

MEXICAN TOWN THREATENED BY TOURISM



More and more holiday destinations around Europe face the negative effects of mass tourism. Palma de Mallorca, Barcelona, Venice, and Athens – these are some of the cities whose local authorities are forced to deal with the requests of the locals to save the community threatened by tourism. However, Europe is not the only part of the world endangered by overtourism. Recently, the same problems appeared in Mexico as well.

Various prominent figures in Mexican society appealed to save the population of "Real de Catorce". The place is considered to be "a magical town" and a destination for both Christian and indigenous pilgrims.

The Mexican town has to fight the detrimental consequences of tourism, such as the accumulation of waste.

"My town is wounded and in danger; its streams are suffocated by pollution, the mountains are covered in garbage and the landscape is turning gray and is calling out for help," proclaimed the filmmaker Petra Puente, promoter of the Real de Catorce Foundation.

Real de Catorce is a historic, mountainous town of 1 300 inhabitants, located in the central state of San Luis de Potosí, whose population was drastically reduced when the silver mines which sustained its economy ceased to be productive.

Recently, however, there has been increased interest in Real de Catorce by the tourism industry due to its architecture and landscapes in addition to the sacred places for both Christians and several local indigenous peoples.

"The town has gone from having 107 hotel rooms to some 600. We welcome 1.2 million visitors a year, 1 500 every weekend," explained Puente, who also argued that this volume of tourists entails problems of environmental nature as well as in terms of the preservation of the town's cultural heritage.

One of the Foundation's suggestions is to make the only means of accessing the town – which is flanked on both sides by mountains – an electric tram which would transit through the sole access tunnel which is "too narrow for cars".

At any rate, the filmmaker pointed out that the goal is not to reduce the number of tourists visiting the town since the town has become dependent on tourism.

The Foundation has been actively supported by prominent figures such as Juan Ramón de la Fuente, the former Rector of UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México), who explained that Real de Catorce is a "multicultural" Mexican town, the heritage of which is being "eroded".

"We need to establish an orderly development plan to protect this town's traditions by promoting a form of tourism which preserves its cultural heritage rather than devastating it," he added.

"I admire the town for preserving its prehispanic tradition and for allowing us to peek into the spiritual tradition based on the cult of nature which existed before the arrival of the Europeans," said historian Víctor Sánchez, who has been studying the indigenous peoples of this region for the past thirty years.

The engineer Treviño Aguado, meanwhile, announced a collaborative agreement between the Foundation and the government of the municipality of Catorce – where the Mexican town is located – for the treatment and management of the waste generated by the increasing number of tourists.

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