
ARTICLES

INTERNATIONAL TOURIST MOVEMENTS IN CANADA AND QUEBEC

Joana Maria Seguí Pons
Universitat de les Illes Balears

I. INTRODUCTION. BACKGROUND TO THE ANALYSIS

The main objective of this paper is to make a synchronous analysis of the main characteristics of international tourist movements in Canada and Quebec. For the demand variable, the number of tourists staying away from home for more than 24 hours was taken, and the theoretical framework for the study is based on both transport geography and tourism geography.

Tourism is clearly one of the macro forces that are described in numerous works of literature on the subject of globalization, either as a way of standardizing the world or as a social phenomenon that highlights local characteristics, cultures and identities, or as a form of dialectics between «local» issues and «global» ones, leading to the emergence of new social and political power geometries (Teo, Li, 2003). Transport and tourism share a close relationship and, more particularly, air transport and tourist mobility, although quantitatively speaking air transport is not the most commonly used method of tourist travel. It is estimated that, at mainland destinations, the aeroplane accounts for only 30% to 40% of all international tourist arrivals (Debbage, 2002). Nevertheless, it is the form of transport that has helped solve the problem of intra and intercontinental mid and long-haul journeys.

Canada's top twenty-five towns and cities account for 64.2% of the population, with 20.5 million people (Statistics Canada). These demographic figures can be attributed to the major role that urban tourism has come to play in both Canada and Quebec, with these areas being the focus of most of this tourism. In 2004, Canada's top ten urban destinations attracted over forty-one million tourists (Guérin, 2005). That is, 39% of all tourist travel by residents and non-residents.

Although the growth trend of the tourist industry is higher than that of the economy in general, it only represents 2.6% of Canada's total GDP. This is lower than that of other more

important tourist destinations, like Spain (the world's second top destination with a share of the GDP of 10%) and half that of the European Union. This trend is not attributable to the demand by international tourists, but to internal movements, which generate around 70% of all tourist expenditure (Commission Canadienne du Tourisme, 2003; Institut de la Statistique du Québec, 2005).

II. TOURISM, A KEY COMPONENT IN GLOBALIZATION

Since 1950, there has been a continual growth in international tourism, justified, among other things, by the following explanations: the growing social use of individual means of transport, the more generalized habit of taking a holiday, the development of air transport, a higher purchasing power, the reduced cost of travel, and an increase in the number of holidays that are taken. In short, all these reasons can be summarized by the widespread access to travel that a large part of the population of western countries now have, accounting for the enormous growth in the demand for tourism and the rising number of issuing and destination countries. The year 2005 concluded with a record number of 808 million tourists, an increase of 5% in relation to the previous year according to the preliminary results of the WTO (2005) and, in the recent future, it does not look as if these trends are going to change.

1. Canada and World Tourism

Canada, which received over nineteen million international tourists in 2004, accounts for 2.3% of the world tourist market, 15% of all tourism to America (126 million visitors) and 22% of all tourism to North America (86 million visitors). International tourism to Canada is currently equivalent to one third of all tourism to Spain. Canada dropped in the ranks of world tourism from seventh place in 2000 to eleventh in 2004, being overtaken by Hong Kong, Mexico, Germany and Austria. The negative results of 2005 do not seem to coincide with those of other nearby destinations, like the Antilles, Central America and even South America, which have seen a rise in visitors (Desiront, 2006). There are several reasons that could account for the problem: the September 2001 terrorist attack, the growing strength of the Canadian dollar, and, more particularly, changes in the demand by American tourists, who prefer to travel to other markets.

III. INTERNATIONAL TOURISM TO CANADA AND QUEBEC. A UNITED STATES MONOPOLY?

Visitors from the U.S.A. constitute almost 80% of all international tourists, with a figure of over fourteen million visitors in 2005. Consequently, we can almost talk about a monoculture in international tourism, explained by cultural factors, proximity and convenience. Nevertheless this demand has dropped by 5% over the five last years. Pélouquin (2004, p.1) analyses *the New Normal*: a term coined by the company Yesawich, Pepperdine, Brown & Russell to describe changes in American tourism. The firm points to the need to start from scratch and define the profile of new American visitors in order to influence their travel behaviour.

Overseas tourism, which represented over four million visitors and 23% of the market share, also dropped by 13% in the same period, although this type of tourism has a less significant impact on the overall economy.

Europe accounts for over 50% of tourism to Canada as a whole, while the United Kingdom accounts for 20% and Asia 30%. In Quebec, Europe's influence is stronger, accounting for 74% of all tourists. Nonetheless, the predominant market is the French one, given the historical and cultural ties that link France to North-America's biggest French-speaking area. France alone accounts for 35% of overseas tourism to Quebec, representing 47% of all European tourism there.

1. Tourist Travel by Means of Transport

The means of tourist transport with the strongest demand are the two most flexible, best adapted ones: road and air transport. Internationally, both have gained in relative importance compared with other means, with the aeroplane playing a key role in extending international tourism. According to data by the ICAO, in 2003 there were over 1.7 billion passengers in the world, about five hundred million of whom travelled on international flights and more than one billion on domestic ones (La Presse, 05-02-2005): figures that demonstrate the huge scale of the phenomenon.

Meanwhile, the motorcar continues to head the modal distribution of tourist transport, and it has been fundamental in contributing to the growth of short and mid-haul domestic and international tourist travel (Seguí, Martínez, 2004). Travel on the American continent is no exception.

