

Article

Tourism-Philia Vs Tourism-Phobia: Evolution of Residents and DMO's Perceptions in Barcelona



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Abstract

This paper aims to show if and how hosts' public narratives of tourism have changed in the particular case of the city of Barcelona (Spain) from 2004 to 2015, analyzing any common and opposing points of their argumentation over time. These narratives represent the perspectives of two opposing groups of hosts: residents and Destination Management Organisations (DMOs). We used thematic analysis to portray their public discourse, as expressed in the residents' magazine Carrer, and the annual reports of Turisme de Barcelona. Our findings show a clear division between the residents' tourism-phobic perception and the DMO's tourism-philic one which appear to reach a common ground over time

Keywords: Tourism-phila, Tourism-philic, DMOs, Perceptions, Discourse

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Introduction

Host-guest relationships in tourism destinations have been thoroughly analyzed in the literature, and cover aspects such as residents' perceptions of the costs and benefits derived from tourism, community engagement in tourism management and decision-taking, and degrees of visitor satisfaction, to name a few of the areas most explored. Many theories and models, like Social Exchange Theory or the Segmentation Approach, have been used to analyze how different segments of a community or even each member of a particular segment perceive costs and benefits related to tourism in their territory (McNaughton 2006; Iorio & Wall 2012; Presenza et al. 2013, Griffin 2013). In a destination, the host community is comprised not only by its residents but also by its local authorities, whose members not only live in the destination but also decide for and publicly defend their tourism planning.

Focusing highly on the residents' perspective through quantitative analysis, an heterogeneity in reaction towards tourism has been reported, ranging from 'lovers' (Williams & Lawson 2001) to 'haters' (Fredline & Faulkner 2000) and various in-between clusters. On the other hand, the official positioning of the local authorities like Destination Management Organizations (DMOs), does not reflect such a variety of perceptions, but on the contrary there is a clear support of the economic importance for continuous tourism planning and development (Volgger & Pechlaner 2014).

Looking for successful tourism destinations where opposing points of view among DMOs and residents are reported and could create a confusing image of hospitality to tourists, the case of the city of Barcelona was considered inviting. The main objective of this study is to show the evolution of the separate narratives of tourism as expressed publicly by residents and local authorities in Barcelona, in order to see if there is any possible metamorphosis of these collective and on some occasions opposing perceptions and, if any, towards which direction.

Perceptions about tourism

Evolution models of perception towards tourism

In the present study, the aim is not to analyze attitudes and ways of behaving but the perceptions of hosts towards tourism impacts. Following the conceptualization of

previous studies (e.g. Gursoy et al. 2002; Nawijn & Mitas 2012; Nunkoo & Gursoy 2012), residents' perceptions towards tourism development (meaning support versus opposition), depends on the perceived impacts of tourism at both a collective and individual level (Kayat et al. 2013). One of the most accepted theoretical frameworks used to study residents' perception regarding tourism is the Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Hernandez et al. 1996; Faulkner & Tideswell 1997; McGehee & Andereck 2004; Gursoy et al. 2010; Nunkoo & Gursoy 2012; Kayat et al. 2013; Presenza et al. 2013). This sociological theory was first developed by Homans (1961), who indicated that the actions and reactions of individuals are based on how they perceive the trade-off between the benefits and costs they receive on completing a specific exchange, whether they feel the relationship is worthwhile, and whether there is a chance of having a better relationship with another individual (Woosnam & Norman 2010). Adapting the SET theory to the tourism field, Ap (1992) specified that residents' support for tourism development and their involvement in the tourism industry depends on the extent to which perceived rewards outweigh perceived costs (Kayat et al. 2013; Nunkoo & Kam 2015). The SET theory does not look into how perceptions and responses evolve over time, but focuses on the study of the multiple variables that – at a certain moment in time – can influence perceptions and, thus, actions of exchange.

Putting aside past experiences and shifting the emphasis to the intensity and perception changes in interpersonal relationships between differentiated groups of people (such as hosts and guests), gave rise to the Intergroup Hypothesis Theory or the Contact Hypothesis Theory, credited to Allport (1954). Through this theory, social interaction changes negative perceptions existing between rival groups, thus reducing tensions or conflicts. For this to be achieved, appropriate conditions must be established. These include similar group status, common objectives, intergroup cooperation (rather than competition), and support from the government. This theory was used by Pizam et al. (2000), to demonstrate how intergroup contact affects prejudiced and discriminatory behavior between hosts and tourists working at a destination for extended periods, leading to a positive turn in behavior towards each other. Yet, on the other hand, criticism has focused on a superficial resident-tourist cultural encounter, based on a mutual commercial exchange (Reisinger 2009).

