

# MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF FAIR TOURISM SUPPLY IN SPAIN

**Francesc González Reverté**

Universitat Oberta de Catalunya  
fgonzalezre@uoc.edu

This paper provides an empirical analysis of the current Spanish fair tourism supply. The fieldwork consisted in analyzing fair tourism travel catalogues (2012) from fourteen major Spanish distributors (including NGOs and specialized travel agencies). The characterization of the Spanish fair tourism supply is established through the analysis of different issues: the journey structure and price, the leisure practices performed by tourists during their stay and the ethical components and social responsibility associated with the travel providers. The main result is the establishment of a typology of fair tourism trips according to their formal characteristics and the role that tourism and leisure practices have in its implementation. Moreover, in a scenario of expected growth in demand, it is discussed the tourism marketing possibilities of the different types of responsible tourism trips detected and some guidelines for improving engagement with potential demand segments are suggested.

This study provides an exploratory analysis of the characteristics of responsible tourism in Spain based on the analysis of the supply offered in 2012. The responsible tourism trips marketed in Spain are a singular tourism product with an image clearly associated by people with solidarity and responsibility. However, the lack of product segmentation can make difficult attracting new consumers or to add different profiles to the existing ones. Content analysis of travel programs and brochures shows that there are three basic types of responsible tourism trips. The first type, which we call responsible solidarity tourism, is linked primarily with solidarity tourism practices and also, in a complementary way, with tourism practices based on discovery. This results in the predominance of activities closer to the volunteer tourism and community tourism, but also is associated with a significant presence of heritage tourism. The second type, which we call responsible and cultural exchange tourism, is also based on discovery and solidarity practices. However the formula is different because users put the emphasis on contact with the local community and, secondly in importance, in heritage or nature tourism. The third type is called solidarity responsible holidays. This type of travel is opposed, in essence, to the first one because the main tourism practices are focused on discovery (owing, basically, to the presence of activities based on heritage tourism and ecotourism), while solidarity (in this case much more focused on volunteer and

community tourism modalities) are complementary. The tourists involved in this type of tourism travel are also interested in sport and risk tourism practices. The distribution of total number trips by responsible tourism types shows a balance between solidarity responsible holidays and responsible cultural exchange (both of them representing  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the total supply of travel), while solidarity responsible tourism, the type of travel with the purest solidarity features, has a smaller presence (about 25 % of all trips).

It is worth to note that all combinations of travel types include leisure practices, although their density in the whole travel program varies significantly by type. Therefore we find a gradation of leisure practices that identifies four subtypes responsible tourism travel. This classification can be useful as a framework to establish appropriate marketing strategies for responsible tourism trips, and to identify different segments of demand with different interests and motivations on those kind of tourism practices. At the end of the scale stands what we call **volunteer tourism and personal growth** travel programs, which focus on projecting an imaginary cooperating emulation, where leisure components are marginal and are seen just as a reward for effort and personal commitment.

This type of trip offers an attractive approach to «experience» the destination in terms of authenticity and personal commitment with local community. Tourists enjoy an experience that, in some way, emulates real cooperation tasks and allow them to recreate this kind of experiences under the umbrella of the tourist trip. The profiles of demand for this type of travel experiences are people sensitive with the world of cooperation, voluntaries or that are willing to approach to the cooperation tasks as a tourism experience. At the other extreme we can find the subtype holiday with a message, where the recreational aspects predominate over the rest of practices and solidarity are not highlighted in the brochures and travel programmes.

This kind of journeys can be an interesting way to introduce responsible tourism among those segments of population that, although they are aware of social responsibility in tourist trips, they require large doses of fun to enjoy a tourism experience. In the intermediate zone in the scale lie the rest of subtypes. The first one is what we call living together solidarity tourism, which practices are primarily based on tourist participation and the contact with the local community. The other subtype is what we call educative responsible tourism, which practices are oriented to extend the tourists' knowledge of the destination through informal learning, direct participation in the daily life of the local community and/or voluntary cooperation. Both intermediate subtypes have a wide spectrum of potential demand that ranges from members of associations and non-governmental entities or individuals with pronounced social commitment (ideological and political), to people who are interested in widening their knowledge of a destination through unconventional channels. Besides, another social segment potentially interested in this kind of tourism practices are people who, despite of not having the vocational or professional skills of professional cooperators, are occasionally interested in participating or in the development of tasks linked with cooperation and solidarity. The Spanish responsible tourism trip profile seems to respond to strategies that consider that kind of tourism as a niche market. That is, a tourism product that have a scarce product supply and who is fostered by a minority group of demand highly motivated, with very specific vacation needs and willing to pay a plus to buy a trip of responsible travel. However, the fact that some subtypes responsible tourism travel programmes, include leisure and recreation practices in a prevailing way respect to other tourism practices, is a sign that

