

DIVERSITY, FLEXIBILITY AND IDENTITY

Mechanisms for recycling Mature Tourist Destinations

Biel Horrach Estarellas

PhD in Urbanism, Department of Urbanism and Regional Planning UPC

e-mail: bielhorrach@coaib.es

Abstract

Globalizing dynamic sources are making of tourist destinations, spaces each time more homogeneous, unable to respond to the tourist's new motivation and to the specific characteristics of the territory and the local landscape. Tourist space has gone through changes, resulting in conurbations without urban structure that require new planning patterns.

Despite predictions, which determine a declining process or a post-stagnation, there is a high potential of reconversion of obsolete tourist destinations based on its typological characteristics and its interaction with the territory.

The new challenges faced by tourist activity: diversity of tourist resources, travel flexibility and the differentiation of the destination from the rest by enhancing its identity, are methodologically tackled by testing regional tourist dynamics experimented in one of the most paradigmatic cases of tourist coastline development, Majorca island.

Key words: tourist regional system, tourist settlement, tourist reconversion, mature tourist destinations, Majorca

1. Introduction

After one hundred years of tourist development, Majorca Island has been going through a continuous urban construction of different tourist settlements which have ended up forming a sort of conurbations called *regional tourist systems*. Along this process, regional tourist systems have experienced the different life cycles of tourist destinations: (Butler, 1980): discovery, beginning, development, consolidation, stagnancy, and in some cases, the starting of a decline process. Many of them have reached their stagnancy phase in a relatively short period of time, especially due to an explosive growth, based on sun and beach monoculture, which has left a heritage characterized by the hyper-development of the destination, environmental deterioration, overcrowding, standardization of products and the loss of local landscape values. This reality puts the destinations feasibility under doubt at a long term, if they are not duly redirected (Knowles and Curtis, 1999). The impact of new market tendencies, the evolution and life cycle of tourists destinations and the need for adapting demanding spaces to the new global dynamics, make necessary to tackle renovation processes in tourist concentrations with more than five decades of use as receiving areas of high demand flows (Vera, Baños; 2010).

Historically, Majorca has been a predominant hotel destination with the largest number of tourist beds of the Estate: 285,065 beds (IBESTAT, 2009), and has also been number one in overnight hotel staying 37.408.219 (INE, 2010). Currently, it almost duplicates the second Spanish tourist destination, Tenerife Island, with 19.643.030 (INE, 2010) and exceeds on one of the main world tourist destinations, Quintana Roo region (Cancún) which shows 33,446,549 overnight hotel staying (Statistical compendium 2005, SECTUR). Bearing in mind insularity effects and seasonal tourism which characterize the island (Rullán,

2005), it can be observed that most of overnight staying is produced in a relatively short period of time (4 months) and is concentrated in a very enclosed territory, making of Majorca one of the most singular cases of worldwide tourist development.

Apart from hotel development, residential development effects experimented over the last 30 years cannot be overlooked when it comes to analyze consolidated tourist destinations of the island. The evolution of tourist spaces tends to increase in complexity according to its urban and demographic growth, essential aspect in tourist conurbations (Knafou, 2006). If at the beginning and during the development of these destinations, the percentage of dwellers in relation to hotel beds did not exceed 10%, the current proportion is generally 40% in the case of Cala Millor and Platja d'Alcudia-Muro, reaching 55% in Playa de Palma and 75% in Costa de Calvià. If these numbers are compared with third generation tourist destinations, (Knowles and Curtis, 1999), such as Cancún (Mexico) and Playa Bávaro (Dominican Republic), it can be observed that residents and visitors hardly coexist, according to the pattern of many emerging destinations which show a greater planning process.

Since the 80's, given the stagnancy process, different tourist policies have been applied in order to redirect their negative effects. However, many of planning initiatives put into practice have obtained a temporal rejuvenation of tourist buildings but have not modified the intrinsic structural defect that certain tourist infrastructures had at the moment they were developed. (Knowles y Curtis; 1999). Despite the huge environmental, social, and economic complexity of the island tourist coastline, it has been treated unconsciously. Even the administration - divided into different competences: councils, island ministries, general directorates, and secretaries of state - over decades, has not been able to reach a common agreement to guarantee an integral planning of the tourist coastline. In many cases, competence division results in different types of taxes, grants, rates collected by each of the administration offices without investing at least part of it in the enhancement of the coastal landscape. Meanwhile, tourism has been the economic activity that has transformed more landscapes in the Mediterranean, over the last 50 years (Barba, Pie; 1996).

