes, evaluations on the opinion of the users of the routes, incorporating a satisfaction survey with the dual objective of obtaining updated information on the state of the product and increasing the participation of visitors in the process of improving the route, as well as in the creation of primary products or services.

The model developed, by including all the above-mentioned elements, makes it possible to have a general impact on all the evaluable aspects of the tourist-cultural routes. Its application is considered effective for the improvement, control and monitoring of these products. Its application to the case study, although partial, has demonstrated the viability of the model, allowing for an exhaustive analysis of the state of integration of the route in the destination. For all these reasons, this methodology is useful for incorporation into the design phase of tourist-cultural routes, since, given its flexibility, it will facilitate their adjustment to market changes, as well as their adaptation to the needs of users.

Although the proposed evaluation model is feasible, a number of weaknesses detected during its development must be taken into account. Firstly, the methodology has been applied to a route promoted by public bodies and, therefore, access to data such as visitor numbers, income obtained or tourism promotion, if available, is straightforward. It is considered that, if the METRC were to be applied to the evaluation of private sector routes, the possible lack of this information would make it necessary to collect such information or else the parameters included would have to be made more flexible. Secondly, the proposed model requires funding and time for its development. The funding-time trade-off could be reduced by implementing elements of this methodology (accessibility analysis, verification of the absence of architectural barriers, etc.) in the design of tourist routes. Finally, the model should be better developed to apply the model of cultural landscapes within the route, so that the evaluation is complete.

All these weaknesses show that the METRC methodology is at an embryonic stage. Further developments in the procedure should include a

numerical or percentage reference of the elements analysed, so that the model can be replicated more easily.

6. Conclusions

Strategic planning in tourism requires the development of evaluation and measurement systems that reflect the problems, as well as the potential of the implementation of the commercialisation of possible products and their impact on the market and on society. The need to evaluate cultural tourism routes is due to their progressive introduction in the market, which is not always accompanied by studies that justify their development in a given territory. The proposed methodology (METCR) aims to take steps to meet this need, analysing the main elements on which the success of the marketing of cultural tourism products depends. It is a method made up of five thematic axes that respond to the traditional classification of tourism product evaluation and that allows for a systematic evaluation of the potential, use and exploitation of cultural tourism routes. The method developed has a hierarchical structure, based on five categories of values which are broken down into various criteria or variables. These criteria contemplate various functional and descriptive aspects of the elements that make up the route as a tourist product. In this way, the elements that make up the model are objective, easily assessable and highly adaptable. Although not applied in this article, the method contemplates axes dedicated to the participation of society as the main evaluators of the route and its impact on the territory. In short, and as a result of the application of the method, two evaluation formats or modalities are obtained for cultural tourism routes: one based on technical elements (quality, promotion and tourism use) and the other based on the territory and society (impact and satisfaction of resident and visitor com-munities).

The application of the methodology presented in the case of the route of the castles and monasteries in the section of the province of Cadiz, has allowed the technical evaluation based on the first three axes of the evaluation process. The results obtained confirm that despite the existence of elements related to the complementary offer in the territory (shops, restaurants and accommodation), the connectivity that allows access to this offer, as well as to the elements that make up the route, is scarce, which is detrimental to the influx of visitors to certain areas, such as the municipalities located in the region of the Sierra de Cádiz. Similarly, the level of promotion of the route presents negative results, despite being a regional route that includes, in its entirety, the autonomous community of Andalusia, the promotion of the route is very scarce and its presence on websites, as well as on social networks is practically nil. Due to the fact that there is also no data related to tourist use, the results in relation to axis 3 are negative. The results obtained, although partially analysed according to the total method proposed, show that the selected route has planning shortcomings, as it does not have many of the basic elements that guarantee the proper functioning of the route and the possibility of adapting it to possible changes in demand.

Some vulnerabilities have been detected in the application of the methodology, mainly related to the various landscapes that make up the route. Their incorporation into the method is considered to be a determining element in the evaluation of tourist-cultural routes, allowing both landscape elements and the impact of the creation of the route on the landscape itself to be assessed. However, although it is an element that will be considered in future studies, the aforementioned methodology is considered valid, as it is adapted to the hierarchical structure of the general model for the evaluation of tourism products pre-established in previous studies and, after its implementation, has

obtained satisfactory results. In short, the methodology for the evaluation of tourist-cultural routes constitutes a useful instrument in previous tourism management tasks for the promotion of the routes as a means of diagnosing the use and value of the routes as a product, and can therefore be recognised by tourism managers or the administrations in charge. Its application makes it possible to quantify the cultural interest of the routes and to ascertain their main strengths and weaknesses in terms of the use and tourist exploitation of the cultural assets that make up the route.

Based on the research carried out, future lines of work that are of interest are proposed. The proposed methodology is flexible and dynamic, allowing for its adaptation (incorporation, suppression or modification of criteria and variables), as well as the incorporation of other axes of evaluation (such as cultural landscapes) that complement the original method.

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