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TOURISM DESTINATION MANAGEMENT: AN OVERVIEW OF THE ADVANCES OF CATALONIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper is dedicated to review Catalan public and private efforts to keep managing tourism advances to the benefit of Catalonia, and in particular its capital Barcelona, since the celebration of the Olympic Games in 1992. As the paper will progress its focus will turn on analyzing the abilities for learning and teaching advances, tackling how advances should be managed in order to keep their positive effects as long as possible in time, as they seem to be precisely at the basis of the success and position of Barcelona in the worldwide ranking as a top urban tourism destination.

Key Words: tourism destination; long term management; competitiveness

INTRODUCTION

Despite the impact of recent international economic recession and social turmoil Barcelona and the rest of Catalonia have demonstrated so far a strong capacity to keep attracting higher numbers of either national and international visitors and tourists and even more important to increase significantly the tourist expenditure. Which are the advances that can explain this performance? Which are right now the challenges to overcome in order to shape and to exploit new ones? To carry out this study the paper will start analyzing the outcomes of the celebration of the Olympic Games of Barcelona in 1992 and how these contributed to put in place a series of strategies that permitted to support and ensure Spanish and Catalan public authorities tourism policies. Particularly, their impact in the tourism strategy of the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona and its managing advances, the follow up of the competitive advances set in place by hoteliers and events operators in Barcelona in the last few years and the identification of new advances opportunities and associated challenges both for Barcelona and Catalonia as a country.

THE GAMES OF THE XXV OLYMPIAD

Almost twenty years have passed from the celebration of the Olympic Games in Barcelona. The capital of Catalonia hosted and managed then, with remarkable success, one of the major international events supported by a full range of coordinated procedures among tourism, travel and hospitality stakeholders. The set of measures and strategies putted then in place by both public authorities and private operators and subsequent and constant efforts of optimization in the management of its advances seem to be at the basis of the success and position of Barcelona in the worldwide ranking as a top urban tourism destination.

Three were the main action plans, promoted by public administration at national, regional and municipal scale that contributed to make possible the success of the Olympic Games in Barcelona. The first action plan in terms of the total financial investment was devoted to urban planning, including reforms of the use of the land and transportation networks. The effects of these interventions resulted in a major number of public spaces and the traffic decongestion in the city. The airport expansion was also crucial to ensure the arrival of the Olympic community.

The second main action plan was addressed to build the necessary telecommunications infrastructure to relay the Games. Two spectacular telecommunications towers were built for this purpose changing the skyline of Barcelona. Both projects (see figures 1 and 2) were entrusted to two renowned architects who showed his talent in carrying out their work.

The third action plan and the least expensive in financial terms consisted in building or conditioning the necessary sports facilities for the proper development of the Games. Beyond this set of interventions putted in place by both public authorities and private operators, the Barcelona'92 Olympic Organizing Committee had the ability to generate a great enthusiasm among the citizenry. More than 100.000 people volunteered, of which 34.548 were finally selected.

Figure 1
Torre de Collserola by Norman Foster



Source: <http://turistaxcaso.wordpress.com>

Figure 2
Torre de Montjuïc by Santiago Calatrava



Source: <http://www.miathletic.com>

The Games were covered by more than 13.000 media from all over the world. The impact of broadcasters that followed the event was tremendous among foreign potential travelers, particularly from outside Europe. The promotion of the city and the Catalan culture changed the perception of hundreds of thousands of people around the globe and made them realize that Catalonia is in itself a country within another country which is named Spain. In fact the Spanish State is composed at least by three other national identities apart from the Castilian one representing Spain. These historic nations are Galicia, Basque Country and Catalonia each one possessing its own language repository of its own culture, traditions and customs.

In some ways it is ironic that the development of the tourism industry during the Franco dictatorship was driven since the late 1940s by the Spanish tourism authorities through a campaign to entice tourists to Spain via the slogan “Spain is different”. Despite the time elapsed this slogan still somehow nowadays the most known and successful tourist slogan of the Spanish State. The campaign was aimed mainly to promote the diversity of landscapes and heritage of Spain among foreign tourism, nevertheless the slogan was used within the borders of the State in the form of parody; as an indicator of abnormality and uniqueness of the political situation in relation to the democracies of Western Europe. At this point it seems convenient to recall that “the development of organized leisure travel ... is closely associated with several major processes of the modern period, including changing patterns of social and industrial organization, nation building, the rise of mass consumption and the emergence of a modern subject consciousness” (Pack 2008: 657).

