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# Tourism Planning and Tourismphobia: An Analysis of the Strategic Tourism Plan of Barcelona 2010-2015

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**Abstract:** *The exponential growth of tourism has brought new challenges to destinations; how to plan themselves to avoid overtourism and this new form of intolerance, the so-called tourismphobia. In order to address the negative impacts of tourism and enhance the positive ones Barcelona has developed and implemented a strategic tourism plan. This paper seeks to understand how Barcelona addressed the tourismphobia problematic through planning: how it was done and which results were achieved in the end. This research reveals a clear gap between the planner's intention and the plan's implementation.*

**Keywords:** Strategic Tourism Planning; Overtourism; Tourismphobia; Sustainable Development; Resident Communities

**JEL Classification:** L83, Z32, Z38

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

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One can say that “tourism may be regarded as a fantasy selling industry striving upon people’s dreams, hopes, beliefs, expectations and imageries, which are in turn transformed into consumable commodities or experiences” (Martins, 2015:02; 2016:34).

Kreag (2001:02) has stated that “for decades, tourism industry growth has been a major contributor to increase economic activity throughout (...) the world. It has created jobs in both large and small communities and is a major industry in many places. The lack of an education for tourism leads some tourists to have behaviours that natives can consider to be offensive against their culture; some examples include the profanation of sacred places and the destruction of patrimony. This has led several times to anti-tourism manifestations.

In the future, the international community will see anti-tourism manifestations and the so-called tourismphobia as a priority. To address this problem, it is required a political will and a sustained and comprehensive approach; national, regional and local tourism planning that must include a wide range of measures and actions which must complement and reinforce each other. Several destinations are already developing and/or implementing action plans to avoid overtourism, anti-tourism manifestations and tourismphobia,

among them one can point out Amsterdam, Venice and Barcelona, where one first came across to the word ‘tourismphobia’.

The subject of this paper is to understand how Barcelona address the tourismphobia problematic through planning; how it was done, and which results were achieved in the end. It was also important to us to understand if the planning implementation has failed and if so why.

About the issue overtourism Goodwin (2016) says that in Barcelona overtourism “has been a concern since 2004 and an issue formally engaged by the ajuntament (government) of Barcelona since 2008”. This concern has led to the development of the city of Barcelona Strategic Tourism Plan (PET2015), whose policies, measures and actions one will analyse here having always in mind the issue of tourismphobia.

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## 2 TOURISM PLANNING AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

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According to Nickols (2016:03) “strategy refers to a general plan of action for achieving one’s goals and objectives”. (Gunn, 1988:16) expresses that strategic planning is predicting and “it requires some estimated perception of the future. Absence of planning of short-range planning that does

not anticipate a future can result in serious malfunctions and inefficiencies”.

One can verify that it is in the territories that are present the agents that will make the policy for the tourism activity viable, because this is the stage where tourist actions take place. It is known that in the viability of this activity the rural or coastal, natural or artificial landscapes are tourism potential that can be transformed into products, and planning is one of the tools through which is possible to preserve, keep or recover this element present in the territory.

Tourism planning can be seen as a dynamic, systemic, participatory and continuous process that has in view the determination of the destination’s objectives, strategies and actions. It is then a relevant to deal with changes in the internal and external environments and to contribute to the success of a destination. Thus, tourism planning seeks to provide a coordinated transition or link between the present situation at a destination for and improved future to both residents and tourists (Bhatia, 2006; Stokes, 2008; Almeyda-Ibáñez & George, 2017).

The fast growth of the tourism industry not only transforms destination areas, but without planning and control, tourism growth can bring social and cultural disruptions due to economic imbalance and also environmental degradation.

In recent times some destinations have even thought of using demarketing to reduce the number of tourists, trying at least to achieve a reduction of the negatives effects of tourism. As Kotler and Levy (1971:75) stated “we define demarketing as that aspect of marketing that deals with discouraging customers in general or a certain class of customers in particular on either in a temporary or permanent basis”.

