

Tourism in Alt Maresme. Historical perspective and future challenges

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Abstract:

This paper analyzes the historical development of tourism in the Alt Maresme, its current problematic situation, and the strategies that are being considered in the area to regenerate and to give continuity to this economical activity. This region, located on the Northeastern Spanish coast, within the sphere of Barcelona's Metropolitan area, was in the 60's and 70's a good example of Mediterranean mass tourism. This model –with sunny climate, golden beaches, night parties and cheap prices as main incentives to attract tourists, mostly from northwestern Europe- went into decline in the late 80's, due to the success of other international destinations. This study briefly explains the main factors which now affect this activity in the Alt Maresme. It aims to present the main challenges and opportunities of tourism in the area, as well as the threats that may affect the sustainability of tourism in the medium term.

Keywords: Alt Maresme, recycling of tourist the areas, promotion of natural and cultural heritage, tourist model coexistence

Introduction

According to the Instituto de Estudios Turísticos (IET) and Frontur, Catalonia was in 2010 the first tourist destination in Spain, with 25% of the Spanish market ⁽¹⁾ and 1.8% of the global tourism market. Approximately 26 million people traveled to Catalonia during this period, of which foreign visitors were 14.206.600 ⁽²⁾. Tourism accounts for 11% of Catalan GDP ⁽³⁾ and, unlike other economic activities, it has experienced a slight growth in Catalonia during the last two years, both in number of tourists (3.7% in 2010, 5.1% yoy in July 2011⁽⁴⁾), as in the total expenditure declared by foreign tourism (10,516.7 million euros represents an increase of 9.8% yoy in 2010) ⁽⁵⁾.

In Maresme tourism is also a critical activity, which accounts for 11% of GDP in the area ⁽⁶⁾. It is concentrated on various municipalities of Alt Maresme, as Calella, Pineda, Santa Susanna and Malgrat. In 2010, the hotel enterprises under the brand of Barcelona-Maresme Coast received 935,200 guests, a significantly lower number than the 6.63 million visitors in Barcelona, the 2.97 million in the Costa Brava, or 2.02 million that stayed in the Costa Dorada ⁽⁷⁾, other well-known Catalanian beach destinations.

The tourism industry in the Alt Maresme is influenced by many variables, at local, regional and international level. Its geographical location, marked by the proximity to the metropolitan area of Barcelona, its attractive landscape -seriously threatened by real estate speculation- and its cultural heritage are outstanding local factors that affect tourism. In the past twenty years the area has experienced important demographic and economical changes, as well as severe urban and transport infrastructure transformations that affect this business directly, and should not be ignored in an analysis of this kind.

At a global level, the increasing international competition, including the rising of other Mediterranean tourist destinies, is one of the major factors that affect tourism in the area. In the recent times, significant technological and cultural transformations have introduced new ways of promotion, organization, and marketing of tourism. One of the major challenges in the Alt Maresme is the international promotion of the destination, the diversification of the offer, and the communication of a new image that makes the area attractive for visitors again.

Tourism in Alt Maresme. Influence of local factors:

Geography and landscape

Alt Maresme has great tourist potential, both for its geographical and cultural characteristics, as for its proximity to one of most popular destinations in Spain, the city of Barcelona.

The Maresme, with an area of 398.9 km² ⁽⁸⁾, is located north of Barcelona and south of La Selva region, between the Mediterranean sea and the hills of the *Serralada Litoral (Montnegre, Corridor and Sant Mateu)*. It consists of 30 municipalities (16 in the coast and 14 inland) and it is divided into two sub-regions: the Baix Maresme (low Maresme) and the Alt Maresme (high Maresme). Caldes d'Estrac is the town that marks the boundary between the two. Historically, Baix Maresme has always been more closely linked to Barcelona -both in its administration and communications-, as Alt Maresme was strongly connected to the county of Girona in the past (not until 1833 it was incorporated to the province of Barcelona).