On the other hand, the coastline of the Balearic Islands has become one of the most complicated territories in legislative terms, thus making it difficult to put into practice many of the plans, laws and decrees that regulate them. Since the decade of the 80's there has been a tendency to apply passive protectionism measures¹, and now the time has come to apply other strategies based on the integral planning and management of the tourist coastline². During the last 30 years, faced with the inability of knowing how to tackle the coastline problems, two antagonic reactions have appeared. On one hand, the widespread belief that it is necessary to obliterate the maximum of tourist obsolete facilities for improving a mature tourist destination, despite the economic and environmental cost these measures entail. While on the other hand, the usual tourist related improvements based on upgrading the tourist building, arrives at a point in which entrepreneurs recognize that it is not worth to have a five-star hotel, if the surroundings are in decline.

“There is not an appropriate framework for analysis and interpretation of the problem, as well as an integral vision of acts, from the complexity of the concept of the tourist destination. The result of main planning instruments application in consolidated tourist coastal areas shows effects of their own insufficiency, dispersion and discoordination and reveals the urgency for undertaking integral actions from the space scale which represents the destination.” (Vera and Baño; 2010).

“In order to contrast the decline phase, reaction of these destinations should: propose urgent and radical strategies of rejuvenation, to obtain the market control and implement restructuring radical measures and not only pure cosmetic ones” (Aguiló, Alegre and Juaneda; 2003).

“The challenge of the tourist model is not the continuing growth of the number of tourists through disperse and specialized products in the whole island, but to establish a restructuring of mature destinations which allow an unseasonal tourism process (Aguiló, Alegre, Juaneda; 2003).

2. An approach toward regeneration of tourist destinations

Currently, there are some thesis that bring up the irreversible decline of Mediterranean sun and beach mature destinations, so-called second generation destinations, despite “*Embellishment*” operations which may be applied in the future (Knowles and Curtis, 1999). These theories have third generation holiday centers as models, characterized by higher *degree of planning, control and quality specification*. These centers, without being addressed to a mass tourism conform planned areas of new construction, which combine a good quality offer with a certain exoticism and provide more sophisticated and varied amusement.

Faced the topic that tourist areas which have not been totally planned are condemned to its decline, this research proves the potential these areas have to be transformed into a space with better quality at urban, economic, and landscape levels, providing a solution to the three main motivation emergent factors: travel flexibility, resources diversity and local landscape quality and identity.

In order to reconsider coastal tourism, it is necessary to come up with new urban-regional planning principles based on the knowledge of tourist activity dynamics and in the consideration of landscape as the main factor for its restructuring. Landscape integration in urban-regional planning demands a transcalar reading³, which offers different tools to the discipline in order to give a value to tourist settlements, to endow with structure different Regional Tourist systems and generate synergies among them, as well as with the elements which form the destination landscape unit⁴.

On the other hand, competence division among different administrations in the island tourist coastline, as mentioned before, has generated the tendency to organize and plan the elements that make up the tourist activity in a separate way: accommodation-travel –resource. The new challenge of restructuring tourist space should provide more complexity to mature tourist destinations. Both accommodation and travel should become part of the destination resources in harmony with its environment, allowing for the enjoyment of the scenery travelled through and the landscape of the tourist settlements made up of different types of accommodation and activities.

“Among the new work tools to be suggested, it is worth mentioning: to reinforce the integral approach, before sectorial approach; to identify the effects of the destination in an immediate regional and global environment; (ecological finger print); to integrate social and tourist perception in the assessment of tourist development; to measure effects of renewal and restructuring processes from sustainability point of view;” (Vera and Baños; 2010).

In this way, given the supposition that a reconversion implies a high economic investment, this research proves that if this transformation is produced through the recovering of elements which structure the territory (MacHarg, 1971) and by enhancing its natural and cultural elements, the intervention investment will not only be optimized but also will make its management more feasible. For example: avoiding the traditional investment in the incorporation of facilities which tend to import exogenous landscapes, much more expensive to manage and to maintain, causing a loss of the destination identity. Over decades,

Majorca has developed its own tourist model. The reconversion of this model should be based on redefining itself from identity patterns based on the landscape and the morphology characteristics of tourist settlements and applying a new mobility more adapted to the environment in order to provide a real answer to the tourist's new motivations which at the same time will result in the enhancement of the island's landscape, activating new economies and positively influencing in the self-esteem and wellbeing of residents.

