

GROWING vs LOCAL DEVELOPMENT, THE BOUNDS OF A MODEL OF EXCELLENCE IN A SEMIPERIFERAL DESTINATION

M^a Luisa Gómez Moreno

Department of Geography. University of Málaga

The Mediterranean coast is one of the first areas, in chronological terms, to become a tourist destination. This is why Butler chose one of its segments, namely the Costa Brava, as “a plot for experimentation” in his *destination lifecycle model* (Priestly and Mundet). And due to its long history, it is currently suffering, to a much greater extent than other tourist destinations, the consequences of environmental deterioration arising from the establishment of tourism facilities (Kousis: 2000; Briasoulis: 2001) and of lack of competitiveness, characteristic of conventional sun and beach destinations in developed countries in comparison with similar destinations in emerging countries.

The situation is thus a conflictive one from two points of view: on the one hand in respect of control of urban growth, which has even been the subject matter of a “Proposed resolution by the European Parliament regarding allegations of abusive application of the Urban Planning Activity Regulatory (LRAU in Spanish) and its repercussions on European citizens”, also known as the “Fourtou Report” (RR\592830ES.doc PE 362.800v02-00) which, amongst other measures, “urgently insists on the need for a moratorium in regard to the approval of new projects and urban development plans on land not for building as long as the amended legislation is not in force.”

On the other hand, in regard to recuperating competitiveness, for which the solution proposed by planners and theorists is the evolution towards a model of excellence, identified with “supply diversification, improved quality, innovation, and destination“ (Ivars, J.M. 2004.324).

The solution to both conflicts is seemingly simple, to the extent that their causes are interrelated: if you control urban growth and hotel supply, environmental quality improves, which in turn increases competitiveness. In this context, the basis of this article is a survey commissioned by one of the town councils of the Costa del Sol (Figure 1) for the purpose of presenting proposals of economic activities adapted to the parameters of endogenous and sustainable local development. Nevertheless, the issues of this survey revealed that residents

and stakeholders are conscious of the risks of that model, but they see its perpetuation like ineluctable, agreeing with Kousis affirmation (2000. 470).

The aim of this paper is to state the possibility of reorienting tourism activity in Spanish Mediterranean towns towards quality and sustainability criteria in order to improve their competitiveness.

1. METHODOLOGY

References to the context of the area of study and the objective of the paper condition the diversity of epistemological elements selected for such purpose.

1.1. The context

As regards the area of study (see Figure 1), the situation of the Andalusian Mediterranean coast is atypical, in that its social and economic situation combines features of advanced countries (higher prices) with others typical of peripheral countries, such as the threat of unemployment or the weakness of planning concepts, construed as elements to control growth. It can thus be described as a semi-peripheral area (Taylor 1993), in contrast with the Catalan Mediterranean coast, situated in a clearly central regional context, as inferred from the study of Priestly and Mundet (1998).

Wherefore, the Costa del Sol in the province of Malaga, Andalusia, Spain, constitutes a typical sun and beach Mediterranean destination which started developing in the decade of the 60s. Since then, the indiscriminate advance of tourism activity and of the urban areas linked to said activity, resulting from a general trend of growing demand, despite recessive situations (Ivars 2004. 319), has entailed the transformation of areas corresponding to a backwards rural society into areas typical of mass tourism, constituting for this reason a clear case of “boosterism” (Ivars 2004. 315). Thus, in 1950 the 6 townships which later joined under the “brand” Costa del Sol only had 42,219 inhabitants (SIMA 2003), which represented 5.6% of the population of the province. Curiously, all had less than 10,000 inhabitants, with the exception of the town in which the survey was carried out, which had 12,913. Presently, these towns total 318,389 inhabitants, representing 24.7% of the population and only 6.3% of the province’s area. In this context, the town which was the subject matter of the survey has the smallest number of inhabitants (43,109), due to its peripheral situation in regard to the central core of this tourism area, occupied by the Malaga airport (Ocaña, C. y García, E, 1990).