The Maresme Coast, more than 50 km long, has 38 km of beaches (including broad sandy beaches and coves such as those between Sant Pol and Calella). 5 marina harbors have been built in the area (El Masnou, Premià, Mataro, Sant Andreu de Llavaneres and Arenys de Mar), which in occasions have altered the coastal dynamics, causing recurrent regression of sand surfaces. Parallel to the coast, a few kilometers inland, is the Natural Park of Montnegre and Corridor, 15,000 ha. of remarkable Mediterranean forests, hills and valleys which are relatively calm. Between the mountains and the sea run numerous streams and *riera*s (small rivers which are usually dry except for occasional episodes of heavy rainfall).

Unfortunately, this landscape has been irreversibly altered in recent decades. The urban and economic dynamics have transformed the country at a rapid pace. Residential developments, industrial buildings and warehouses (often empty) have proliferated. The impact of some transport infrastructures, as the highway C-32, has also been very important.

Economic and demographic dynamics

Until the mid-50's, the economy of Maresme combined farming, fishing and industry. The textile industry was main source of economical in municipalities such as Mataro, Canet and Calella. In the 60's, the decadence of this activity boosted the interest in investing in tourist businesses.

Other towns, as Caldes d'Estrac ("Caldetes"), Teià or Premià, had already some tradition with local "tourism" and since the nineteenth century were popular summer resorts for Barcelona's bourgeoisie. In the 1920's the area began to attract the first builders of holiday housing. It is also relevant to remind the influence of the "indianos" in the area - former migrants who, after making their fortune in America,

returned to their homelands-. Upon returning, the wealthiest of them built villas, gardens and public buildings, bequeathing an interesting heritage of colonial architecture, as it is the case in Masnou, Alella, Canet, or Arenys.

International tourism was virtually nonexistent in the Maresme until the fifties. In 1953, several initiatives to attract European tourism appear in Calella, promoted by catalan and german entrepreneurs, as Manuel Vila, Joaquim Serra i Codina, Enric Teixidó Salva, Margot Hildegart Rothe or Adolf Dickfeld ⁽⁹⁾. They were encouraged by the growing international popularity of the nearby Costa Brava. Hollywood films, like "Pandora and the Flying Dutchman", with Ava Gardner, were shot in Tossa, 20 km away from Calella. Several new hotels were built in Calella at that time (Hotel Goya, Hotel Bahia Azul, Hotel Miami...) to respond to the increasing demand for accommodation. Good weather, wide beaches of golden sand, night parties, and low prices, - sponsored by a favorable currency exchange-, led to mass tourism. The will to promote tourism at any cost was a common goal for both the private sector keen to invest in this activity and Franco's public administration. This fact was decisive to launch the tourism model commonly called in Spain "sun and beach."

In the decades of 60 and 70 mass tourism in the area was a booming business, often controlled by international tour operators. The offer is composed by low cost summer holidays: coach buses or charter flight transport, and "all inclusive" hotel services. Sociologist Mario Gaviria describes it well in his works "*España a Go-go*" (1974) ⁽¹⁰⁾ and "*Turismo de playa en España*"(1975) ⁽¹¹⁾. The demand for low-cost workers in both tourism and the construction sectors, provoked an important migratory flow to the Catalan coast from other parts of Spain. It is a tourism model marked by a strong seasonality, which concentrates activity during the summer months and allows to rise profits in a short time with few labor costs. Staff often remained in precarious jobs in construction works, or receiving unemployment benefits for the rest of the year.

New hotels and campings opened in Pineda, and later, in Santa Susana. The construction and maintenance of hotel facilities and new housing developments of second homes in the hills of Maresme, often of dubious legality (for example in Can Vistamar and Can Carreras), helped boost construction business. These developments are a first threat to the conservation of this attractive landscape.

