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# Tourism Place: A Discussion Forum

## Mass Tourism Development on the Mediterranean Coast

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**Report on a joint meeting of the Research Group for Sustainability and Territory of the University of the Balearic Islands, the Research Group on Territorial Analysis and Tourism Studies of Rovira i Virgili University, and the Research Group for Planning and Sustainable Management of Tourism of the University of Alicante, 26–28 May 2010, Ibiza, Balearic Islands, Spain**

On 26, 27 and 28 May 2010, researchers of the Research Group for Sustainability and Territory of the University of the Balearic Islands, of the Research Group on Territorial Analysis and Tourism Studies of Rovira i Virgili University, and of the Research Group for Planning and Sustainable Management of Tourism of the University of Alicante met to hold the ‘Exchange and transfer of results between Spanish Mediterranean groups researching into tourism’ seminar. This has the general aim of debating and developing theoretical, methodological and applied approaches concerning the common subject of research interest, the territorial organization of tourism on the Mediterranean Spanish coast. The seminar was funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (project CSO2009-07050/SOCI). These three groups perform research in the field of the geography of tourism and, in 2010, they were working on competitive projects funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation.

The general aims of the University of Balearic Islands Research Group for Sustainability and Territory are to study, from a historical perspective, the geographical transformation that the Balearic Islands have undergone in the second half of the twentieth century, to chart and study diachronically, on a territorial scale, land

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occupation and use in the Balearics, to apply indicators of sustainability, to analyse the historical development of the energy system in the Balearic Islands and to compare and contrast the experience of the Balearics with that of other islands of similar geographical characteristics. These objectives are reflected within the framework of the project entitled 'The geo-economics and geopolitics of tourism. Analysis of touristic glocalization in the Balearic Islands, socio-environmental implications', which is being carried out in collaboration with researchers from the University of Málaga. The project is based on a theoretical-conceptual study concerning the ecological economy and political ecology in order to propose tourism as a means of accumulating capital via the production of space along the lines of thought of Castree (2007). Consequently, novel frameworks of analysis are established, such as those that arise from the socio-institutional analysis of socio-ecological conflicts (stakeholders, actors, regulations) and from the analysis of the flows of materials, energy and territorial transformations on the basis of the fundamental premise that the glocalization of tourism is a generator of unequal geographical development. On the basis of these considerations, a number of lines of empirical analysis are proposed, combining a territorial perspective in the Balearic Islands with the analysis of the dissemination of the processes studied outside the archipelago.

1. A study of the globalization of tourism from a trans-scalar viewpoint, considering the territory as being the meeting point of the logics of global capitalism and tourism as a means of accumulating capital in periphery economies. The 'Global Commodity Chain' analysis model is taken as a point of reference.
2. An explanation of the geohistory of the touristization of the Mediterranean, in particular its joining the global capitalist system at the start of the twentieth century, the role played by the Cold War and its current position in today's global framework of relations.
3. Analysis of the role of transport mega-infrastructures in putting the Balearic Islands on the world tourism map from a political, institutional and environmental perspective.
4. Charting and analysis of the spatial-temporal diffusion of tourist accommodation in the Balearic Islands.
5. Research into the internal transformation of the towns on the Balearic Islands as a result of tourist development between 1956 and 2008 and of the contemporary expansion of real estate-financial stakeholders in Balearic tourist areas.
6. A study of the territorial effects of neo-liberal urbanism. Analysis of the strategy of urban production in the Balearic Islands as a survival mechanism of capitalism, considering the production of space and urbanization as a solution to the excess capital of the capitalist economy and a mechanism of the stabilization of the global economy. A study of regulatory frameworks, urban policies, entrepreneurial strategies and large-scale urban development projects.

7. Analysis of the territorial and environmental costs of tourist development, considering the effective territorial footprint generated by changes in land occupation and the socio-economic metabolism in the Balearics.
8. Charting and analysis of the spatial diffusion of hotel chains in the Balearics outside the archipelago, considering dynamics of the dispossession of resources, abuse, competition, lack of adaptation to the regulatory framework and socio-occupational deterioration in the places where they are established.