From the point of view of its weight in the context of national tourism activity, the Costa del Sol, with only 0.0012% of the nation’s area, has 3.4% of national hotel beds (according to the INE: “Anuario de Estadística de España 2004”). However, these figures only partially reveal the Costa del Sol’s capacity to receive visitors, since, as pointed out in different studies (García, E, 2000), second residences exercise this function to a greater extent than hotels. Thus, the total number of dwellings, according to the 2001 Census (www.ine.es: “Censos de Población y viviendas 2001. Resultados definitivos”) is 253,270 (a density of 551.2/km², equal to a ratio of 1.26 permanent inhabitants/dwelling), of which 54.9% correspond to non-

habitual occupation, whether secondary (33.8%) or inexistent (18%), in other words, empty dwellings.

In order to gauge the scope of these figures, they can be compared with the ones for Andalusia (very similar to those for the whole of Spain): density is about 40.3 dwellings/km², with a ratio of 2.08 permanent inhabitants/dwelling, and the proportion of non-habitual dwellings going down to 31.5%, divided into equal amounts of secondary (14.6) and empty (15.5%) dwellings.

Nonetheless, as a mature destination, its weight in the overall national context remains stagnant, so that its growth, in relative terms, is less than that of the country as a whole. In consequence, according to INE: "Anuario de Estadística de España 2004", its share of number of travellers and of overnight stays for the whole of the country, for the period 1991 to 2002, stayed around 4.5 and 5.5% respectively, whereas with base 100 in 1991, the number of travellers to Spain grew in 2001 up to 155 and in Andalusia up to 173, in Malaga (there is no disaggregated data for the Costa del Sol) it only grew to 143; similarly, the number of overnight stays grew in Spain to 144, in Andalusia to 172 and in Malaga to 130.

The research aims: the need of a multidisciplinary approach

The possibilities of applying the concepts of innovation and local development to planning for mature tourist destinations on the basis of quality and sustainability criteria were in fact considered as a methodological option. In the seminal survey, for the application of this methodology, a multidisciplinary group of geographers, anthropologists and economists was formed. Said methodology:

1. Applies instruments of different disciplines: local development; local inhabitants participation in planning proposals; learning spaces.
2. Is focused in the running of the community as a whole, not solely in tourism, and in the ability that this whole can get in order to improve it, regarding that the most part of local economy depends on tourism. In other words: the possibilities of innovation in tourism depends on the community behavior and the future of the community depends on the innovation in tourism.
3. On this regard, the notion of SLOT (Sistema Local Territorial) formulated by Dematteis y Governa (2006) is the most adequate because it lets to link the sociological and environmental views through the concept of relation between "social capital" and "territorial capital".
4. Is based on the interaction of statistical information (see References) and information obtained from surveys and interviews (see Table 6), through the design and discussion of the proposals .

With this methodologic implement, this paper develops the following premises:

1. The context can be identified with what Reed predicted, whereby "power relations that favour tourism will gain ascendancy as the nature and structure of the community itself changes through alterations to the demographic composition, economic base

and policies at higher tiers of government” (1997.589). So, the combination of studies of statistical sources, and surveys and interviews reveals the existence of a circuit of positive retroaction whereby the evolution of economic activity based on construction and tourism attracts population in a way that contributes to the creation of a social group the majority of which is in favour of maintaining said concentration.

2. Applying the basis of local development related to innovation (SLOT), it can be stated that actually this social framework hinder, from both a quantitative and qualitative point of view, achieving the objectives of quality and sustainability and generates a series of contradictions which constitute a risk for its development.

2. ISSUES

The issues of this methodological proceeding has let modelizing how local actors behave towards the conflict between keeping the actual system of urban growth and the need of reorienting it in order to reach a model of quality and sustainability:

1. Taking as a point of departure the characterisation of Andalusia as a semiperipheral area and the *destination life cycle* (Butler), the Costa del Sol is a mature tourism areas (established since the decade of the 60s and 70s) that pass through a number of phases (Gómez and Robles 1988) characterised by:

- 1.1. The growing priority given to the generation of urban space in the global economic organisation of these areas, proving Smithe statement (apud Priestley and Mundet 1998. 92) that “defined the evolution of beach resorts as “essentially a form of urbanization”.