In the mid eighties, low cost "sun and beach tourism", becomes less and less profitable. Due to a more intense global competition, with the rising of many international destinations that offer similar products at lower prices, tourism in the region enters in a relative decline. The hotel's facilities are starting to become obsolete, and often lack the space and services required by an increasingly demanding clientele. To meet this demand, new hotel complexes are built in the coast of Santa Susanna and Malgrat, with large lounges, shops, swimming pools and gardened areas, emulating the "luxury resort model" that is developing in countries like Greece, Turkey and Tunisia. Some of these resorts are built along the beach, at a very small distance from the shore, breaking the law, *Ley de Costas (Ley 22/1988 de 28 de Julio)*.

In the early nineties, various important demographic and economic transformations in the region affect the tourism sector. The picture is altered by the Spanish construction boom, favored by many different factors (financial and tax incentives, population growth, massive real estate speculation, international investment, etc ...). In the Maresme, the construction boom is particularly strong, partly due to the large increase in housing prices experienced in the metropolitan area of Barcelona since the 1992 Olympic Games. This fact forces many people to seek residence in neighboring regions.

In 2003, over 20% of the population of the region came from Barcelona ⁽¹²⁾, and had moved to the Maresme region over the past decade, often with the intention of improving the characteristics of their residence (answer selected by 31.3%) ⁽¹³⁾. Many of these new residents have their work place or school in Barcelona's metropolitan region, and are forced to commute, fact which increases the rates of forced mobility and road congestion in the area. With the construction boom, single family homes, townhouses and collective housing extended over Maresme's geography. Urban sprawl began to seriously threaten the landscape and the environmental balance, essential values for the sustainability of tourism.

The rising of the construction activity, also attracted to Maresme, an important flow of immigrant workers, from areas such as North Africa or Latin America.

These two facts result in a significant demographical increase: in 1996 there are 318.891 registered inhabitants in the Maresme region, the number goes up to 430.997 inhabitants in 2010 ⁽¹⁴⁾.

The Barcelona Olympic Games in 1992, had other remarkable effects on the regions tourism. The event is used to renew and promote Barcelona at the international level with numerous urban improvements (such as Montjuic works and the reconstruction of the waterfront). The offer of accommodation improves both in quantity and quality. Public and private organizations launch a new image of Barcelona that captures international attention. The architectural and urban heritage of the city (the modernist works of architects such as Gaudí and Domenech i Muntaner, *l'Eixample*, the "Gothic quarter", the Olympic Village), as well as culture, sports (Barça) and food, are essential for understanding the overall success of the "Barcelona model", able to attract all types of tourists.

In the Alt Maresme, tourism based in "sun and beach", still present today, is often complemented with excursions by coach or train to Barcelona to visit the historical center and the works of the architect Antoni Gaudí.

Tourism and Infrastructures

Development of tourism in an area is always influenced by its accessibility and the characteristics of the transport infrastructures that are available. In the case of tourism in the Maresme, the construction of this kind of infrastructures has been decisive, for better or for worse.

In the eighteenth century, the construction of new roads, like the road along the coast from Barcelona to Girona (1747), former NII ⁽¹⁵⁾, implied the need to provide accommodation facilities to serve travelers. Since the XVII Century, there was a hostel for caravan passengers in Calella -situated halfway between Barcelona and Gerona-. In 1790 l 'Hostal Nou was built ⁽¹⁶⁾. Since the second half of the XVIII century there was also a hostel in Pineda.

In 1847 the first railway in Spain was constructed between Barcelona and Mataró. The train line was extended to Arenys in 1856, and in 1861 to Maçanet-Massanes ⁽¹⁷⁾. In the Maresme, the coastal railway is situated very near the shore, and it is, still today (2011), a major barrier between the town centers and the beaches. This question, more or less problematic depending on the municipalities, has not been resolved satisfactorily yet and continues to harm urban organization and tourism potential of the coastline in the entire region. The project of moving several sections of the railway line underground, building a third line

to increase train frequency to Barcelona, coupled with the renewal of the seafront and promenade connecting all the Maresme Coast is one of the most promising proposals ⁽¹⁸⁾.