No one disputes that the Olympic Games of Barcelona in 1992 had an enormous success in economic, urban and social terms for the city, including the expansion of its tourism facilities. Many new hotels were built and many other old ones were refurbished to secure accommodation during the Games. This initiative marked the beginning of a steady increase and quality improvement of city hotel bedrooms. Just from 1990 to 1992 a significant private investment meant a growth of 38% of the total number of hotel beds (Brunet, 1993). The celebration of this international event marked indeed a turning point for Barcelona and for Catalonia in general. Thus, since the Olympic Games took place, the rise of awareness among the international community about the Catalan geography, heritage and culture has just continued to increase. To cope this challenge all efforts, both from public and private sectors, are being developed to manage as effectively as possible the tourism advances of Catalonia.

TOURISM EVOLUTION IN BARCELONA AND CATALONIA

This section consists in a short summary dedicated to quantify and to analyze briefly tourism evolution in Barcelona and Catalonia both in terms of supply and demand. As pointed in the previous section the celebration of the Olympic Games meant a remarkable momentum for the hotel industry in the city. As table 1 shows the number of hotel beds in Barcelona has tripled since 1990.

Table 1
Number of Hotel Beds by Category in Barcelona (1990-2010)

Hotel	1990	1992	2000	2004	2007	2008	2009	2010
5*	3.979	-	-	5.363	7.954	8.487	8.853	10.096
4*	5.302	-	-	14.274	27.224	28.486	30.772	29.774
3*	6.375	-	-	9.280	13.283	14.213	14.612	13.351
2*	1.466	-	-	4.505	3.650	3.828	3.845	5.089
1*	1.447	-	-		1.925	1.970	2.249	
B&B	-	-	-	5.831	-	-	-	5.681
Total	18.569	25.055	31.338	39.253	54.036	56.984	60.331	63.991

Source: compiled from Turisme de Barcelona, 2011; Duran, 2002.

As table 1 shows the hotel evolution in Barcelona in the past twenty years has been particularly significant in regard the increase of number of beds in 4* and 5* starts hotels. Therefore the registered evolution means a smaller percentage of lower hotel category beds and consequently it results in a higher quality accommodation supply. This same trend can be observed (see table 2) for the whole of Catalonia.

Table 2
Number of Hotel Beds by Category in Catalonia (2004-2010)

Hotel	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
5*	6.372	7.810	9.227	10.036	10.572	11.262	13.199
4*	55.183	61.848	67.202	70.875	80.026	91.958	95.122
3*	107.092	107.164	109.355	108.431	109.186	108.435	108.507
2*	43.211	41.539	39.155	38.618	38.563	38.511	38.956
1*							
B&B	36.035	35.077	34.181	33.588	32.485	31.960	31.165
Total	247.893	253.438	259.120	261.548	270.832	282.126	286.949

Source: compiled from Observatori de Turisme, 2011.

In fact, analyzing the evolution of total hotels beds by category in Catalonia for the period 2004-2010, see table 2 above, it is significant to note that the path of growth of the number of beds in 4* and 5* starts hotels has been very much the similar to the one registered in Barcelona. Indeed, taking into account the same period, this is the period 2004-2010, we can observe that the number of 4* and 5* starts hotels beds has doubled in both cases. This fact means that hotel industry for tourist accommodation has experienced a substantial upgrade all over the country in the last years.

Logically, the growth of supply is related to a phenomenon of increasing demand, particularly notable in the case of Barcelona. The number of tourists and overnights in hotels in the pre-Olympic Barcelona was far more inferior to the current one. As table 3 shows the number of tourists for the period 1990-2010 has quadrupled whereas that the number of overnights in hotels has almost followed the same pattern. On the other hand, the percentage of tourists according to the purpose of visit has substantially changed.

Table 3
Number of Foreign and National Tourists and Hotel Overnights in Barcelona (1990-2010)

	1990	1995	2000	2005	2007	2008	2009	2010
Number of tourists	1.732.902	3.089.974	3.141.162	5.061.264	7.108.393	6.659.075	6.476.033	7.133.524
Hotel Overnights	3.795.522	5.674.580	7.777.580	10.941.579	13.620.347	12.485.198	12.817.170	14.047.396

Source: compiled from Turisme de Barcelona, 2011; Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2011a.

While in 1990 approximately a 70% of tourists visited the capital for business the rest were attracted by vacation or other purposes. In 2010 this situation has been reversed and a desirable balance exists between tourists

according to the purpose of its visit. Thus, more than a 50% of tourists are nowadays visiting the city for holidays and the rest do so for professional reasons and other purposes. Nonetheless, is worth to note that the total number of national and international meetings, this is congresses, corporate and incentive meetings in Barcelona has increased from 373 in 1990 to 2.138 in 2010.

The number of international tourists arrivals as well as the number of hotel overnights has grown considerably in Catalonia, see table 4, particularly between the years 2000 and 2005. Although the effects of the international economic crisis have dragged down the total number of foreign tourists arrivals in the last years, the number of hotels overnights tends to increase lengthening the average hotel stay.