- 1.2. From an economic point of view, this process is accompanied by a progressive concentration of the activity in the construction-tourism tandem, thus experimenting an almost absolute dependence on these two activities.

2. In relation with this model, the results of the said applied study highlight:

- 2.1. Confirmation of the said process of concentration (see Tables 2 and 3).

- 2.2. The capacity of these towns to attract active population is so strong and so dependent on the construction-tourism tandem (see Fig. 3) that it leads to the formation of a population group which is dependent on said tandem and focuses its prospects for the development of the town on the continuity of construction-tourism, considering that an alternative, in the case of a hypothetical crisis, would be to leave the town, thus fomenting the contradictions set forth in point 3 (see below).

- 2.3. In relation to the evolution of the function of local human resources, the formation of a dichotomy amongst entrepreneurs is observed (see Fig. 4), with local ones with low levels of training occupying the construction, hotel and commercial sectors, whereas the ones from the outside, who combine exterior capital and highly qualified management, are concentrated in top category accommodation and leisure activity sectors.

- 2.4. Likewise, in relation to the assessment made by the different groups interviewed of this dependence on construction and tourism, different attitudes were observed. One of the coordinates on which this difference is based is the strength of the links of the persons polled to local life. Thus, whereas unemployed persons, most of who were not born in the town, consider it to be positive, citizen associations, which are identified with the town’s most participatory inhabitants, consider it to be a threat. Finally there is a third position, that

of entrepreneurs and unions, which consider it as something inevitable in the context of the Costa del Sol.

3. Applying the principles of local development mentioned earlier, in the current development phase it can be observed that this model is generating a series of contradictions which constitute a risk for its development. These contradictions are:

3.1. The relation with the availability of qualified human resources for the activity which is the driving force of this demand: the hotel industry (see Fig. 5). The contradiction arises from the fact that the prospects of profits in the production of dwellings has allowed an increase of construction salaries (for both qualified and non qualified labour), a factor which together with a more concentrated workday, is resulting in a lack of workers, both qualified and non qualified, for the hotel industry. It must be reiterated that this subsector, the driving force of the overall model, thus faces an obstacle in regards to its evolution, in accordance with the excellence criteria considered advisable to improve competitiveness of tourism areas of the most advanced countries in respect to those of emerging countries.

3.2. In relation with premise 2.3., the weak interaction amongst the different local agents, a factor which constitutes a clear obstacle to achieving a process of local innovation and development.

3.3. The relation with the image of the dominant social project: sustainable development (see Fig. 6). The contradiction is due to the fact that the attitudes and characteristics of the population noted in premises 2.2 and 2.4, positive in regards to the continuous advance of urban development, which we could identify with “massification”, indirectly result in an equally progressive decrease of the values which said project promotes the most in the demand of tourism areas: areas with vegetation, environmental quality of beaches and waters...

4. The degree of identification of the process of socio-economic growth spearheaded by the construction-tourism tandem with a process of local development is low due to the following reasons:

– If quality is identified with investment in innovation, and the latter with requirement for local development, it is clear that the development process of the area under study does not include an appropriate attitude on the part of local entrepreneurs to achieve this objective, there lacking, in addition, interaction with the most dynamic segment, the allochthonous one, which could facilitate modification of the town’s current trend.

– This lack of identification with the postulates of local development is compatible with very high rates of growth but is incompatible with the requirements of quality tourism, which is the tourism proposed as an alternative to the threat to this growth hanging over mature tourism areas.

– The methodological approaches to local development offer an ideal instrument to involve all social agents of tourist towns in the reorientation of tourism activity, assuming in a cohesive manner the principles of quality services and sustainability.

