

THE ROLE OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS IN THE SOCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSFORMATION OF THE SPANISH MEDITERRANEAN COAST

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During the last three centuries the Mediterranean coast has concentrated the growth of population, production and consumption in Spain. Nevertheless it seems that in recent years this tendency has accelerated. Despite coastal urbanization has brought important socioeconomic and territorial effects (as fast changes in the landscape, competition between production industry and economic activities) and that is an issue of interest for Spanish society, little is known about some key aspects of the Mediterranean process of urbanization. We mainly need to understand the relationship between tourism, social and economical factors. The purpose of this article is twofold: 1) to characterize the different types of coastal municipalities according to their urban, social, economic and demographic characteristics; and 2) to recognize the differences between the tourist towns and the rest. The main hypothesis is based on the belief that tourist towns are specifically different than the rest in terms of production and consumption, and that the development of urban processes reinforces this trend.

The work of Mullins and others about Tourism urbanization has reported results about the distinctive form and structure of tourism resorts. In short, tourism urbanization and urban tourism has been responsible of the new social and spatial system based on consumption (Mullins, 1994). But this model of organization varies in every place (Gladstone, 1998). Tourism urbanization in the Mediterranean coast of Spain is shaped by the real state sector and its effects in terms of territorial competitiveness on the tourist sector. Some other key elements have been identified as factors of change in the study of the urban process (mobility, social change, counterurbanization, and second homes) but they have been studied isolated instead of doing it systemically.

Our work is based on the construction of a data base built upon 31 socioeconomic variables (2001) for the 1.861 coastal municipalities of the Spanish Mediterranean regions. The use of indicators allows us to analyze five different items of each locality and to distinguish the differences between tourist and non tourist cities. Previously a typology of tourist cities has been built. Two levels of analysis are used in this work. First we draw cartographical

synthesis of each five items selected for the whole region at a local scale. Second we compare the differences between the five items selected by type of town.

The main results obtained are the following:

- 1) Demography. In a context of general demographic growth tourist specialized towns types (M1 and M2) have the highest levels. As a result some new urban polarities appeared on the Spanish coast; a second line capillarity urban system (complementary of the tourism coastal resorts) has been reinforced, and deconcentration of metropolitan spaces has benefited tourist settlements and inland small villages. Demographic structure of tourism specialized resorts has changed also quickly than the rest of types, including conventional towns as a consequence of the highest mobility rates and migration towards tourist towns, and the amount of immigration and new residents registered in recent years in this kind of cities. Production and consumption opportunities (labor, leisure, retirement) combine to attract more people in specialized tourist cities. This generates some advantages (rejuvenation, creativity, increasing municipality incomes), but also inconveniences (formation of socioeconomic ghettos, increase in the demand of social services, etc.).
- 2) Social change. The Mediterranean region as a whole is experiencing huge social transformations linked to the creation of new forms of home that are displacing the “traditional family” (although it stills being the predominant). Tourist cities are, again, the leaders in social and family change indicators (divorce rates, percentage of singles, percentage of one parent family, etc.), and they have the broader gap with traditional family model and lifestyles. One of the main results of the research suggest that tourism spaces act as an accelerator of social change, and that tourist cities display higher indicators of social change compared to the rest of city types. This trend, mixed with the transformation of some cultural and mentality features, gives place to a socially distinctive urbanization in tourist spaces.
- 3) Consumption. Consumption indicators reflect an opposition between villages and towns. Type M6 (inland villages) has lower consumption indicators than the rest, and tourist specialized towns are in an intermediate level, but with high commercial and financial indicators. The consumption orientation of tourist spaces is clear, due also in part, to the presence of seasonal population.
- 4) Quality of life. In general terms residents along the Mediterranean coast perceive a medium-good quality of life of their place of residence. Differences appear when considering town size and “rural”-urban spaces. Towns are lower ranked than villages in general and urban typologies (M4 and M5) obtain the worst results, while non urban spaces obtain the best results (M6 typology). Tourist towns have intermediate values between both typologies. Seasonal population makes tourist cities comparable to other towns but indicators of perception of quality of life are comparatively better.
- 5) Real estate dynamics. Tourism urbanization in the Spanish Mediterranean coast is characterized by the strong presence of real estate activity in their economic base. Tourist towns have the higher indicators of house construction and second home specialization. City budgets also are highly based on real state taxes and burdens. Tourist towns are characterized by high income per capita, to have the higher fiscal

stress of the region, and to have indirect taxes higher than the mean. Tourist cities share two productive strategies: 1) a high specialization in residential tourism; and 2) a tendency towards the consolidation of permanent population. Both issues increase the territorial attraction of tourist spaces.

CONCLUSIONS

Tourist cities play a differential role in the process of urbanization of the Spanish Mediterranean coast. Compared with the rest of urban typologies tourist cities have greater social and demographic transformations that make them potentially competitive. The main findings about that issue are twofold: 1) Spanish Mediterranean coast process of urbanization is characterized by an asymmetrical "littoralization". 2) It exist a link between the progress of the urban process and the acceleration of demographic and social change in tourism cities, especially in terms of social modernization and household structure and composition.

Spanish Mediterranean coast continues to allure population and residents, as concentration of residences, production and services, and the good perception of quality of life indicate. There is no doubt that in the short term human pressure over the coast will increase and spatial conflicts will also appear. This is a challenge for urban and land planning. Nevertheless the increase of complexity tied to social change and the transformation of household and population can also be read as an opportunity to improve competitive strategies through creativity.

The results of this work are provisional and should be revised and widened in future research. Particularly our interest is focused on the sociodemographic transformation and their relationship with the competitiveness of the tourist local system. Four central issues should be undertaken in new research 1) the impact of migration and how it sharpens the demographic structure; 2) the patterns of settlement and the social and cultural roles of the creative class; 3) to identify the social and demographic elements linked with territorial innovation and competitiveness; and 4) to identify tourism clusters based on the competitive strength of their human capital.