The Rovira i Virgili University Research Group on Territorial Analysis and Tourism Studies has a number of scientific interests: the study of the relationship between global dynamics and local responses and their effects on territorial competitiveness; the role of tourism and leisure in the productive and environmental restructuring of places; the effects of territorial planning on the preservation and improvement of the environmental conditions of places; and local development and the effects and hazards of growing mobility on social dynamics. More specifically, there is a project entitled 'Territorial innovation and development models at coastal tourist destinations. Analysis on different spatial scales', in which a researcher of the Open University of Catalonia also takes part. This aims to evaluate the trends of the (territorial, economic and touristic) restructuring of tourist destinations, to analyse the dynamics of territorial innovation in tourist destination areas, to model the capacity of tourism to generate competitive territories from a social, economic and environmental point of view and to develop instruments to measure the factors of sustainability and competitiveness of coastal tourist destinations. To do so, the group takes as a basis the hypothesis, already proposed by Mullins (1991) – though little developed since in analyses of the processes of tourist development and its effects in terms of the social construction of urban spaces – of the singularity of tourist destinations as towns/cities from both a functional and socio-demographic, and an organizational and structural perspective. To this end, the basic working hypothesis is that for the case of the Spanish Mediterranean, the recent transformation of coastal tourist destinations has led to their development into complex urban structures, with renewed landscapes, innovative systems in the use of resources and differentiated processes and intensities of land use. All of this has brought about the appearance of specific social, economic and territorial dynamics which, in certain circumstances have provided competitiveness to the tourism areas and have generated dynamics of spatial innovation and creative development. It should not be forgotten that such processes have brought about notable socio-environmental conflicts and, especially, have generated new hazards from the point of view of the future sustainability of the destinations.

The analysis seeks, therefore, to link the study of Spanish Mediterranean tourist destinations with studies on the creation of urban space, territorial analysis and the economic valorization of anthropomorphized landscapes and to present the role of some tourist destinations as being spaces of social innovation, creativity and territorial competitiveness. Based on the above considerations, nine different themes

of empirical analysis are proposed, on different scales. The first three are on a regional scale (taking the whole of the Mediterranean coast as the focus of analysis); the following three are on an intermediate scale (referring to tourist destination regions which incorporate other economic activities, urban structures and productive functions); and the last three are on a local scale (taking specific destinations of the Mediterranean coast as a territorial reference framework of analysis). Thus, it is proposed to:

1. perform a typology of coastal tourist destinations in accordance with their recent dynamics of transformation;
2. assess the role of tourist destinations in the transformation of the regional territorial systems of the Spanish Mediterranean coast;
3. study the socio-demographic changes undergone by the Spanish coast, especially in terms of interculturality, new modes of social relations and residential mobility;
4. characterize the dynamics of the new coastal landscapes, their renovation and tourist exploitation;
5. identify the patterns of behaviour, recreational uses and mobility of tourists at coastal destinations;
6. establish the social mechanisms that lead to the creation of territorially competitive tourism 'industrial estates' or 'clusters';
7. analyse the competitiveness of the destination based on the analysis of changes in its perception, its image and its identity;
8. suggest systems for the evaluation of the sustainability of development dynamics in terms of the 'living conditions' of the destinations' residents;
9. suggest systems of analysis that enable identifying processes of innovation and creativity at coastal destinations.

The Research Group for Planning and Sustainable Management of Tourism of the University of Alicante is engaged upon a project entitled 'Renovation of consolidated coastal tourist destinations: new instruments for planning and management'. The aims of this are to establish a global (conceptual and theoretical) framework for the interpretation of the renovation/restructuring processes at tourist destinations, as well as of the theories that form the basis thereof; to perform comparative analysis of concrete restructuring strategies implemented at coastal destinations of reference, both in Spain (integral reconversion plans in Andalusia, Sur de Gran Canaria and Playa de Palma) and internationally; and to apply the results at three pilot destinations in the area of Valencia: Benidorm, Benicàssim and Gandia. Researchers from the University of Valencia and of Jaume I University of Castellón are also participating in this project. In greater detail, the work is focusing upon the analysis of renovation activities undertaken by the three above-mentioned destinations from the following two aspects:

- business – affecting the renovation of the destination due to the appearance of new tourism business models based on innovation and creativity, the renovation of the existing supply of accommodation, leisure and commerce as well as the study of the progressive incorporation of specific products that contribute to diversification and/or complementarity and, hence, to a renovation of tourism;
- destination – among others taking into account the renovation and recycling of urban and tourism fabrics, the renovation and regeneration actions carried out on the seafront, the local management of the tourist destination, the valorization/adaptation to touristic use of the natural and cultural heritage and changes in the image of tourism and the new approaches in promoting destinations.