Other conflictive transport infrastructure is the national road N-II, which runs alongside the coastal railway between Montgat and Canet. It is a very congested road, with a significant number of mortal accidents ⁽¹⁹⁾. From Sant Pol, the N-II separates from the coast and crosses the centers of the towns of Saint-Pol, Calella, Pineda de Mar, also with heavy congestion and traffic jams. The road serves as access for tourist coaches on their way to the hotel areas of Calella, Pineda, Santa Susanna and Malgrat. There are several plans to convert the N-II in a truly urban road, a new avenue, the "Passeig del mar" ⁽²⁰⁾, although there is no consensus in which is the best way to organize traffic. Among the options that are being considered is to redirect traffic on the highway C-32, or on a new road parallel to it (splitting of the C-32 or "*l'avinguda del mig*").

Another transport infrastructure that has an important effect on the territorial organization and the landscape is the highway. In 1969 the Maresme motorway was opened between Montgat and Mataro (now C-32), which was extended to Palafolls in 1994. Recently, the section between Palafolls and Tordera has been built. The opening of the motorway has had an enormous impact on the area and its communications: it improved the connection with Barcelona's metropolitan region but it has also involved an important degradation of the traditional landscape. This results of the construction of the highway itself and also of the numerous new housing developments that grow along the highway's new accesses.

Public and private stakeholders agree on the need to renew and improve the functionality of the transport infrastructure network in the Maresme, and to control its impact on the landscape of the region (particularly in relation to the seafront). However, there is also much controversy and many disagreements in which are the most appropriate proposals to achieve this goal. An example would be the resistance of civil and environmental groups to the possible splitting of the C-32 ⁽²²⁾. The need to eliminate or reduce the cost of highway tolls is also discussed. Another hot topic is the "burial" or displacement of the railway to regenerate the coastline. At the predictable difficulties and conflicts between different sectors, there are added problems of land ownership and land-maritime zone management. The solutions to these infrastructure problems affect the future of tourism in the region at a high extent.

Besides land communications, air transport has gained weight since the 90's in the Maresme region. This has been a very noticeable change in the way of organizing travel and vacation. The emergence of low cost airlines in the airports of Barcelona and Girona-Costa Brava, as Ryanair and Easy-Jet, have made the air flights a popular alternative to classical coach bus trips organized by tour operators. In 2004 ⁽²³⁾, Ryanair installed one of its European bases in Gerona Airport, fact with an important impact in the tourism industry both in the Costa Brava and Costa del Maresme, especially for short stays purchased online.

Tourism in Alt Maresme. Influence of global factors:

Since the mid-nineties, entrepreneurs and experts dedicated to the study of tourism stated that it wasn't possible to maintain international competitiveness based mainly in the policy of low prices in Spain ⁽²⁴⁾ anymore. Promoting the uniqueness of the destination – with landscape and culture in the first place-, and

differentiating the offer were shown as the strategies to follow. Cases such as Barcelona and Bilbao seem to confirm this hypothesis. A large increase in the rate of inflation in Spain, which is enhanced by the introduction of the euro in 2002, makes holiday offers more expensive. The competition between tourist destinations has increased, with the emergence of new “sun and beach” destinations with remarkably lower costs –as Croatia, Turkey, Egypt ...The continuity of degraded tourist areas is not guaranteed anymore simply by offering lower prices, alternative that isn't profitable enough.

In the late 80's, the model of Fordist mass tourism begins to show signs of exhaustion in the Spanish Mediterranean coast. The tourism trends and demands seem to evolution: we speak of a cultural change from “fordist” mass tourism to post-fordist tourism, which requires a diversified offer of leisure activities and in which travelers have a participative role in the organization of their own holidays. While inclusive tours, produced by large tourism corporations, continue to control much of the market, other formulas gain market.