According to Ness (2003:22) the question that rises is whether tourism is a nightmare or a godsend, or some combination of the two. He says that “it depends on an array of circumstances to vast and complex to model in general terms”. Reid (2003:13) says that “what has been lost in the discussion of tourism planning, and in the problem solving-process, generally is the plethora of everyday issues – such as social relations, local institutions, and the conditions of the environment – that are central to the lives of individuals and communities”. All discussions around tourism planning must consider these wider issues rather than just concentrate in the economic development.

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### **3 COMMUNITIES PARTICIPATION IN TOURISM PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

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Communities should play a key role in tourism planning and development. They should participate actively in all stages of the planning development and implementation, including participation in the resources assessment, in the identification of problems, and in the definition of actions to resolve and prevent problems. Concerns about community involvement in tourism planning and development have increased as a result of unfair power distribution between powerful interest groups and local communities (jamal and Getz. 1995; Trakolis, 2001). Tourism literature stresses out the importance empowerment, which consists in giving authority

and resources to make decisions on the local tourism development (Choi and Sirakaya, 2006; Cole, 2006; Sotiriadis and Shen, 2017). Several studies investigated a range of community involvement initiatives, some of which advocated the distribution of power and benefits fairly among residents, whereas others defend that one must strengthen the power of governments and business over communities (Shani and Pizam 2012). According to Murphy & Murphy (2004) the community approach to tourism development is an attempt to integrate the interests of all community stakeholders, including residents as a critically-important group, in analysis and proposals for development.

It is possible to identify at least three types of resident community participation in the context of tourism planning and development: coercive participation, induced participation and spontaneous participation (Tosun, 2006; Zhang et al., 2013; Volgger et al., 2017). Coercive participation is the most “manipulated and contrived” approach (Tosun, 2006: 495), so it refers to the lowest level of participation in which resident communities have no power in what regards to tourism planning and development. In here, resident communities may or may not benefit from tourism benefits. Induced participation consists in the situation where governments and developers only consult the resident community opinion regarding tourism planning and development, but they are excluded from actual decision-making throughout all the planning and development process (Tosun, 2006; Chatzigeorgiou, 2017). Tosun (2006:494) says that spontaneous participation is a ‘bottom up’ process in which resident community members through participation in decision-making, have full authority in tourism planning processes, so in spontaneous participation, local residents have the power to make decisions and to control development process.

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### **4 TOURISMPHOBIA AND THE BARCELONA’S STRATEGIC TOURISM PLAN 2010-2015**

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One agrees with Goodwin (2016) that says that the Barcelona’s Strategic Tourism Plan 2010-2015 vision was both ambitious and ground breaking. Ambitious because it sought among other to, to be committed to tolerance, inclusiveness and with sustainability principles (City of Barcelona Strategic Tourism Plan Diagnosis and Strategic Proposal: Executive Summary, 2010:19-20), and ground breaking because perhaps for the first time a strategic tourism plan really sought and managed to include all stakeholders in its design (City of Barcelona Strategic Plan Diagnosis and Strategic Proposal: Executive Summary, 2010:06).

Since 2008, the numbers of reports denouncing a growing uneasiness between tourists and residents in Barcelona have increased. By 2012, one could see several images provoking tourists as the ones available in [passive-agressivenotes.com](http://passive-agressivenotes.com) (2012), showing that tourists spotted all over Barcelona phrases such as the following: - “tourist you are the terrorist”; - “no tourist allowed, thanks for your collaboration” or “welcome tourist, the rent of holiday apartments in this neighbourhood destroys the local socio-cultural fabric and promotes speculation. Many local residents are forced to

move away. Enjoy your stay”. This and other anti-tourism manifestations have led to the appearance of a concept intrinsically linked to discrimination designated as ‘tourismphobia’.

Having as starting point the definition of discrimination given to us by the Council of Europe (2017), one can say that tourismphobia can be defined as a dislike or hatred against tourists independently of their ethnic or social origin, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation or other discrimination. However, paradoxically, xenophobia, racism, and other radicalism forms can trigger and/or be the trigger to the increase of hostile and violent actions against tourists. These actions aim to humiliate denigrate and/or hurt the tourists and those associated to them.

