TOURISM PHOBIA REVIVES IN BARCELONA

The debate about sharing valuable water resources with tourists is rising in Barcelona in the face of the threat of a dry summer and restrictions on consumption.

Drought gives wings to tourism phobia. At a time when Catalonia is suffering on the front line of the most prolonged drought in recent years in Spain, experts explain how visitors' high-water consumption and the lack of civility observed in some districts of Barcelona augur difficulties of cohabitation between locals and visitors this summer.

The concern is mounting in the region as first-quarter figures point to a record tourist season, expected to surpass pre-pandemic levels. But this massive return of visitors risks provoking a rise in tourism phobia: it feeds on frustration with the saturation of public spaces and the fear of lack of water this year.

High water consumption by hotels

Due to a lack of rain, water reservoirs are at 27% of their normal levels. The diminishing water reservoirs and the poor forecasts have prompted the Catalan Water Agency to activate consumption restrictions in the anti-drought plan. But how should the consumption of a commodity that is becoming rarer be distributed? Which sector needs it more, agriculture, tourism or other industries? The debate on the water stress of tourism is not new, but it has never been Catalonia's first concern.

Until now, experts have warned that Barcelona's lifeline in the face of an overabundance of tourists would be to put the brakes on the hordes of low-cost tourism, preferring "quality" tourism", which is less massive and more selective and would bring more to the city. However, according to experts, this strategy seems to be challenged by a recent survey that shows that hotel water consumption alone represents 12% of the total in the region, and each tourist in luxury hotels consumes five times more than an average inhabitant.

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