Certainly, new technologies and Internet have altered the landscape: current ways of travel promotion, organization and marketing are changing irreversibly. Flights, accommodation services, inclusive tours, can all be purchased online. The percentage of e-commerce sales is rapidly increasing ⁽²⁵⁾. In 2010, from the total economic benefits generated by e-commerce in Spain, 11.8% corresponded to air transport, 11.4% to travel agencies or tour operators, 6.4% to land passenger transport (train, coach or rent-a-car), and 6 % to leisure and entertainment activities. Web portals that compare, offer or promote travel deals and make reservations for various types of accommodation (booking, catch, let's bonus... etc) are quickly increasing their influence and power ⁽²⁶⁾. Internet also facilitates the rental of private apartments for days, weeks, or months which are not always legalized for tourist use. For tourism enterprises, online presence in multiple ways is increasingly necessary (web portals, offers in other travel webs, positive feedback in social networks, promotional videos in Youtube or Vevo, mobile applications, etc...)

In the recent years, another relevant change in travel trends is holiday time organization: it is increasingly common to distribute the available vacation days throughout the year, making several trips with short-stays to different destinies. This option is also favored by low-cost flights.

Tourism facilities in the region

The development of tourism in the Alt Maresme has not been uniform. The sub-region consists of 12 municipalities, which combine a large range of economic activities and land uses. Besides tourism, agriculture, construction, commerce, services and small size industries are present. Accommodation facilities and tourism services are also very diverse (holiday homes estates, hotels, hostels, apartments, resorts, campings...). This complexity involves advantages (urban vitality, mixity) and disadvantages (management difficulties and conflicts between activities).

The hotel industry, dedicated mostly to international tourism, is concentrated on the coast between Calella and Malgrat (Calella, Pineda de Mar, Santa Susana, Malgrat). In other municipalities (like Caldes d'Estrac, Canet and Sant Pol), accommodation options are few, but on the other hand, there are numerous second homes. Most are owned by people from Barcelona, who stay in them during weekends and summer holidays. In the inner Maresme, municipalities without coast as Arenys de Munt, Sant Cebrià, Sant Iscle de Vallalta, Palafolls and Tordera hardly have any accommodation facilities. Restaurants and bars don't depend on tourists from abroad.

Maresme region has also several camping sites, most of them only open during the warmer seasons. From the 34 campings that exist in the Maresme, 32 are in the Alt Maresme (11 in Malgrat) ⁽²⁷⁾. The rental of family bungalows in camping facilities is becoming increasingly popular.

Tourism Challenges in the Alt Maresme

During the last two years tourism results provided by the Institute of Tourism Studies (IET) and Egatur have been positive in Spain, both regarding the increase in number of visitors and the money spent per person and day. However, it shall not be overlooked that the prospects of tourism in the area are uncertain. The current political instability in North Africa has temporarily favored Spanish tourism ⁽²⁸⁾.

Currently, there are many challenges facing the tourism industry in the Alt Maresme. To compete in a profitable and sustainable way in the global market is not easy. One of the main lines of action, that has achieved a significant success, has been directed to capture new markets, such as tourism from the Eastern countries, with the Russian market ahead. In 2010, 374,000 Russians visited Catalonia and in 2011 this number is expected to increase in more than 30%. Tourism fairs and congresses, business and diplomatic contacts, online promotion and informal advertising strategies are some of the tools to capture new markets. For its promotion, the Coast of Maresme has the advantage of its proximity to Barcelona, that can be considered an important international tourism attraction and a relatively well-known global brand.

One of the most complex challenges is to transform the seasonal character of tourism in the region, and the reduction of the job instability that persists in the sector. There are no magic solutions in this direction, but different institutions ⁽²⁹⁾ are doing efforts to improve this situation. In order to keep tourism facilities open in low season, a large range of tourism models and activities are being promoted: sport, gastronomy, health, business and conferences, culture... Alternatives to long summer holidays are being proposed during the rest of the year (weekend breaks, combination of accommodation services in Barcelona and in the Maresme, long-term stays for seniors ...). To defend high quality tourism (and higher prices) implies to promote training and sustainable labor conditions for workers.

Another complex goal in the region is to balance tourism with other economic activities and social demands. Unlike other destinations dedicated to tourism in an exclusive way, Alt Maresme is characterized by the coexistence of diverse economic activities, interests and social groups. It is desirable to provoke synergies between different activities, not otherwise. As a negative example, we can recall the residential construction boom in the 90's that damaged irreversibly the landscape of the region, a major capital of any tourist destination. Commercial activity, clean industries and new technologies, not to mention agriculture and other traditional labors, combine well with tourism, and contribute to achieve desirable urban vitality in tourism destinations.