Table 4
Number of Foreign Tourists Arrivals and Hotel Overnights in Catalonia (2000-2010)

	2000	2001	2004	2005	2007	2008	2009	2010
Foreign tourists	-	9.638.337	13.470.000	14.680.000	15.925.000	14.888.000	13.597.000	13.177.000
Hotel Overnights	24.297.529	24.168.000	24.285.000	25.151.000	27.701.000	27.792.000	26.261.000	29.839.000

Source: compiled from Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2011a; Estudis de Turisme de Catalunya, 2011.

The number of international tourist arrivals in Catalonia in 2010 represents a 25% of the total international tourist arrivals to Spain, as around 52 millions foreign tourists entered the Spanish State in 2010 (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2011). These figures mean that Catalonia is the first tourist destination of Spain in terms of international tourist arrivals, being thus the autonomous region, of the 17 existing ones, that attract the major number of foreign tourists (Instituto de Estudios Turísticos, 2011). Catalonia is also the autonomous region of the Spanish State with the major number of foreign overnights with the figure of 107.191.000 registered in all type of tourist accommodation facilities in 2010, being the average stay for foreign tourist of 8.2 nights spent (Observatori de Turisme, 2011; Instituto de Estudios Turísticos, 2011). Catalonia is also leader in tourist accommodation capacity with a total of 736.000 tourist accommodation beds in 2010 (Observatori de Turisme, 2011; Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2011b).

MANAGING TOURISM DEVELOPMENT SINCE 1979

With the return to democracy in Spain, Catalonia recovered its self-government again in 1979. Since then the government of Catalonia, known as Generalitat de Catalunya, has developed its own tourism policy. The Department of Business and Employment is the responsible public authority to legislate and to promote the Catalan tourism product around the globe. Three major bodies within this Department are in charge to direct and to manage Catalan tourism advances. The first body is the Directorate General for Tourism whose main functions are among others:

1. Designing, coordinating and implementing policies to promote the competitiveness of the tourism industry, innovation and quality of tourism products in Catalonia.
2. To develop planning instruments to balance and to ensure sustainable tourism in Catalonia.
3. To sort and to control establishments, business and tourism activities in the area of jurisdiction of the Department.
4. To design and to coordinate activities related to the training of the tourism sector.
5. To manage and to coordinate activities for the analysis, study, knowledge, research and strategy definition of tourism.
6. Designing and coordinating support for local authorities to promote and boost tourism.
7. To check and to impose disciplinary sanctions to tourist establishments, businesses and regulated activities (Direcció General de Turisme, 2011).

The second body is the Observatory of Tourism of Catalonia. The Observatory is an integrated information system for the study, the research and the monitoring of tourism. The creation of this body is devoted to deep on the knowledge of integrated tourism management systems as well as making available to public and private sectors different tools and information aimed at enhancing the competitiveness of tourism in Catalonia, co-assisting thus the positioning of the Brand Catalonia, its products and territories around the world. Therefore, the Observatory of Tourism of Catalonia has been conceived and designed to carry out the monitoring of tourism in Catalonia, to promote applied research, to support decision making, to design new strategies and to support the

information needs of the various areas of the Directorate General for Tourism. In turn, the Directorate General of Tourism provides technical and administrative support to the Observatory.

The third body is the Catalan Tourism Agency founded out of the principles of co-decision-making and co-financing between public and private agents and led by its Governing Board. The creation of this new body was one of the key actions in the Strategic Tourism Plan for Catalonia 2005-2010. The aim of the Catalan Tourism Agency is to provide the tourist industry with more effective promotional tools, positioning Catalonia as a leading international tourist destination, as maintaining its diversity, quality and social and economic profitability. The Catalan Tourism Agency has two main objectives: firstly, overhauling the country's promotion of tourism, switching from the traditional model, which is mostly publicly financed, to a new model with greater private sector participation; and secondly, responding to the desire in the sector to work closer with the public authorities and in collaboration with private enterprise. The Agency's Governing Board is composed by the Government of Catalonia and local promotional bodies representing the public sector and the General Council of Chambers of Catalonia that represents the private one. Financial donations are required to become part of the Agency, observing the basic principles of its members in co-decision making and co-financing.

