

BARCELONA FIGHTS THE TOURIST ACCOMMODATION



Over the last few years, Barcelona has succumbed to a strong feeling that tourism is to blame for almost all the wrongs in the city. Particularly, the tourist accommodation sector is accused of aggravating the housing issue.

In this sense, people in general, leaders of public opinion, neighborhood associations, political parties, etc. consider that the construction of new hotels on building sites, as well as the phenomenon of tourist apartments, contribute significantly to the increase in the cost of housing, both for rental and purchase.

At the same time, this increase in housing accelerates the phenomenon of “gentrification”, the forced relocation of neighborhood residents who would be replaced by tourists and more affluent residents with a higher purchasing power.

Once these ideas have spread enough and find significant support, measures such as the Special Tourist Accommodation Plan (PEUAT, in Spanish), a moratorium on hotels and tourist apartments that was approved by the entire City Council of Barcelona in January 2017, can be implemented.

The PEUAT is a response to “the need to manage in a controlled manner the tourist accommodations to guarantee the right to housing, a sustainable urban model, and the improvement of the quality of life of the neighborhood”, according to the municipal government.

However, no other city in Europe has approved a moratorium on the hotel industry in order to guarantee the right to housing.

What other cities have approved are limitations on the number of days that a house can be rented for tourism purposes. It should also be noted that the PEUAT establishes a “zero growth zone” in virtually the entire center of the city (Ciutat Vella, most of L'Eixample, the Gràcia neighborhood, and the Sant Martí coastal region). In these areas, even if an establishment is closed, a new one cannot be opened.

The hotel moratorium not only prevents the opening of new hotels in the center, but it also hinders the relocation of these establishments.

At the same time, the Barcelona Hotel Association warns that the PEUAT “will prevent renovations from being carried out” and denounces that said regulation will cause the “unforgivable deterioration” of the hotels.

“Hotel renovations are going to be difficult due to the PEUAT. For example, a hotel in the center may find that in order to comply with the new regulations, it will have to reduce the number of rooms if it wants to remodel its establishment”, as explained by BRIC Consulting.

As a result, by the end of 2019, no new hotels will be opened in the center due to the moratorium approved by the City Council and - as a consequence provoked by the same municipal regulations - there'll be more difficulties when relocating existing establishments.

The focus should be placed on policies to promote housing, not on policies aimed at slowing down the tourism activity.

Considering the resources and revenues that Barcelona has at its disposal thanks to tourism (14% of local GDP) and other economic activities, the city could perfectly approve an ambitious 20-year plan with the aim of substantially increasing the housing offer, both for rentals and purchase at regulated prices.

However, **this long-term plan would require an outstanding agreement between the political parties and the civil society, so that the planned investments and deadlines are executed in different phases and under different terms, no matter who assumes the office.** The results after 20 years would be evident.

In any case, to design and implement this kind of housing plan, Barcelona would need to rely on a strategic source of income such as tourism. So if we choose to reduce the flow of that source, the city would be left dry.

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