Maintaining residents' quality of life is another key factor for achieving sustainable tourism. Improving traffic congestion, avoiding noise and air pollution is essential. It is necessary to control the negative effects that tourism can carry itself, such as garbage on the streets, noise, or the overcrowding and the degradation of the public space. Another aspect to handle with care is to avoid conflicts between residents and tourists.

The saturation of transport infrastructures as the NII, traffic and parking difficulties are also pressing issues affecting both residents and tourists. In a survey from 2000, parking problems are chosen the main inconvenient by the Maresme residents, followed by traffic. There are several measures that are being proposed to improve public transport: increasing the frequency of trains, the construction of a third railway, more buses to connect different municipalities, more punctuality and coordination between different transports...⁽³⁰⁾ In relation to tourism, it is also essential to regenerate the negative impact of infrastructures on the territory and the urban space, as the coastal railway and the N-II that act as a urban barriers.

Another key to ensure the sustainability of tourism in the region is to promote its landscape, history and cultural heritage. At the end of the day, these are the factors that are able to singularize a destiny. Often, it is not enough to preserve the environment. In many occasions it is necessary to regenerate, maintain, and promote – and sometimes design- the landscape. In the case of tourism in the Alt Maresme, the effort to preserve the beaches in a proper condition is a must (water and sand quality, cleaning). A new water treatment plant has been built between Santa Susana and Pineda last year, which is about to open. In relation to the traditional landscape, an agricultural park has been proposed in Pineda de Mar. The renovation and maintenance of the seafront maritime walks is also important to promote tourism. *The Strategic Plan Maresme 2015* proposes to "connect seaside walks and existing coastal paths" in the region, to achieve greater functional continuity.

The Natural Park of Montnegre & Corredor is certainly another important natural highlight, which should be preserved with care. Many leisure activities are possible in the area: hiking, biking trails, horseback riding, or cultural visits to medieval monuments in the park as churches and *masias*. The limits of the park should be preserved and protected from real estate pressure. Besides the "natural" landscape, urban landscape shall also be cared for. In the Alt Maresme, some municipalities have invested in the renovation of some streets located in the historical centers. Several streets and squares have been pedestrianized in the centers of Calella, Pineda, Canet and Malgrat.

The Maresme has a history and a cultural heritage of great interest. *The Strategic Plan Maresme 2015* states as a strategic priority "to create a catalog of cultural heritage, identifying those tangible and intangible elements that give meaning and historical continuity to the territory"⁽³¹⁾. The architectural heritage of the region is certainly varied: roman ruins, remains of castles and medieval defense towers, numerous churches, chapels and farmhouses of the XV-XVIII centuries, Catalan modernist architecture, colonial villas, old textile factories ... In this regard, the "*Ruta Modernista*" of Canet⁽³²⁾, or the "literary tours" in Caldes d'Estrac⁽³³⁾, are some interesting proposals have been developed in the area. There are also several museums specialized in different topics and art foundations, such as the Palau i Fabre Foundation dedicated to the work of Pablo Picasso in Caldes d'Estrac or the Tharrats Foundation in Pineda de Mar.

Gastronomy and winery are two other important cultural values in the region that are being exploited. A recognized example is the restaurant Sant Pau in Sant Pol de Mar, with three Michelin stars. Alella is well-known for its cellars that offer wine-tasting. *The Strategic Plan Maresme 2015* calls for "the creation of a coordinating entity of networked cultural initiatives in the Maresme, as a part of the Consell Comarcal del Maresme"⁽³⁴⁾. In fact, since the late 80's several tourism associations have been founded in the region as the ATC (associació turística de Calella), or the Fundación Turística de Santa Susanna, to coordinate promotion and advertising and organizing different leisure activities to attract tourism, also from nearby

areas. Music festivals, as the Screaming Psychobilly festival, Oktoberfests, medieval and Renaissance fairs and sporting events like Challenge Barcelona - Maresme, are some of the events that have taken place in the Alt Maresme in the past years. All these initiatives are intended to help maintain off-season tourism, offering alternatives and choices to complement the traditional "sun and beach" holidays.