3. Rethinking tourist settlements from its potential of diversity

During the process of tourist destinations development, each tourist product has responded to a concrete type of demand, and has been materialized through different tourist settlements units⁵, which show important potentials for their reconversion. The variety of tourist settlements, which make up regional tourist systems of Majorca, creates different situations, types of relations, categories and levels of open spaces and activity. This richness of potential scenarios for reconversion conflicts with the traditional norms of tourist areas. These norms tend to homogenize the different types of tourist products towards more conventional city models or towards ideals applied on third generation destinations, such as the unattainable standards of private space for tourist facilities in a generalized way. The diversity of tourist products and resources allows giving an answer to the new motivations of tourism based on the need of living different experiences during the trip.

The inertia of sectorial planning of coastal tourism areas has led to significant deficits that have resulted in lack of urbanity, urban landscape decline and excessive travel inflexibility based on the private vehicle. In the early days of tourism, urbanity was never a requirement for tourist facilities, as it was enough for it to have a direct relationship with the immediate landscape and there was little interest in the relationship with other facilities. But after decades of tourist development, when it passes from minimum elements of tourism to a tourist conurbation, providing the whole with urbanity has become a basic requirement for its enhancement and operation. Tourist urbanity should be understood as a result of the interaction between different activities and categories of open spaces through a new mobility much kinder to the environment, which allows the destination to be more competitive based on the reorganization and enhancement of the supplementary offer, as it had been in the early days of mass tourism at the European West Mediterranean tourist destinations.

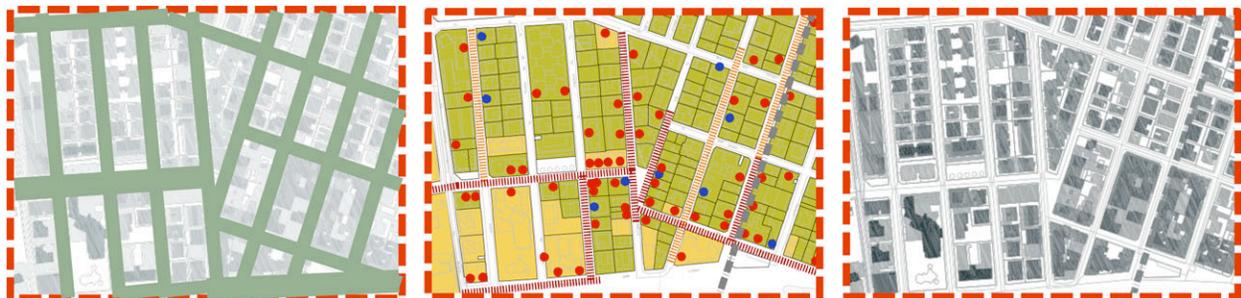


Fig.1: Characterization of the densified tourist grid. Source: author

In this way, planning collective space has become an experimentation field, for activating the interaction between the private and public sectors according to the morph-typological characteristics of each tourist settlement, which offer extremely powerful tools for rethinking them in terms of urbanity. By way of example, we can highlight the potential of denser zones to provide activities for quality public spaces, characterized by walking or bike mobility or the areas with small hotels to offer a product with a different character by activating localization economies instead of each of them trying to cram everything into a small space (Camagni, 2005). In this way, each hotel offers a differentiated product (spa, signature restaurant, swimming pool, gym, etc.) and the collective public space becomes the place of interaction among different services, turning each obsolete settlement into a tourist center with high competitiveness. Along the same lines, areas with large hotels would offer excellent spatial quality if they integrated their activities and private open spaces into the public domain.

This research intends to redefine the planning rationales of the tourist urban structure endowing the destination of a great diversity of activities intensity and interaction with open spaces according to the characteristics of each tourist settlement. To establish synergies between the supplementary offer and the open spaces is a substantial matter for rethinking mature tourist destinations. To supply services and equipment to open tourist spaces has become a key factor in order to provide them with security (Petrus, Tovar; 2010), by guaranteeing appropriate conditions of urbanity in each tourist settlement, which are hardly found in emergent tourist destinations. On the other hand, enhancement of open spaces understood as a landscape resource, reports an added value to the destination, to the supplementary offer and accommodation of such tourist settlements.

In short, the enhancement of each tourist settlement, based on the qualities that characterise them, turn them into a new, unique, high-quality product, making the destination as a whole more competitive.