In the other hand the capital of Catalonia, this is Barcelona, has been and still being a main attraction to tourist development for the whole country. The capital counts with the Turisme de Barcelona Consortium which was created in 1993 as the result of an agreement between the city's public and private sectors. Since then it has worked to lend continuity to the impetus given by the Olympic Games, making it possible for the city's wide range of hotels, services and new infrastructures to become more cost-effective and to improve over time. Turisme de Barcelona was set up as the result of an agreement and the close relationship between Barcelona City Council and the Barcelona Chamber of Commerce, which took advantage of the 1992 Olympic Games to establish the guidelines and operational organization for Barcelona's growth as a tourist destination. Nevertheless there is still a challenge; this is to spread tourist flows and tourist incomes to many counties away from the coastline or the Pyrenees. Recent efforts to identify and to measure tourism gross domestic product, county by county (Duro, 2010) show in fact a huge disparity between the counties of the coastal area and the Pyrenees and those of the rest of the country.

Figure 3
Counties Map of Catalonia



Source: <http://aoestany.wordpress.com/2011/12/11/catalunya-comarques/>

MANAGING TOURISM ADVANCES: THE CATALAN WAY

Analyzing the abilities for learning and teaching tourism advances in the context of a constantly growing sector at international level, both in terms of demand and supply, any tourism destination must take into account four basic components to shape and to manage its own tourism sub-system. The first component is the transport

system that has to guaranty accessibility to tourists by different means of transport. In this sense, Barcelona airport was expanded with a new terminal in 2009, rising from a 30 million passengers annual capacity to a 55 million one. Total traffic in 2011 amounted to 34.399.180 passengers whereas it was little more than 10 million the one registered in 1992 (Aeropuertos Españoles y Navegación Aérea, 2012). The port of Barcelona has experimented as well a significant development in terms of capacity allowing the flourishing of the cruise industry (see table 5) in the last two decades.

Table 4
Cruise Ship Traffic in the Port of Barcelona (1990-2010)

Year	Number of Cruises	Total Passengers
1990	207	115.137
1995	356	233.389
2000	492	576.942
2005	691	1.224.575
2010	851	2.347.976

Source: Autoritat Portuària de Barcelona, 2012.

The second component is represented by the agents involved in tourism development. Certainly, more efficient are the cooperation mechanisms and the communication channels between public and private tourism sectors greater the chances are of achieving the success and competitiveness of the tourist destination. In the previous section were analyzed the two main bodies that in the form of private public partnership are in charge to manage the tourism advances in Catalonia, that is the Catalan Tourism Agency and the Turisme de Barcelona Consortium that have undoubtedly done a good labor so far. The third component of any tourism sub-system is the tourist himself as consumer, with his social, cultural and economic profile, its expectations and motivations and finally the fourth component is the tourist destination itself that is, a physical delimited area characterized by its natural and human resources inherent to any location or territory. From the analysis conducted hitherto the following deduction can be established; as managing advances seem to be precisely at the basis of the success of Catalonia as a tourist destination a constant effort of adaptation is required to keep developing their positive effects as long as possible in time.

This assumption means a continuous management of tourism advances in the long term. So which are right now the challenges to overcome the tourism advances achieved in order to shape and to exploit new ones? In the case of Catalonia, tourism agents must keep developing inland tourism products and services able to attract visitors and tourist flows to disadvantaged counties. In the case of Barcelona, tourism agents, in particular hotelier and events operators must continue to show their skills to adapt to price decline in the provision of service without renouncing to the most innovative systems and quality standards in their facilities. A continuous and systematic identification of new tourism advances opportunities associated with the challenges that future holds are also indispensable both for Barcelona and Catalonia as a country. In fact, an advance or a set of advances have to prove to be right in the long term, in other words, it have to prove to be useful to chart the right course towards the best quality tourist destination of tomorrow, otherwise after a certain period of time these advances could be perceived as mere setbacks or, even worst, like unpleasant aftermaths. Therefore, the integrated management of both natural and human resources in the development process (Milne, 1998; Murray et al. 2010) alike the environmental excellence of the tourism destination in the long term (Boyra, 2009) are crucial to safeguard the quality of the tourist experience as well as the highest degree of competitiveness of the destination itself within the tourism market.

CONCLUSION

Tourism certainly has complex effects both on society and the natural environment. There is no doubt that a scientific analysis of the positive and negative impacts of tourism can help us to better understand the processes of tourism development and therefore to manage its advances towards more sustainable development patterns. Some of the effects of tourism like the inconvenience to the local community caused by an excess of tourist frequentation, or the environmental damage due to the over sizing of tourist facilities can exceed the carrying capacity of the area driving away the tourist demand from the destination. Both Catalonia and its capital Barcelona are facing now the challenge to keep managing with success the set of tourism advances of the country. This challenge requires a deep reflection process which involves the reinforcement of multidisciplinary lines of research adopting new approaches to some key questions such as, for instance, the type of growth and tourism management model, the extent and consequences of the impact of tourism development and the modes of coexistence between local residents and visitors, among others. Observing the basic principles in co-decision making and co-financing must guaranty the positive outcomes of these lines of research.

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