In the City of Barcelona Strategic Tourism Plan – Executive Summary (2010:04), the authorities recognised that tourism was having negative impacts on the city: “some effects of tourism are often a nuisance and inconvenience to the local community, making it difficult for the tourism phenomenon to be understood and viewed in a positive way.” It follows stating that “the inconvenience experience by some local residents, which creates a feeling of unease and anti-tourist sentiments, ends up converging on and having feedback in certain discourses and public (and/or published) opinions by journalists, intellectuals and professionals who make their opinions heard, thereby constructing a social discourse which is sceptical about or against tourism.”

The Barcelona Strategic Tourism Plan – Government Measures (2010:63) states that “the negative speeches associated with tourism are part of a phenomenon that some authors have identified as ‘tourismphobia’, and that usually appears when it is socially perceived that the tourists’ capacity for tourism has been exceeded or its reaching its capacity.” So, to address it, in 2008 the City Council approved a Municipal Action Plan (PAM), which committed the city to develop a Tourism Strategic Plan. This strategic plan was developed with the “Turisme de Barcelona” between 2008 and 2010. According to the City of Barcelona Strategic Tourism Plan (2010:05), this had as main objectives “to promote a tourism model which will strengthen the balance between local residents and tourists, while preserving the identity values of the city”; to “... draw up a Strategic Tourism Plan in association with the sectors involved, which will address the need to plan our capacity for hosting tourists and guarantee the quality and sustainability of the city’s business sector”; to “... analyse the city’s capacity for hosting tourists in accordance with the characteristics of the public space in each neighbourhood and with regard to the impact of tourism”; to “... promote tourism that includes civic-minded attitudes as a value for coexistence”.

To address the negative impacts of tourism and the local community reaction against them, the Barcelona Strategic Tourism Plan: Executive Summary (2010:22), states that local authorities have enrolled a series of measures such as:

- **Territorial Deconcentration** – “The territorial deconcentration seeks to foster a more equitable distribution of the economic and social effects caused by tourism, as well as a territorial re-equilibrium, releasing the pressure in some areas of the city”.

- **Governance of Tourism** – “The plan therefore needs to move towards the development of new structures of

management and coordination of the tourist activity and of its relationship with the city, and with the different territories. The generation and dissemination of information must play an important role in order to help achieve the necessary complicities, take the best decisions and favour the credibility of the activity”.

- **Generation of Complicities** – In order to ensure that tourism functions are correctly integrated in the city, the maximum number of complicities is essential, with particular importance being given to the Catalan community and institutions according to their historical importance and/or shortcomings. The involvement of the community is a necessary condition for the economic and social sustainability of the activity. Considering the Barcelona residents also means fostering hospitality, extending a warm welcoming to visitors, coexistence and reciprocal exchanges”.

- **Competitive Improvements** – “In the world today, strong competition between cities means that the competitiveness of the destination as a whole and the sectors in particular are key factors to success. There can be no long-term success without sustainability, and there is no sustainability without the ability to be competitive”.

The idea behind these measures, according to the Barcelona Strategic Tourism Plan – Executive Summary (2010:04) is that “today Barcelona is setting to itself new challenges and initiatives that require a deep reflection process which involves adopting a new approach to some key questions, such as, for instance, the type of growth and the tourism management model, the territorial boundaries of the destination, the extent and consequences of the impacts and effects of tourism and, the modes of coexistence between local residents and visitors.”

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## 5 RESULTS

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Without an analysis of the city of Barcelona Strategic Tourism Plan – Evaluation of the Action Program 2010-2015, one could never have a good idea of what went well and wrong in the application of its 15 programs. After reading it somethings have caught our attention regarding why in 2015 (end of the program) tourismphobia and other negative tourism effects were still very much in the order of the day.

According to the city of Barcelona Strategic Tourism Plan – Evaluation of the Action Program (2015:110), of the 55 measures, 2 have been withdrawn, 8 were not initiated, 13 have received an achievement graduation of 25%, 21 received an achievement graduation of 50%, 10 received an achievement graduation of 75%, and only 1 measure was fully achieved (100%). The program with the highest degree of accomplishment was “Neighbourhoods and Districts”, and the program with the lowest degree of accomplishment was the one entitled “Governance”.

As a Whole, the 55 programs established in the city of Barcelona Strategic Tourism Plan (2015:110) achieved an average rating in their degree of implementation of less than 50%. According to this document, the results can be evaluated as having a low applicability rate.

