Tourism planning and tourismphobia: An analysis of the strategic tourism plan of Barcelona 2010-2015

http://dx.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1247519

Persistent identifier (URN):
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-67085-2
Tourism Planning and Tourismphobia: An Analysis of the Strategic Tourism Plan of Barcelona 2010-2015

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Abstract: The exponential growth of tourism has brought new challenges to destinations; how to plan themselves to avoid overtourism and this new form of intolerance, the so-called tourismphobia. In order to address the negative impacts of tourism and enhance the positive ones Barcelona has developed and implemented a strategic tourism plan. This paper seeks to understand how Barcelona addressed the tourismphobia problematic through planning: how it was done and which results were achieved in the end. This research reveals a clear gap between the planer’s intention and the plan’s implementation.

Keywords: Strategic Tourism Planning; Overtourism; Tourismphobia; Sustainable Development; Resident Communities

JEL Classification: L83, Z32, Z38

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1 INTRODUCTION

One can say that “tourism may be regarded as a fantasy selling industry striving upon people’s dreams, hopes, beliefs, expectations and imageries, which are in turn transformed into consumable commodities or experiences” (Martins, 2015:02; 2016:34).

Kreag (2001:02) has stated that “for decades, tourism industry growth has been a major contributor to increase economic activity throughout (…) the world. It has created jobs in both large and small communities and is a major industry in many places. The lack of an education for tourism leads some tourists to have behaviours that natives can consider to be offensive against their culture; some examples include the profanation of sacred places and the destruction of patrimony. This has led several times to anti-tourism manifestations.

In the future, the international community will see anti-tourism manifestations and the so-called tourismphobia as a priority. To address this problem, it is required a political will and a sustained and comprehensive approach; national, regional and local tourism planning that must include a wide range of measures and actions which must complement and reinforce each other. Several destinations are already developing and/or implementing action plans to avoid overtourism, anti-tourism manifestations and tourismphobia, among them one can point out Amsterdam, Venice and Barcelona, where one first came across to the word ‘tourismphobia’.

The subject of this paper is to understand how Barcelona address the tourismphobia problematic through planning; how it was done, and which results were achieved in the end. It was also important to us to understand if the planning implementation has failed and if so why.

About the issue overtourism Goodwin (2016) says that in Barcelona overtourism “has been a concern since 2004 and an issue formally engaged by the ajuntament (government) of Barcelona since 2008”. This concern has led to the development of the city of Barcelona Strategic Tourism Plan (PET2015), whose policies, measures and actions one will analyse here having always in mind the issue of tourismphobia.

2 TOURISM PLANNING AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY
According to Nickols (2016:03) “strategy refers to a general plan of action for achieving one’s goals and objectives”. Gunn (1988:16) expresses that strategic planning is predicting and “it requires some estimated perception of the future. Absence of planning of short-range planning that does not anticipate a future can result in serious malfunctions and inefficiencies”.

One can verify that it is in the territories that are present the agents that will make the policy for the tourism activity viable, because this is the stage where tourist actions take place. It is known that in the viability of this activity the rural or coastal, natural or artificial landscapes are tourism potential that can be transformed into products, and planning is one of the tools through which is possible to preserve, keep or recover this element present in the territory.

Tourism planning can be seen as a dynamic, systemic, participatory and continuous process that has in view the determination of the destination’s objectives, strategies and actions. It is then a relevant to deal with changes in the internal and external environments and to contribute to the success of a destination. Thus, tourism planning seeks to provide a coordinated transition or link between the present situation at a destination for and improved future to both residents and tourists (Bhatia, 2006; Stokes, 2008; Almeyda-Ibáñez & George, 2017).

The fast growth of the tourism industry not only transforms destination areas, but without planning and control, tourism growth can bring social and cultural disruptions due to economic imbalance and also environmental degradation.

In recent times some destinations have even thought of using demarketing to reduce the number of tourists, trying at least to achieve a reduction of the negatives effects of tourism. As Kotler and Levy (1971:75) stated “we define demarketing as that aspect of marketing that deals with discouraging customers in general or a certain class of customers in particular on either in a temporary or permanent basis”. According to Ness (2003:22) the question that rises is whether tourism is a nightmare or a godsend, or some combination of the two. He says that “it depends on an array of circumstances to vast and complex to model in general terms”. Reid (2003:13) says that “what has been lost in the discussion of tourism planning, and in the problem solving-process, generally is the plethora of everyday issues – such as social relations, local institutions, and the conditions of the environment – that are central to the lives of individuals and communities”. All discussions around tourism planning must consider these wider issues rather than just concentrate in the economic development.

