

SPANISH TOURISM NEEDS TO FIGHT TOURISM-PHOBIA



One of the main battles facing tourism in the 21st century is tourism-phobia and its alarming upward trend in recent years. The hatred of tourists and the businesses that rely on tourism for their survival arises when part of society associates the tourism sector and everything that it encompasses with being something that is more harmful than beneficial to the population. Moreover, this radical current tends to focus its hatred on the party that is least at fault: the tourist.

Spain cannot and should not give up its tourism sector as it is a strategic part of the country's national economy. **Spanish tourism currently accounts for 11% of Spain's GDP, according to Exceltur.** For this reason, Spain must combat tourism-phobia by legal means and with common sense and must prevent one of its greatest attractions from turning against it.

Spain must continue to strongly support its tourism sector, betting, on the one hand, on innovation and, on the other, on cultivating other alternatives such as internal tourism so as not to saturate the market of “sun and beach” tourism. This model, which has worked – and continues to work – very well for decades should not be abandoned but should instead be incorporated into a series of alternative options.

Tourism-phobia has been known to express itself through outpourings of hatred, such as what took place in Mallorca last year where messages appeared with the motto: “El turisme destrueix la ciutat” (Tourism is destroying the city). Ironically, these messages appeared on the walls and doors of businesses - taking on the characteristics of vandalism.

However, Mallorca has not been the only place that has been affected; other cities such as San Sebastián, Ibiza, Alicante and, mainly, Barcelona, are all areas in which tourism-phobia is on the rise, materializing in the form of attacks against tourist activities as well as the hotel and leisure sectors.

Catalonia is the autonomous community in which these acts of persecution against tourists and tourism commerce have been most readily publicized. This is worrying since this region – along with Andalusia – is one of Spanish tourism strongholds – a leader in the tourism sector, not only nationally, but also at the European level. At present, tourism in Catalonia generates 50 billion euros annually and is responsible for some 500 000 jobs - accounting for 15% of the community's GDP.

Barcelona and the Costa Brava are two of the preferred destinations of foreign tourists; in addition, there is a growing number of cruise ship passengers who make very short visits to the City of Barcelona.

Tourism-phobia should be dealt with more firmly, and the response of public administrations should be strengthened without however transforming one of the principal engines of the national economy into a political weapon to be used for campaigning. Moreover, any legal and institutional response would not necessarily preclude taking measures to correct the abuses caused by low-cost tourism in those places where it takes place, such as the Mediterranean coast and the Balearic islands.

The administration must regulate the industry in order to avoid abuses as well as to close off the legal gaps within which many companies operate. This regulation would protect those establishments which meet legal requirements and which pay municipal taxes and any other applicable taxes. This legal restructuring would also allow the tourism industry to offer an optimal level of quality service, thus encouraging repeat visits. In addition, this regulation would force those companies operating within legal blind spots to obtain a measure of legal security, thus promoting equality among the industry's businesses.

In the same way that illegality should not be allowed to exist within the tourism sector, neither should the development of sustainable tourism be stifled. The cause of many of the complaints originating from cities such as Barcelona is an over-exploitation of tourism which can have a severe negative impact on its sustainability. It is imperative to find a balance between the tourism industry, environmental protection, and the quality of life of a city's inhabitants.

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