On the basis of such considerations, the project deals with the following topics of analysis:

1. the establishment of a framework of analysis and conceptualization concerning the renovation and restructuration of consolidated or mature tourist destinations and its scope;
2. the characterization of the selected local models of tourism, with special emphasis on the state of the question with regard to the need for renovation and restructuration;
3. processes for the valorization of natural and cultural heritage for inclusion into tourist activities in the local areas of study;
4. the renovation of the infrastructures and services and of the urban landscape;
5. the main urban-tourism projects underway or planned for each pilot destination and their contribution to the renovation of the destination;
6. the identification of actions taken by business to improve establishments and create new business models, paying special attention to the renovation of the destination;
7. the appearance of new models for the management of destinations, analysing the role of mixed public–private bodies as an element of management based on the need for co-ordination and efficacy among stakeholders in tourism.

The contributions made by the members of the three research projects during the seminar have highlighted not just the opportunity but also the need to analyse the processes of tourism development in coastal areas in greater depth due to at least three fundamental issues.

- Their role in the dynamics of global capitalism and, therefore, as proof of the ability of tourism to bring about transformations and conflicts on a local scale.
- The clearly urban nature of coastal tourist destinations and the implications that this has on the needs for analysis, planning and management that link destinations to matters related to land-use transformation, the localization of other productive activities, the appearance of real estate-financial strategies of global reach,

the connection between the growth of destinations and the new dynamics of social mobility of a residential and productive nature, and the appearance of new innovation environments.

- The extreme importance of the processes of renovation/restructuring of existing, consolidated tourist destinations both as regards their tourism competitiveness and, especially, due to the consequences – often in the form of new conflicts – that these processes have in environmental and social terms.

On the basis of the above, and beyond the specific orientations of the research and the projects carried out and proposed by each of the groups, key questions emerge concerning research into Mediterranean coastal tourist destinations. The questions in point are:

1. the effects of the flows that tourism directs towards destination areas in a global–local dynamics regarding both the conflicts it catalyses and the dynamics of territorial competitiveness it brings about;
2. the role of tourism as a way to accumulate capital in destination areas, its implications in terms of creating a dynamics of environmental inequality and transformation and its will in terms (via the dynamics of renovation/restructuring) of maintaining the activity;
3. the connection between tourism and the dynamics of creating urban spaces both from the logic of real estate–financial capital and from the perspective of the productive and reproductive functions located in towns and cities as well as from the point of view of the actual structuring of urban networks and the internal structure of towns and cities;
4. the need to integrate the planning of land use, the conservation of the environment and the landscape and balanced local development strategies into the dynamics of managing tourist areas as an exclusive way towards the sustainability of the processes;
5. the implications that the current processes of renovation/restructuring of destinations have on their own urban metabolism and in relation to changes in people's mobility patterns.

Finally, the seminar served to address matters of a theoretical, methodological and operative nature.

- The challenge of integrating tourism research carried out by groups located in tourism destination areas in the main currents of dissemination of thought on an international level.
- The need to contribute new content and approaches to the theoretical and conceptual framework of analysis of changes at destinations.

- The difficulties in obtaining and processing primary information and the challenge of building integrated databases on different scales with specific indicators adapted to the needs of interpretation of the destinations.
- The interest in building a catalogue of cases to perform comparative analyses based on detailed study, under the same theoretical, epistemological and methodological assumptions, of the reality of coastal tourist destinations and the conditions for the existence of situations of success and failure both in social and in environmental and, of course, sectorial-touristic terms.
- The suitability of the existence of networks and systems of permanent exchange between research groups.

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