3 COMMUNITIES PARTICIPATION IN TOURISM PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Communities should play a key role in tourism planning and development. They should participate actively in all stages of the planning development and implementation, including participation in the resources assessment, in the identification of problems, and in the definition of actions to resolve and prevent problems. Concerns about community involvement in tourism planning and development have increased as a result of unfair power distribution between powerful interest groups and local communities (Jamal and Getz, 1995; Trakolis, 2001). Tourism literature stresses out the importance empowerment, which consists in giving authority and resources to make decisions on the local tourism development (Choi and Sirakaya, 2006; Cole, 2006; Sotiriadis and Shen, 2017). Several studies investigated a range of community involvement initiatives, some of which advocated the distribution of power and benefits fairly among residents, whereas others defend that one must strengthen the power of governments and business over communities (Shani and Pizam 2012). According to Murphy & Murphy (2004) the community approach to tourism development is an attempt to integrate the interests of all community stakeholders, including residents as a critically-important group, in analysis and proposals for development.

It is possible to identify at least three types of resident community participation in the context of tourism planning and development: coercive participation, induced participation and spontaneous participation (Tosun, 2006; Zhang et al., 2013; Volgger et al., 2017). Coercive participation is the most “manipulated and contrived” approach (Tosun, 2006: 495), so it refers to the lowest level of participation in which resident communities have no power in what regards to tourism planning and development. In here, resident communities may or may not beneficiate from tourism benefits. Induced participation consists in the situation where governments and developers only consult the resident community opinion regarding tourism planning and development, but they are excluded from actual decision-making throughout all the planning and development process (Tosun, 2006; Chatzigeorgiou, 2017). Tosun (2006:494) says that spontaneous participation is a ‘bottom up’ process in which resident community members through participation in decision-making, have full authority in tourism planning processes, so in spontaneous participation, local residents have the power to make decisions and to control development process.

4 TOURISMPHOBIA AND THE BARCELONA’S STRATEGIC TOURISM PLAN 2010-2015

One agrees with Goodwin (2016) that says that the Barcelona’s Strategic Tourism Plan 2010-2015 vision was both ambitious and ground breaking. Ambitious because it sought among other to, to be committed to tolerance, inclusiveness and with sustainability principles (City of Barcelona Strategic Tourism Plan Diagnosis and Strategic Proposal: Executive Summary, 2010:19-20), and ground breaking because perhaps for the first time a strategic tourism plan really looked and managed to include all stakeholders in its design (City of Barcelona Strategic Plan Diagnosis and Strategic Proposal: Executive Summary, 2010:06).

Since 2008, the numbers of reports denouncing a growing uneasiness between tourists and residents in Barcelona have increased. By 2012, one could see several images provoking tourists as the ones available in passive-agressivenotes.com
Tourism Plan: Executive Summary (2010:22), states that community reaction against them, the Barcelona Strategic Tourism Plan in association with the sectors involved, which balance between local residents and tourists, while preserving “to promote a tourism model which will strengthen the destination as a whole and the sectors in particular are key factors to success. There can be no long-term success without sustainability, and there is no sustainability without the ability to be competitive”.

The idea behind these measures, according to the Barcelona Strategic Tourism Plan – Executive Summary (2010:04) is that “today Barcelona is setting to itself new challenges and initiatives that require a deep reflection process which involves adopting a new approach to some key questions, such as, for instance, the type of growth and the tourism management model, the territorial boundaries of the destination, the extent and consequences of the impacts and effects of tourism and, the modes of coexistence between local residents and visitors.”