4. Strategies for regional tourist systems regeneration

An understanding of how tourist areas have been constructed provides us new tools to redirect the usual reading of coastal tourism. Regional tourist systems have been made up from an elaborate mosaic of tourist settlements, whose features vary depending on the tourist period in which they were created: suburban holiday settlements, tourist grid systems, tourist garden-cities and autonomous holiday centres, that are more concerned with exploiting the resources of the tourist real estate business than in putting together a cohesive urban system. As a result, there is no continuity to the road systems that have been created between open spaces and hubs of activity, and there are discrepancies between settlements that have given rise to interstitial spaces, many of them in a process of decline.

If the enhancement of each tourist settlement entails a new tourist product, as we saw in a previous section, the articulation of the whole should allow the construction of a destination with a great variety of tourist products, diversifying it into a richer offer. From this idea stems the need of providing the whole destination with a cohesive urban structure promoting a new tourist mobility, in which interstitial spaces can play a key role in offsetting the current environmental, landscape, economic or public space deficits they may be suffering from. These interventions of articulation should become catalyzers of change and restructuring actions. One of the actions is based on introducing leisure components as a strategy to differentiate tourist settlements in order to keep and promote the regular visitors' demand, as well as the reception of new segments, the reduction of seasonal demand and the image improvement (Vera and Baños, 2010). By applying this example it's possible to set out a strategy for the location and type of intervention of leisure components according to the cultural and natural values of the tourist settlements which make up the regional tourist system.

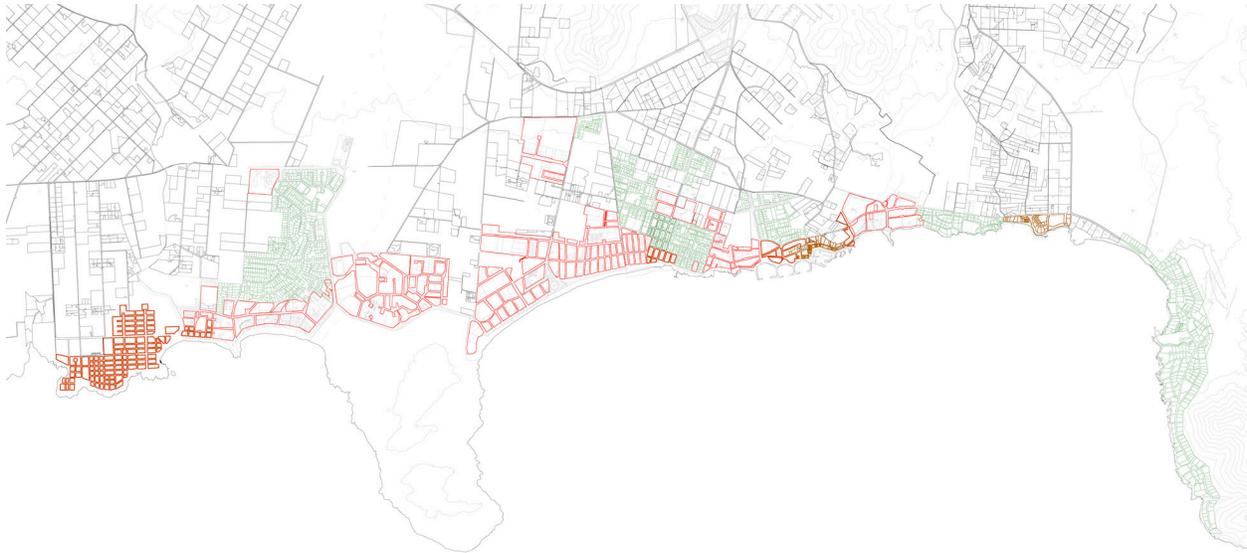


Fig.2: Morphology of Cala Millor Regional Tourist System. Source: author

From the urban tourist economy point of view, the regeneration of regional tourist systems must necessarily go through a redefinition of the operational rationale of the economic activities they house. On one hand, to highlight the need of redefining the autonomous operation of each tourist facility towards the creation of positive externalities⁶ among the different economic activities which make up the regional tourist system. On the other hand, to make of the tourist activity, not only the main purpose of these destinations, but the way to promote new economies as well as to enhance pre-tourist activities, which originally constructed the coast cultural landscape. This is how mature tourist destinations should go from an economy based on sun and beach tourism, towards an urbanization economy (Camagni, 2005), which guarantees the destination's landscape self-management and activates new resources that redirect current seasonal tourism problems. One of the actions should be to create synergies with the existing agriculture and cattle activities of the area, which may contribute to improve the destination's landscape quality and also offer the visitors a local gastronomic product that they may even recognize, in order to provide a brand as an added value. This example allows us to introduce the need of positive interaction between the tourist activity and the elements that form the coastal landscape.