The importance of the perception of past experiences in an individual's interpretation of a given event was previously analyzed through the Experience Use History construct,

developed by Schreyer, Lime and Williams (1984). This was incorporated in the tourism field by Draper, Woosnam and Norman (2011), who focused on the influence of an individual's travel experience on their perception towards tourism and local government, concluding that travelling outside their country provided residents with an understanding of the positive impact of tourism to the overall community. The importance of being a traveler in perception formation was also included in the Emotional Solidarity Scale (ESS) developed by Woosnam and Norman (2010). The scale demonstrates that residents and tourists show a positive degree of emotional solidarity when the former realize the benefits of tourism, accept their role as hosts, and understand the role of a tourist (Woosnam 2011).

Pearce, Moscardo and Ross (1996) deepened the analysis of factors affecting perceptions of everyday life, and brought the Social Representations Theory to the field of tourism development. This theory supports the idea that people's understanding of the world around them depends on representations, by which we mean mechanisms that turn the unfamiliar into familiar on the basis of past experiences and prior knowledge. These social representations can refer to a community's shared concepts, such as language, values, knowledge, images, ideas, explanations or simply thoughts (Andriotis & Vaughan 2003). This approach helps direct attention to the social construction of knowledge of tourism and its impacts by analyzing the links between individuals and their attitudes within the social context they share (Jenkins 2003), and between their knowledge and understanding of tourism (Moscardo 2008). Most importantly, these representations, once created, take on a life of their own and are in constant adaptation mode. 'Here and now' depends on the past and determines the future, thus, the concept of change is vital.

Constraints and benefits perceived by destination residents

On a collective level, tourism development has been acknowledged to offer higher quality of life at economic, sociocultural and environmental level (Kim et al. 2013), representing an important source of income for residents through the employment it generates (Hernandez et al. 1996; McGehee & Andereck 2004; McNaughton 2006; Andereck & Nyaupane 2011), an important local business environment that offers greater chances to negotiate (Dyer et al. 2007), and a motivation for improvements in community infrastructure and public facilities (Andereck et al., 2005). On the other hand, tourism

development has been criticized on a general level for several reasons: planning without the support of the host population (Gursoy et al. 2002); higher cost of living and inflated property values and housing prices (Gursoy et al. 2010; Stylidis et al. 2014); employment opportunities interpreted as low salaries, low-quality jobs and high seasonality (Johnson et al. 1994); the commodification of heritage landscape (Su & Teo 2008); the uprooting of traditional society; and the destruction of natural resources (Andereck et al. 2005), all of which lead to hosts displaying negative behavior towards tourists.

Common factors found to have a direct impact on residents' personal benefits or general well-being (Kim et al. 2013), leading to positive perceptions of tourism were as follows: close contact with the tourism industry in terms of employment and increased salary (Hernandez et al. 1996; McGehee & Andereck 2004; McNaughton 2006; Su & Teo 2008; Kim et al. 2013; Gezon 2014); simply having close contact with tourists (Belisle & Hoy 1980; Nawijn & Mitas 2012); high knowledge about tourism and local economy (Andereck et al. 2005) or poor knowledge about environmental impacts of tourism (Sheldon & Abenoja 2001); positive place identity in terms of self-esteem and self-efficacy (Wang & Chen 2015); positive place image as the lens of tourism interpretation (Stylidis et al. 2014); living near the tourist area (Belisle & Hoy 1980) or away from it (Faulkner & Tideswell 1997); and living in a low tourism dependent community (McGehee & Andereck 2004), or a multicultural community (Ling et al. 2011). This broad focus on tourism economic benefits is known as the Growth Machine Theory (Woosnam & Norman 2010). The lack of studies that analyze the evolved dialogue between residents and DMOs provides poor evidence over the consequent evolution of hosts' perception over these personal and collective costs and benefits in time, while, on the other hand, contradicting voices of the host community on tourism could lead to a confusing image of the destination in terms of hospitality.