General reflections about tourism in the Alt Maresme

For more than a decade, tourism enterprises in the Alt Maresme are in the process of reorganization and renovation to avoid their decadence ⁽³⁵⁾.

The existence of a consolidated but dynamic tourism industry, quite aware of the need to adapt to the changes of global tourism demands, is a favorable factor. The common goals of the private sector and public administrations are coordinated in institutions such as the *Consell Comarcal del Maresme* and *Consorci turístic de promoció del Maresme*. From these entities, tourism initiatives and policies are analyzed and promoted, such as brand *Costa Barcelona-Maresme* and or the *Strategic Plan Maresme 2015*. The plan proposes various lines of action; due to the crisis and financial difficulties some have been postponed.

Some municipalities, as Calella or Santa Susana, count with local organizations to plan tourism strategies, which collaborate regularly with other tourism institutions of higher level (at the level of Maresme, Catalonia or Spain). The Tourist Board (PMT) of Calella was founded in the early nineties, in order to become a meeting place for the tourism sector, local organizations and the city council to design and implement the tourism policies of the city. The board of trustees is composed by representatives of political parties, the tourism sector, and local civic, cultural and sports associations interested in tourism planning. *La Fundació Turística Privada Santa Susanna* is another influent local organisation.

Tourism is a transversal phenomenon that demands strategic agreements and strong coordination between the different administrations (with different powers and budgets) and between the public and private sectors. The level of action by each administration is governed largely by their skills, budget and political interests.

In the Alt Maresme proposals to reactivate tourism are very diverse, and so are the agreements and budgets that are required. Generally speaking, each approach requires a set of specific promoters (public and private). For example, some of the large transport infrastructure works that are suggested (as the renewal of the N-II road or the changes in the coastal railway) require the involvement and the difficult agreement of a large number of agents, companies and administrations of varied level.

On the other hand, there are small scale interventions, such as the renewal of hotel facilities or the construction of new extensions, which often promote private entrepreneurs, sometimes with government subsidies. In this sense, several tourist cooperatives of Alt Maresme - as Serhs, Hotusa, H-10 or Hotenco Hotels - have made an important effort to rehabilitate many pre-existing installations.

Today, the general economic mood is not too optimistic, which makes it essential to prioritize the needs, deciding which initiatives are essential and which are only desirable. Investments must be profitable and benefit not only the tourism sector, but the rest of the population as well, avoiding negative externalities.

As mentioned, the sector is trying to adapt to new tourism trends -such as the diversification of the offer and to the possibilities offered by new technologies-. Information and sale networks are constantly evolving. Large companies and cooperatives are usually more capable to invest in new technological platforms, which can contribute to reach new markets, optimize logistics, or help calibrate the clients' satisfaction. However, also small firms can benefit from new technologies and promote their business in existing platforms, which can be used to reach new clients. Search engines and comparators of tourism products are increasingly relevant, along with online promotion and social networking ⁽³⁶⁾.

Another essential aspect for the future of tourism in the area is the respect of those elements that singularize the destination: landscape and culture. The protection of the environment and the landscape against the greed of certain economical sectors is a must. The coast and the interior of the Maresme landscape should be protected as a source of future wealth and well-being. The negative impact of the massive exploitation of the territory over the past two decades in the Maresme, reminds us that sometimes it is better not to do, than to do too much, compromising the future of the region. The vision of countless apartments and houses for sale and numerous new warehouses to rent, where a few years ago agricultural fields or forests had been, provokes thought.

Among the key initiatives for the promotion of tourism in the Maresme, is the construction (or reconstruction) of an attractive imaginary of the region, based on landscape, history and culture ⁽³⁷⁾.

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