5. The restructuring of regional tourist systems based on local landscape

For decades, the tourist area has experienced the difficulty of scaling up from minimum elements of tourism⁷ to regional tourist systems, forming large conurbations that have blurred many of the elements that used to make up the pre-tourism coastal landscape. The planning dynamic was based on "resistance operations" against the natural or cultural resources of the area, occupying flood zones, building dykes to retain sand dunes, or displacing livestock farming and agricultural concerns. Development of sun and beach tourism was the only purpose of all these actions. This phenomenon directly affected the evaluation of the destination by tourists, who are very sensitive to density and urban continuum, as well as damaging the natural and cultural landscape of the area. This issue has been widely studied by different disciplines and entities as it can be seen below:

“An environmental crisis may become a tourist crisis and, in destinations with an intense specialty in this activity, will represent an unquestionable social and economic scope.” (TNO Inro, 2002).

The decline of natural systems and the problems of congestion result in a decrease of integral quality of the destination, which bears a loss of value of assets and consequently, a fall of tourist income (Aguiló et al. 2005).

The degradation natural elements have gone through, after year of intense tourist exploitation, leads to the serious matter of recovering the destination sustainability, which will result in more profit, at short and long term of the tourist sector.” (Martorell, Mulet, 2009)

“The search for income in the tourist sector cannot be conceived in the future without being accompanied by an appropriate management of environmental policies (Palmer y Riera, 2003).

The enhancement of the regional tourist system landscape entails –without doubt- not only scaling up in the form of intervention, moving from individualized projects to overall planning, but also establishing new intervention strategies based on the capacity for resilience⁸ of the destination, as opposed to the usual imposition of infrastructures resistant to the dynamics of the landscape. This reorganization should be based on relating open public and private urban spaces with open regional spaces, strengthening the identity of the place, guaranteeing efficient management of open spaces based on economies of means, in recovering the elements that shaped the natural and cultural landscape of the area, in order to build a system of cohesive regional tourism open spaces and in relation to a new mobility structure well adapted to the characteristics of the place.

