

# AN ANALYSIS OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN CATALONIA USING DESTINATION LIFE CYCLE

**Luis Alfonso Garay Tamajón**

Universitat Oberta de Catalunya

**Gemma Cànoves Valiente**

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

The article begins with a justification of the analysis and a presentation of its theoretical framework. Following a review of national and international literature about the analysis of the historical development of tourism, we conclude that it has gone from an initial stage in which different pioneers began the work to a new stage with the emergence of new publications that refer to specific aspects or local experiences related with it. However, an historical, long term and horizontal approach to development in regional tourist destinations was found to be lacking. This is the objective of this research, which integrates the elements that explain the structural changes in the industry, observing the changes in production methods and organization in technological innovation. As well as the pursuit of social differentiation based on tourism consumption or the creation of a tourism image linked to territorial identity. In a study on the development of this industry, temporal and dynamic dimensions are just as important as those of territory.

Although there are many insights into the planning and management of destinations, Richard Butler has dedicated over two decades of study to it, producing the Tourism Area Life Cycle (from now TALC). It was initially designed to explain the development of tourism in a fordism context, but it is still used today to observe the movement of the industry towards post-fordism paradigm. We took into account the fact that while the TALC description of the process of destination decline was quite simple, focusing on an inability of the destination to defend its position against new competitive destinations, for other theories such as Regulation, these processes were much more complex, and involved various structural forces. When the accumulation regime or system of production and consumption saturates and reaches a crisis, society develops a new regulatory system (legal, political, institutional systems) that is capable of supporting the former. In tourism, as a part of the production system, there are also these periods of crisis in the production and consumption systems and simultaneously a progressive transformation of the regulation systems.

In our view, an analysis of tourism development, using the conjunction of the TALC and regulation theories, could be used, not only to observe the transition to a new post-fordist

paradigm, but also to examine previous restructuring in the history of tourism. Even if the origins of this type of tourism lie in craft tourism or the new period of professionalization and from there to mass tourism. It is for this reason that the methodology of this study focuses on detecting and analyzing changes in the cultural, economic and technological forces described in TALC. Here, the territory also plays a role in the possible restructuring of the industry. Regarding the observation of these forces, the study takes into account the main elements that make a destination dynamic. These elements include demand variables, the accessibility of the destination, and the dialectic between tourism, society and environment. Further elements include the relationship between residents and tourists, and the promotion of the destination and its impact on demand. Finally, the perspective of supply and infrastructure was included, analyzing the role of transport systems, the probability of changes in the composition of the stock of accommodation and other related tourism infrastructure or planning actions that facilitate the transition from one phase to the next. A wide range of sources was used to apply this methodology including literature and statistical references.

As for the origins of tourism in Catalonia, from the literature, we can conclude that although Catalonia, like the rest of Spain, was not initially included in the routes of the great forerunner of tourism, the *Grand Tour*; it is true that some early explorers visited its countryside in the late eighteenth century. Their views had a significant impact, and the first subjective assessment of the country was to be found in their descriptions of their perceptions of its landscape and heritage, therefore creating a first impression that was later to explode into the subsequent movement of picturesque romantic travellers. This first exploration phase was followed by an early involvement of local agents. The exclusive world of aristocratic tourism from the ancient regime was displaced by the emergence of a new urban middle class, which reproduced and imitated the aristocratic fashions and began to form part of the leisure class. One example are spas, which crystallized this new demand and its ability to invest in the business and streamline many spa destinations, usually located in rural areas or on the coast. In parallel, local agents also got involved in shaping Catalan tourism through new scientific phenomena such as hiking. However, producing a phase of involvement definitely required the response of local agents through the provision of new infrastructures. This process was consolidated by the development of a Catalan railway network. The expansion of this new mode of transport, between 1855 and 1865, was one of the main determinants of economic growth and allowed new destinations in Catalonia to be discovered.

Furthermore, the development of housing and transport infrastructure in the city of Barcelona and the progressive development of a first urban tourism phenomenon, which climaxed in the Universal Exhibition of Barcelona in 1888, were a starting point for many of the main phenomena that defined the destination's tourism development in the next stage. The involvement of local agents and the municipality of Barcelona were especially important in the preparation of the Exhibition. The need for the bourgeoisie of the city to publicize their potential and serve as a starting point for future meetings took place. Their main interest was the promotion of the city, with the *Societat d'Atracció of Forasters* (Foreigners Attraction Society) being the most prominent.

A new phase of tourism began in the early twentieth century in Catalonia. This new stage began with a new influx of travellers, who were rediscovering a country in constant transformation and renewal and did so in the new mode of transportation that was

transforming the world of travel and leisure: the car. In response to this exploration came a new phase of involvement in which local agents started an early professionalization and industrialization of the tourism supply. Between these two models lies a supply, which began its quantitative and qualitative transformation. Meanwhile, the involvement of local staff also extended to the public domain. From the nineteen twenties some development occurred, with a transformation of the tourism industry, from short supply concentrated in activities such as spa, hiking or tourism associated with large exposures to a new context. This gave way to the development of a specific set of typologies (rural tourism, ski tourism, seaside tourism), some of which became generic in the fordist stage. Finally, as reflected in the development phase of the destination for this stage, the government made a major effort to develop the management and promotion of tourism. In this respect, the role of the Catalan Tourism Office in the Republican regional government was commendable. However, the social and political problems that led to the Civil War suddenly stopped this incipient development, which took twenty years to relaunch.