Methods

After analyzing the various theoretical models that look at hosts and guests' relationships in tourism destinations, we focused on the theoretical context of the Social Representations Theory (Pearce, Moscardo & Ross 1996), this being the most appropriate theoretical approach to analyze a dynamic evolution of perceptions, as in the case of different groups of residents in the city of Barcelona. Two opposing narratives are identified; 'tourism-philia', which focuses on the positive effects of tourism on the local economy and society; and 'tourism-phobia', which highlights the negative impacts of

tourism on local communities. This article attempts to single out the main features of the two narratives of hosts' public representations and their evolution from 2004 to 2015 in Barcelona in order to see if, or to what degree, they tend to integrate elements of the opposite axis, creating in-between constructions.

In order to identify these narratives at a longitudinal level, hosts' perceptions were identified in two official public discourse sources: the magazine *Carrer*, which is written from the residents' point of view; and the internal reports of the DMO *Turisme de Barcelona* (Barcelona Tourism), which is written from the local authorities perspective. *Carrer* presents various civic economic and socio-cultural issues, while *Turisme de Barcelona* is exclusively aimed at the tourism industry. Of the 48 issues of *Carrer* available between 2004 and 2015, we analyzed the 37 which referenced tourism issues while all 12 internal reports from *Turisme de Barcelona* were analyzed.

Thematic analysis, also known as inductive content analysis (Guest, MacQueen & Namey 2012), was employed to analyze the publications of *Turisme de Barcelona* and *Carrer* magazine. This analytical method is inductive, content-driven, and it gives more importance to the qualitative dimension of the sources analyzed. According to the constructivist paradigm, data must be analyzed through a process of induction, where the researcher looks for meaning materializing from the data in answer to the research question (Janesick 2000). We used QSR NVivo, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) package designed to assist with the analysis and management of qualitative research.

Evolution of Tourism-Philia and Tourism-Phobia in Barcelona

2004-2007: Questioning the Promised Tourist Success

On a tourism-phobic level, in 2004, a generalized, critical, civic opinion regarding the city development model and tourism emerged. According to public opinion, as expressed in *Carrer* magazine, only three mentions were made in favor of tourism, basically on cultural benefits, such as the democratization of tourism. After the post-Olympic euphoria, a number of social representatives began to question the city's tourism growth strategy, the reorganization of its economic activity, and the social and cultural effects of urban dynamics. The Forum gave shape to a rather disperse and discontinuous criticism, accumulating in a wave of criticism, contrasting with the previously accepted opinions about the success of the city:

“In fact, the 141 days that the Forum lasted were a huge pilot test for the new model of a city dedicated to fairs, conventions and tourists, that the City Council was sold to the economic power without any complicity from the social and citizen structure of Barcelona”. (October 2004)

At the beginning, tourism-phobic attitudes are represented by a general criticism of the city development model, and a reaction against a number of commercial, real state, urban planning and cultural processes, among which tourism is only one component. Criticism of tourism appears only as a consequence of the general criticism of the city development model as a whole.

On a tourism-philic level, the Forum was observed with some concern, while *Turisme de Barcelona* reaffirmed its strategy, focusing on the benefits of tourism, and claiming the responsibility for *“increasing the offer and reaching higher occupancy rates”*. This was a period when satisfaction of the strategies implemented was obvious, and optimism for the future represented a rational reaction, especially considering the economic downturn of other sectors. Thus, the basic argument for supporting tourism investment was that the tourism sector of Barcelona was favorable, compared to the unstable economic situation in other sectors, at both a national and international level.

“The political and economic situation changes every year, generating crises and slowdowns even in the strongest economies. In the context of certain instability, rare is the example of a city that preserves and improves market share in the competitive segment of business tourism.” (2004)

The only negative comment regarding tourism management related to congestion and was barely mentioned. Thus, arguments focused strongly on fiercely defending tourism as a hegemonic value of the city due to the economic impacts of being an international tourism attraction. The DMO also indicated how the residents of Barcelona should feel about living in the destination.

2008-2011: Extreme positioning

During this period, tourism – for the residents – was not part of the more broadly questioned Barcelona development model, but rather, the problem itself. Cultural benefits were no longer recognized, apart from a small reference to the generation of wealth.