Given the strong presence of tourism from the U.S.A., the most common form of transport to Canada is overland transport, accounting for 77% of all such travel. The main method used is the car followed by the aeroplane (20%). Comparatively, an analysis of international transport to and from Spain gives very different results, due, among other things, to the importance of mass tourism to Spain's two archipelagos. International arrivals and departures by plane in 2003 represented 60% of all Spain's international traffic, with a passenger figure of ninety million people. In conjunction, Spain's domestic and international air traffic accounted for a passenger figure of one hundred and fifty million people (Ministerio de Fomento, 2003). This is twice that of Canada's air traffic in the same year, with Canada having a total of seventy-six million passengers, mainly passing through Toronto Airport (the airport with the highest traffic in 2002 with 23 million passengers), followed by Vancouver (13.5 million), Dorval (Montreal, with 10 million), Calgary and Ottawa.

IV. THE DIVERSITY OF THE TOURIST SUPPLY

Potentially Canada and Quebec have a large number of very different resources for attracting different types of tourism. Numerous studies can be found in literature that analyse their wide variety of resources (Cacomo, Solosandrasana, 2002).

1. A Resource-Based Potential for Tourism

In today's scenario of world tourism, one competitive way of attracting tourists is to take advantage of tourist resources in high-quality natural environments or others that have been transformed by human activity (Melián, Garci'a, 2003; Jacques, Zins, 1999). A brief summary of the potential offered by the country's existing resources, based on bibliographical sources, includes its «Nordic» appeal (Nunavik), rural tourism, rural and cultural tourism, tourist routes, ethnic or cultural traditions, urban tourism, mass tourism, and outlying urban destinations within easy reach of the city that take advantage of the pace of life in a city, as is the case of Montreal.

2. Climate-Based Seasonality

In 2004, Canada had almost fifteen thousand tourist accommodation centres with an occupancy rate of around 63% (Le Quotidien. 12-12-2005). Half of these are hotels. According to data by the *Hotel Association of Canada* (2005) in 2004, over six thousand five hundred hotels formed part of a group, with a joint portfolio of almost 400,000 rooms: a similar figure to the legal hotel rooms in the Balearic Islands. 44 % of the properties have more than thirty rooms and, in 2005, Canada's five biggest chains accounted for 24% of all accommodation (with over eight hundred hotels and almost ninety thousand rooms). We are therefore talking about medium-sized and big hotels, suggesting that they are mainly urban in location. Almost 70% of them are located in the three provinces with the biggest metropolitan areas, Ontario, (Toronto and Ottawa), Quebec (Montreal and Quebec) and British Columbia (Vancouver).

Although the tourist product on offer is a very varied one, the climate is a key element in determining access to certain areas, although elsewhere in Canada winter holidays are promoted as a tourist attraction.

Quebec accounts for 20% of Canada's tourism supply. Small tourist accommodation centres, which tend to suffer the most from seasonality, predominate, since 76% of the properties have between four and thirty-nine rooms and just over fifty have more than two hundred rooms. Unlike tourist accommodation in more northern regions, they are open all year round and they have an appeal for urban tourism since they are mainly located in the Montreal tourist region, followed by the Quebec region. These two cities account for 50% of the total room portfolio of each province.

The country's total room portfolio has changed very slowly over the last fifteen years (Stafford, 2004). Between 1988 and 2004, there was a growth in rooms of almost 29%, with a figure of almost seventy-five thousand rooms last year.

The occupancy figures show signs of seasonality directly related with the size of the hotel, since the biggest ones are concentrated in urban centres with a permanent supply all year round.

From a territorial point of view, there is an uneven distribution of tourist accommodation. As Cazalais indicates (2004), location is a key factor in this big country with its icy winters. The tourist season at *Îles-de-la-Madeleine* or *La Gaspésie* finishes in September due to the

cold weather and their distance from issuing tourist centres, while it continues to the end of the year in *Laurentides*, *Cantons-de-l'Est* or *Montérégie*: the three biggest non-urban tourist regions, with over sixteen thousand rooms and a tourist supply that is available almost all year round, based on winter tourism (Stafford, Sarrasin, 1999b, p. 61). Generally speaking, the occupancy figures are highest during the six months from May to October, with maximums in July and August. January and December are the two months with the lowest demand, followed by March and April, because in February (the winter sports season) occupancy figures go up.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Tourism's share of Canada's GDP has grown at a higher rate than the country's overall economy. Despite this, Canada, which receives one third of the amount of all tourism to Spain, has dropped in importance in the international tourism ranks. This highlights the significance of internal tourist travel.

Given the proximity and/or cultural affinity between Canada and the United States, the latter has virtually monopolized tourism to Canada and Quebec, although this demand has been unstable over the last five years, moving toward other more attractive tourist destinations. Given how important United States tourism is in international tourism to Canada, overland transport tends to predominate, with the motorcar mainly being used to reach Canadian destinations. At the same time, due to the existence of historical, political and socio-cultural ties, over half all overseas tourists to Canada and three-quarters of overseas tourists to Quebec are European, mainly from the United Kingdom and France, respectively.

Most tourist accommodation centres are located in the three provinces where Canada's biggest metropolitan areas are to be found. That is, Ontario (with Toronto being the main urban tourist destination), Quebec (Montreal and Quebec) and British Columbia (Vancouver). The cities of Montreal and Quebec account for 50% of the total room portfolios of each province. Nevertheless, although the country offers a wide variety of tourist products, territorial and climatic factors play a key role in hindering access to more northern regions, while other regions actually promote winter holidays as a differentiating factor. This leads to very different occupancy rates in Canada's regions, with the exception of its urban nuclei.