It wasn't until the fifties when a new era of tourism in Catalonia began, known as fordist or mass tourism. This occurred in parallel to the emergence of a new model of accumulation and economic regulation based, *inter alia*, on a massive supply and demand. This new stage began with a new phase of exploration as the destination had been abandoned for two decades. Some new tourists, initially from the Catalan regions in neighbouring France, travelled there to make short day or weekend trips, taking advantage of cultural affinity, the proximity, the low prices and an attraction for little-known locations. This first phase of exploration continued over the years moving into a phase of involvement in which the local private sector played a prominent role. It was in this period when an initial infrastructure for accommodation was developed on the Catalan coast that was essentially financed by indigenous capital, often from the sale of agricultural land. The development of charter flights, private car tourism and the interest of tour operators in the destination ignited growth in demand, mostly international, and which in turn affected the choice of hotels, which increased in size to meet to the demand.

At this stage of development, a number of factors converged to drive the growth of tourism demand. Among these is the economic progress of the Europeans, who constituted the main market source coming to Catalonia. We must also mention again the role of technological progress, with the popularization of the car in the European population and the development of the charter flight, as a result of lower energy prices. Moreover, business transformations involved in the tourism industry, allowed the consolidation of large tour-operators. While demand beat new records, there was a continuous growth in tourism. In this context, the Franco government maintained a «*laissez faire*» approach in relation to the regulation of the activity, leaving the way open to speculative investment that shaped the residential resort model on the Spanish Catalan coast.

In the late sixties, although demand growth showed the first signs of weakening in terms of international demand, this was countered by a strong increase in domestic tourism. Finally, after nearly twenty years of uninterrupted growth, in the seventies, the destination experienced a slight stagnation of demand. This was the result of exogenous factors, chiefly the international economic situation, which was compounded by the political instability that accompanied Franco's death. More expensive energy costs due to the international economic

crisis particularly affected charter transportation and large tour operators, and finally began to affect the local supply. In addition, labour costs for tourist supply rose. However, weak international demand was countered by growth in national tourism, spurred on by rising incomes and the artificial freezing of wages. Catalan tourism survived the economic crisis, but from this moment on some restructuring was necessary in order to return to the initial momentum. A transition into a new stage of globalization began, and tourism was followed by signs of a new post-fordist paradigm.

By the mid-eighties, the destination abandoned the period of economic crisis experienced in the previous decade, coinciding with Spain's entry into the EEC and the preparations for the Olympic Games. It was at this time when the arrival of a new type of demand occurred, a new exploration phase in which «new» forms of tourism began reaching a volume of considerable demand, while traditional coastal tourism experienced a different strategy conversion. This phenomenon is largely associated with the democratization of tourism in domestic demand, which eventually a dominant position in the total demand captured the destination. Moreover, in this period the involvement of the reinstated Catalan regional government began, with the gradual transfer of industry-related skills. These aspects included the addition of a phenomenon that was to have particular relevance to the future of the destination. This was the preparation of the Olympic Games in Barcelona in 1992. The celebration of the Games was fundamental to understanding the transition that occurred in this period between a cycle related to mass tourism at full maturity and a new post-fordist progressively open stage. The entry into a new phase of development of the new cycle took place in the nineties when re-registration record demand volumes and the destination retrieved a higher growth rate than any seen in the development phase of the sixties.

In the last two decades, the Catalan destination has experienced a transition period marked by the maturity of mass tourism, exploration, involvement, and the early development of a set of specific features of the post-fordism activities or so-called flexible production leisure. In this context, the new regional tourism decentralization policy from the late seventies was fundamental to understanding the new period. Moreover, it allowed the management of the industry to take place in the destination itself. Through the increased proximity and knowledge of the realities of the sector, more contact with business representatives (chambers of commerce, business associations, local authorities), the ability to address issues that were unique to each destination and more direct attention to the tourist were possible. After the impact of the energy crisis on transport, especially in the first years of the twenty-first century, there is now an emergence of new forms of transport such as low-cost flights, the growth of cruise tourism in Barcelona and the rebirth of railways by the advent of high-speed trains. Catalan tourism has undergone significant restructuring and improvements in its average quality. This process of transformation and growth can be seen as a remarkable impact of the emergence of information and communication technologies (ICT) in Catalan tourism companies, and are the basis for the new techno-economic paradigm. From the demand perspective there has been a significant growth in domestic demand while recovering thanks to the international exploitation of these new specific tourism typologies and positive economic conditions related to the long cycle of growth since the mid-eighties only interrupted by two brief crises.

From what has been seen in this paper, it has demonstrated how each tourism area life cycle in destination history fits into each pre-fordist, fordist or post-fordist paradigm. It has also been observed that each of the major stages or paradigms of tourism can be explained from the evolution of the destination. This is particularly true if one takes into account that both the development of business in general and specifically of the destination are guided by the same set of structural forces. Among these are social and cultural changes, the creation of the destination's image, technological progress, economic influences, the role of local agents and environmental awareness. The article has also shown how TALC is a valid framework for understanding the evolution of a region as it establishes itself as a destination. The current challenge is to sustain and reinvent some of the attractions of the destination. It is worth mentioning that Tourism is still one of the most important industries in the Catalan economy and is well known for its capacity to develop the rest of the economy through the multiplier effect. It is therefore essential to remain attentive to the changing demands of society, in providing security, safety and quality and the best goal for infrastructure to complement and assist the development of tourism.