“Tourism as a monoculture was not part of the premises of the Barcelona model in previous years, but it has become a dominant factor, with a true obsession to increase, at any price, the number of tourists in the city.” (December 2011)

Tourism-phobia was now more obvious than ever, and could be divided into two opinion streams: 1) tourism damages the social and cultural life of the city and creates an imbalance in what was previously harmonious; and 2), at the same time, previous economic structures are also in danger. These two poles were similar to the opinions of inhabitants, with social and cultural references predominating slightly. In this case, the most frequent concept is congestion, which includes excessive density of tourists in small areas, negative effects on mobility, the competition for a piece of land, and a high concentration of tourism in a small number of neighborhoods.

There is a close relationship between the concept of congestion and density in tourism spots, and the configuration of a city for tourists. This was one of the core elements of tourism-phobia during this period. The interesting thing here is that criticism of hotels and tourism apartments was merely economic-bound due to the tendency to generate concentration processes. Yet, criticism of apartments focuses on coexistence conflicts, derived from the fact that two very different collectives (tourists versus residents) with a very different relationship with the space that surrounds them (superficial for tourists, emotional and intense for residents) have to live together.

“Tourist apartments are a cancer for the neighborhood. Their very existence among neighbors implies an aggression to everyday life” (April 2009)

On the other level, the city council and *Turisme de Barcelona* promoted a process of strategic reflection, with the aim of analyzing the impacts of tourism in the city, and suggesting specific measures to ensure that the sector adjusted in accordance with the life of the city. The Barcelona Tourism City Plan is a collective debate showing that tourism, and its direct effects, has reached the category of political and institutional concern. The Plan opened a number of new political and public debates. In the meantime, the official discourse of *Turisme de Barcelona*, and its promotional actions maintained its ideological position, favoring the economic dimension of tourism.

Turisme de Barcelona did not mention one negative impact of tourism, choosing to focus on its tourism-philic standing, using mostly economic arguments to show that the model of the city and the model of tourism development were clearly interrelated, arguing that

the tourism success of Barcelona directly benefited the whole city. This correlation between the two models was expressed in statements such as “*the benefits of tourism have contributed to the well-being and wealth of our society*”, “*tourism is the star of the city economy*” or “[*Barcelona is*] a city born for tourism” (2008). Tourism was now, not only a very important engine for the economic development of the city, it was in fact the most important one. These discourses suggested that city and destination had merged as one, that is, there was no city without tourism, and no tourism without the city.

2012-2015: Opposites begin to attract

In the final period, the intensity of tourism-phobic criticism lessens. Not only does the number of critical comments reduce, but the intensity is also less fierce, and nuance is introduced to the discourse. Whereas in the previous periods, criticism is seen in absolute terms, now we see a general reflection on some of the benefits of tourism, at a strictly economic level. Tourism-phobia over time is confronted in a different way, where the solution is not in rejecting tourism and its benefits, but in efficiently managing the negative effects embedded in tourism, in name of the rewards brings to everyone.

“It became clear that the debate could not be simplified into a dichotomy (tourism, yes or no). People [...] sought for answers to a number of problems generated by tourism in their everyday life: roads and streets collapse, increase of rental prices and neighbor exile, noise and vandalism, regulation of the economic activities created around tourism, etc.” (March 2015)

There is a second reason for this evolution, which is attributed to the increase in the use of peer-to-peer accommodation services by tourists, reducing entrance barriers to the tourism industry significantly. Now there are many more potential beneficiaries from tourism, thus filling the gap that existed previously between tourism managers and residents. Thanks to sharing companies, such as Airbnb, and taking action into their own hands, some residents became tourism managers, and their discourse became more empathetic towards tourism. Tourist apartments went from having a negative cultural impact, to having a positive economic one.

“*Many people who participated identified themselves as members of the Barcelona Host Association; they rent out rooms in their homes to tourists, whom they live with during their stay. Many of them explained that their personal economic situation justified their*

option, and all of them claimed for a regulation of their activity, in order to be safe.”
(March 2015)

Partly due to the continuing economic crisis and the assessment proposed in the city's Strategic Plan, *Turisme de Barcelona* changed its discourse and began to be more critical towards tourism. Along with the ideas of success and wealth related to tourism, there were also issues such as the need to manage and adapt tourism to fit comfortably in the city, in order to ensure a “*model that is suitable with the daily lives of Barcelona citizens*”.
(2012)