5 RESULTS

Without an analysis of the city of Barcelona Strategic Tourism Plan – Evaluation of the Action Program 2010-2015, one could never have a good idea of what went well and wrong in the application of its 15 programs. After reading it somethings have caught our attention regarding why in 2015 (end of the program) tourismphobia and other negative tourism effects were still very much in the order of the day. According to the city of Barcelona Strategic Tourism Plan – Evaluation of the Action Program (2015:110), of the 55 measures, 2 have been withdrawn, 8 were not initiated, 13 have received an achievement graduation of 25%, 21 received an achievement graduation of 50%, 10 received an achievement graduation of 75%, and only 1 measure was fully achieved (100%). The program with the highest degree of accomplishment was “Neighbourhoods and Districts”, and
the program with the lowest degree of accomplishment was
the one entitled “Governance”.
As a Whole, the 55 programs established in the city of
Barcelona Strategic Tourism Plan (2015:110) achieved an
average rating in their degree of implementation of less than
50%. According to this document, the results can be
evaluated as having a low applicability rate.
Additionally, the city of Barcelona Strategic Tourism Plan –
Evaluation of the Action Program (2015:112) stresses out
that “other emergent phenomena have taken place, such as
the collaborative economy or the massive increase in new
form of accommodation, as well as advances in technology
and its applications to the city (smart city). These phenomena
have favoured a continuous increased in the tourist activity
and have put more pressure in certain points of the city, those
with higher density of tourism impacts”.
The greatest problem of the city of Barcelona Strategic
Tourism Plan was failing in the implementation of the
program entitled “Governance”, which means that the plan
failed in creating the institutions that would seek to manage
and coordinate the tourist activity and its relationship with
and within the city. These institutions would also be
responsible for the generation and dissemination of
information, which according to the plan would play an
important role in order to help achieve the necessary
manifestations will continue to grow among the receptive
stakeholders relationships. Furthermore, it makes an
address still remain and in some cases these become worst,
like in the case of anti-tourism manifestations and tourismphobia.
This case study reveals a clear gap between the planner’s
intention and the actual implementation results. According to
this research that happened for several reasons among which
a failure in monitoring the implementation of the plan,
making it impossible to a reaction to change. Plan monitoring
and reformulation is crucial for feasible and effective
implementation of the plan. Similar failures have also been
reported in the studies of Inskeek (1991) and Gunn (2002).
This necessarily implicates the existence an organizational
structure that monitors the implementation of the plan
creating a method to overcome unforeseeable obstacles that
may rise in an ever-changing reality. This organizational
structure must be able to develop a multi scenario method that
allows predicting how to address these non-predictable
obstacles.
One has used in this paper a case study research because one
believes that with it, the researcher is more able to go beyond
statistical results and understand better the underlying
qualitative data. However, as any case study research, several
limitations can be identified among which as Tellis (1997)
expresses, a common criticism is its dependency on a single
case exploration making it difficult to reach a generalising
conclusion. Other limitation is that case study research
findings and conclusions are very depending on the
investigator’s background and level of involvement (Stake,
1995).
This paper can be considered relevant to understand how to
address the tourismphobia thematic in the tourism
development and planning context. Furthermore, it makes an
incursion into issues such as: - overtourism and over-visited
destinations; anti-tourism manifestations and tourismphobia;
social resistance and protest in tourism contests; tourism
governance and governability.
Given the lack of studies at this level further research must
be made, namely, empirical research over the gaps between
planning and implementation that enable not only to address
problems such as tourismphobia but several other.
This research intended to contribute to enhance the
knowledge base for later discussions and developments.
Furthermore, it intended to bring new insights into a little-
understood phenomenon suggesting new interpretations and
relationships.

6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Tourism has brought and brings many changes to many
countries, regions and places, and residents have to adapt and
adjust themselves to these changes. The adaption to change
implies that without concerted actions, anti-tourism
manifestations will continue to grow among the receptive
communities leading to a deterioration of the destinations
competitiveness.
In response to overtourism and to new challenges as the one
of Tourismphobia, the city of Barcelona as design, develop
and implemented the city of Barcelona Strategic Tourism
Plan 2010-2015.
The plan intended to create multi-stakeholders relationships
seeking a better and more sustainable tourism development
of tourism. The plan also intended to improve the way how
residents and tourists use the city and relate between
themselves in it.
As one has seen the Strategic Tourism Plan of Barcelona was
both ambitious and ground breaking, and as we seen maybe
it was too much of the two. In Barcelona the implementation
of the means failed and like so, many of the ends foreseen
also have been fully accomplished.
Having in mind what has been said above, even that in the
design of the city of Barcelona Strategic Tourism Plan
tourismphobia was considered as a serious problem, this plan
did not help to clearly mitigate the negative effects
addressing like this anti-tourism manifestations. It failed
because, as we know today, the problems that it intend to
address still remain and in some cases these became worst,
like in the case of anti-tourism manifestations and tourismphobia.

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