this kind of tourism experiences are progressively being opened to main market segments. Consequently it is possible to relate the creation of new responsible tourism products with the ideological debate about the appropriateness of marketing this type of travel and with the commodification issue (Bramwell, Lane, McCabe, Mosedale, and Scarles, 2008 ). During the next years we need to start thinking about the implications of the fact that a presumed growth in the demand for responsible tourism in the coming years may arise. Some outstanding issues can be identified. Firstly, the debate about the compatibility of small-scale travel, that characterize responsible tourism, with the success in promoting a large-scale increased awareness. Secondly, how to make compatible a small-scale and specialized product to satisfy those segments of demand who are only interested in generalistic tourism practices. Finally, as responsible tourism trips are probably going to gain acceptance among preferences of a wider and varied demand, tourism providers and distributors will increasingly need to adapt these trips to the specific travel demands of more segmented social groups, in order to provide experiences that link well with their motivations and travel expectations. For example, the analysis of the travel portfolio of responsible travel products shows that there are very few trips that focus on a gender point of view, although women are one of the most interested social segments in the consumption of this kind of travel.

A final set of conclusions is intended to discuss some considerations about the format of responsible tourism trip. The narrative of most travel brochures reproduces the imaginary of a traveler (long-distance travels, tight contact with otherness -represented by local community actors- as a way to obtain knowledge, the discovery of an unknown «reality» as a travel goal, the high level of authenticity of the areas and cultures visited, exoticism , the sensation of being a pioneer, etc.). Nevertheless, during a standard responsible tourism journey the tourism experience is set up in a highly controlled and even standardized way, in order to minimize risks and to offer a comfortable travel experience according to western quality standards. We have to bear in mind that despite discomfort can be positively valued as an aspect of the travel experience for some people (Lepp, 2009), most of the tourists prefer an austere but comfortable holidays.

The consideration of responsible tourism trips as a form of alternative tourism and far away from conventional tourist travels includes some implicit ambiguities. Some contradictions constitute important issues for future debate: the concentration of supply in a small number of countries, the presence of elements that reinforce the character of social distinction (specially the barrier effects that the high price and the elitism practices constitute for the inclusion of middle-low class as a segment of demand for responsible tourism travels), the environmental impact linked with long-distance traveling, the short length and the fragmentation of on site visits during the journeys which reduces the capacity to contact and to generate cultural exchange with the local community, the scarce number of practices linked to solidarity on some trips, or the lack of monitoring and performance evaluation of tourism cooperation projects. To sum up, responsible tourism represents a great opportunity to build solidarity bridges and to exert as a lever in the fostering of social responsibility projects to the whole tourism sector. In this sense, we consider that improving responsible tourism products could be a good opportunity to eliminate some barriers to the entry of accommodation and travel agencies sectors to responsible tourism, and also to promote changes in the ethical and moral responsibility paradigm that could reach to the whole Spanish tourism sector.

The effects of the increase in the number of responsible tourism travel organized through Spanish distributors represents a good opportunity to reinforce social sensitivity towards sustainability and ethical issues on a wide range of social groups and individuals. Nevertheless this potential is limited because of the small scale that this kind of travels are developed and because it is a product presumably addressed to a traveler profile which have previously internalized the message on responsibility issues. Social actors who are interested in fostering responsible tourism have a major challenge in the creation of attractive products for wide segments of demand. So, to the extent that this demand contribute to consolidate a new Spanish tourism market, it also would be necessary to establish new management and product portfolio and to fix some patterns of commitment with the destination that could be used as models for other tourism and leisure practices.