In previous periods, responsibility for the success of the tourism industry was always attributed to the public and private sector. Yet in the official discourses of the third period, the concept of responsibility for the success of the tourism model was aimed for the first time at society as a whole, and the need to spread the benefits of the activity to the whole city is particularly stressed; acknowledging a problem already mentioned by the residents' problem. Neighbors appear for the first time as tourism subjects and actors who were actively involved in distributing tourism and its economic benefits across the city.
“[Tourism] is also a big responsibility. It is certain that tourism has become a common good which everyone should have to care about.” (2012)

Yet, even though responsibility is the work of many agents, the management role of the DMO to balance and neutralize the negative effects of tourism in the city and the life of its residents is highlighted. This undoubtedly insinuates that the official discourse of *Turisme de Barcelona* made some slight changes for the first time since its creation in 1994, when tourism needed to be controlled, and its management had to be in line with the correct development of other economic activities. In this discourse, tourism was compared to other sectors in order to diminish its superiority, while accepting its significance as one of the fundamental parts of the city's development model.

Discussion

This is an in-depth analysis of hosts' public narratives regarding their perceptions on the evolution of tourism and tourism management in Barcelona, a successful tourist destination, and questions the expected 'happy ending' of an effective tourism model. After identifying that the residents' and the DMO's public discourses take clearly opposing positions, our data suggest a different interpretation of a phobic and a philic tourism perception over time. That is, extreme positions are not static in their definition but may present internal transformations while maintaining their extremity, meaning that

phobic in time is differently perceived, just as philic is. The transformation of narratives from negativism to completely phobic and then to compromise from the residents' side; and from positivism to completely philic, and then to moderation from the DMO's side, concurs with the theory's baseline. This is that the same concepts – meaning tourism and tourism management – are perceived in contradictory terms between two different social groups of the host community, for different socio-economic reasons, but in time, adaptation and adjustment can create a common ground for discussion and understanding. The separation into three stages (2004-2007, 2008-2011, and 2012-2015) indicates the differentiated positioning towards tourism within the public discourse of residents and representatives of the DMO, that is, from opposite poles of hosts within the same tourism model in the same city. Even though the phobic and philic basis remain anchored in each discourse respectively, their approach changes over time. Within the phobic narrative, the emergence of which coincides with the relative failure of the *Fòrum de les Cultures* event, the use of the term 'tourism' refers basically to its management by the other hosts, that is, local authorities. Residents' disappointment does not focus on tourists themselves, but on the selling out of other hosts in the name. During the first stage, residents' recognition of this generalized attitude in other sectors makes tourism part of a general problem. If initially, criticism of the civic movement was aimed towards the city development model, at a second stage, tourism was identified as an autonomous and causal source of conflict. This is when a narrative against tourism, basically identifying economic and socio-cultural impacts, becomes clear. Yet during the third period, tourism is no longer part of the problem, nor the problem itself, but part of the city's identity with major management problems that still remain.

On the other hand, within the philic narrative, tourism is highlighted as one of the few sectors not forming part of Barcelona's economic crisis (between 2004 and 2007). Growing into the protagonist of the city's economy between 2008 and 2011, and maturing later on into one of the main sources of economic welfare (but not the main one) in a time of financial crisis. Tourism in Barcelona was compared to other sectors and tourist destinations in order to highlight its success and in response to the increasingly phobic reaction of residents. During this second period, extreme and opposing opinions of the tourism development model showed that there were no common discussion points, apart from the economic crisis, which made the residents feel insecure.

It is evident that the hosts' phobic/philic standpoint is strongly defended throughout all three stages. Residents blame tourism industry for its preference towards economic

benefits without considering its social impact. At the same time, the DMO is praised for its economic success in comparison to other economic sectors and tourism destinations. Yet, at the beginning the perception is that tourism is an external factor that damages/benefits the city's identity, and over time this perception evolves into an internal part of the city that needs to be better regulated so as to stop degrading the social life of the locals, or to start broadening the economic welfare to other sectors and areas of the city.

We believe that this research can contribute to the literature with insights for both DMO managers and residents' organizations, in order to better understand the balance between tourism benefits and impacts that better fit in different settings in other destinations. Future research should keep analyzing the dynamic character of perception formation towards tourism between different social groups of hosts to see if, and how, consensus can be reached and, therefore, find a uniform voice for hosts.

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