Additionally, the city of Barcelona Strategic Tourism Plan – Evaluation of the Action Program (2015:112) stresses out that “other emergent phenomena have taken place, such as the collaborative economy or the massive increase in new form of accommodation, as well as advances in technology and its applications to the city (smart city). These phenomena have favoured a continuous increased in the tourist activity and have put more pressure in certain points of the city, those with higher density of tourism impacts”.

The greatest problem of the city of Barcelona Strategic Tourism Plan was failing in the implementation of the program entitled “Governance”, which means that the plan failed in creating the institutions that would seek to manage and coordinate the tourist activity and its relationship with and within the city. These institutions would also be responsible for the generation and dissemination of information, which according to the plan would play an important role in order to help achieve the necessary complicities (PET2015 – Executive Summary, 2010:22).

One other great problem in the execution of the plan is that the execution, monitoring and assessment of it was only partially achieved, with an accomplish degree of 25% (PET2015 – Executive Summary, 2010:74).

Having said so, one can say that since the city of Barcelona Strategic Tourism Plan achieved an average rating in its degree of implementation of less than 50%, it becomes impossible to us to know the real effect that it had in reality. This analysis of the city of Barcelona Strategic Tourism Plan makes us raise the question whether it managed to mitigate the negative effects of tourism in Barcelona or not. The truth is that anti-tourism manifestation and tourismphobia since 2010 still continued to grow.

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## 6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

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Tourism has brought and brings many changes to many countries, regions and places, and residents have to adapt and adjust themselves to these changes. The adaption to change implies that without concerted actions, anti-tourism manifestations will continue to grow among the receptive communities leading to a deterioration of the destinations competitiveness.

In response to overtourism and to new challenges as the one of Tourismphobia, the city of Barcelona as design, develop and implemented the city of Barcelona Strategic Tourism Plan 2010-2015.

The plan intended to create multi-stakeholders relationships seeking a better and more sustainable tourism development of tourism. The plan also intended to improve the way how residents and tourists use the city and relate between themselves in it.

As one has seen the Strategic Tourism Plan of Barcelona was both ambitious and ground breaking, and as we seen maybe it was too much of the two. In Barcelona the implementation of the means failed and like so, many of the ends foreseen also have been fully accomplished.

Having in mind what has been said above, even that in the design of the city of Barcelona Strategic Tourism Plan tourismphobia was considered as a serious problem, this plan did not help to clearly mitigate the negative effects

addressing like this anti-tourism manifestations. It failed because, as we know today, the problems that it intended to address still remain and in some cases these became worst, like in the case of anti-tourism manifestations and tourismphobia.

This case study reveals a clear gap between the planner’s intention and the actual implementation results. According to this research that happened for several reasons among which a failure in monitoring the implementation of the plan, making it impossible to a reaction to change. Plan monitoring and reformulation is crucial for feasible and effective implementation of the plan. Similar failures have also been reported in the studies of Inskeek (1991) and Gunn (2002). This necessarily implicates the existence an organizational structure that monitors the implementation of the plan creating a method to overcome unforeseeable obstacles that may rise in an ever-changing reality. This organizational structure must be able to develop a multi scenario method that allows predicting how to address these non-predictable obstacles.

One has used in this paper a case study research because one believes that with it, the researcher is more able to go beyond statistical results and understand better the underlying qualitative data. However, as any case study research, several limitations can be identified among which as Tellis (1997) expresses, a common criticism is its dependency on a single case exploration making it difficult to reach a generalising conclusion. Other limitation is that case study research findings and conclusions are very depending on the investigator’s background and level of involvement (Stake, 1995).

This paper can be considered relevant to understand how to address the tourismphobia thematic in the tourism development and planning context. Furthermore, it makes an incursion into issues such as: - overtourism and over-visited destinations; anti-tourism manifestations and tourismphobia; social resistance and protest in tourism contests; tourism governance and governability.

Given the lack of studies at this level further research must be made, namely, empirical research over the gaps between planning and implementation that enable not only to address problems such as tourismphobia but several other.

This research intended to contribute to enhance the knowledge base for later discussions and developments. Furthermore, it intended to bring new insights into a little-understood phenomenon suggesting new interpretations and relationships.

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