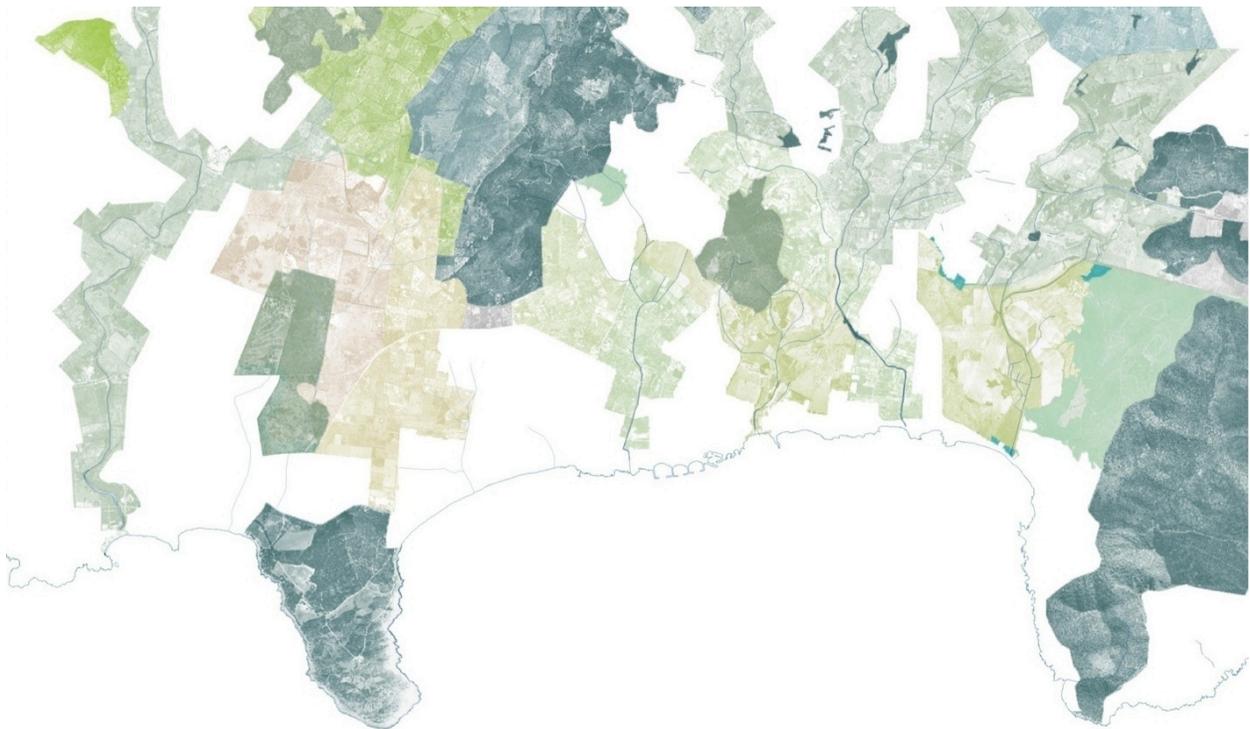


Fig.3: Main elements that shape the natural and cultural landscape unit of Cala Millor. Source: author

Some of the actions along these lines are: the recovery of water systems, the beds of streams and wet-zones as well as riverbank vegetation; the recovery of the beach dune system, on which the first 'sun, sea and sand'⁹ type tourism facilities were built; recovering the original character of historic paths as gateways to regional tourism spaces; enhancing the salt beds and agricultural and livestock farming activities close to the coast, which were the true builders of this pre-tourism landscape, and integrating them into the system of open urban/regional spaces, in a way that the landscape subunit to which they belong works as the management unit of each part of the coastline¹⁰.

6. Conclusions

According to Knowles and Curtis' thesis (1999). Majorca has a great potential for overcoming expectations or scenarios foreseen for its generation through the reinforcement of identity values, redefining and diversifying its morphotypological and operational characteristics. This is how a trans-scalar reading has contributed with different tools to its recycling:

- The restructuring of the destination, by recovering elements which define the territory in order to form large regional open spaces and redirect the perception of massification to which the visitor is so sensible.
- The reorganization based on the balance and articulation of urbanity values with large regional open spaces, in which natural and cultural landscape exposed to tourist activity could be enhanced as a new attraction while making it profitable through its production (agriculture) and its management optimization (cultural and natural heritage).
- The connection of the great diversity of landscape resources through a new tourist mobility based on new means of transportation different from the ones used in the conventional city –by bike, walking, on a horse, in a boat-, which allow the visitors to move in a new and flexible way, turning mobility into a new resource of the destination.

To sum up, the enhancement of positive factors that have characterized the island mature tourist destinations and the transformation of the weaknesses that have been caused into opportunities to establish synergies between tourism and the landscape; open up a wealth of possibilities to regenerate tourist destinations. This gives way to a new tourist model based on the diversification of the existing product and the flexibility of the travel experience in a mature tourist destination, as well as in the endowment of a unique identity will allow it to break through the barrier of seasonal tourism and become more competitive.

References

- Aguiló, Eugeni; Alegre, Joaquín; Juaneda, Catalina (2003). La viabilidad de los destinos turísticos de masas. El caso de las Islas Baleares. XII Simposio de Turismo y Ocio ESADE-Fira de Barcelona.
- Butler, R. (1980). The Concept of Tourist Area Cycle of Evolution: Implications for Management of Resources, *Canadian Geographer*, 24, 1, págs. 5–12
- Camagni, Roberto (2005). *Economía urbana*. Barcelona, Ed. Antonio Bosch, editor SA.
- IBESTAT (2009). *Las Islas Baleares en cifras, 2009*. Palma de Mallorca, Instituto de Estadística de las Islas Baleares.. <http://www.ibestat.cat>
- INE (2010). *Encuesta de ocupación hotelera 2010*. Instituto Nacional de Estadística. <http://www.ine.es>
- Knafou, Rêmy. (2006): El turismo, factor de cambio territorial: evolución de los lugares, actores y prácticas a lo largo del tiempo (del s. XVIII al s. XXI), en Lacosta Aragüés, A. (2006): *Turismo y cambio territorial: ¿crecimiento, aceleración, desbordamiento?*, Actas del VIII Coloquio de Geografía del Turismo, Ocio y Recreación, Zaragoza, Prentas Universitarias de Zaragoza, pp. 19-30.
- Knowles, T. y Curtis, S. (1999). The Market Viability of European Mass Tourist Destinations. A Post-Stagnation Life-cycle Analysis. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 1 (4), págs. 87-96.
- Martorell Cunill, O Mulet Forteza, C (2009). “Análisis de la rentabilidad del sector turístico en las islas baleares. Políticas de reflotamiento” en *Investigaciones Europeas de Dirección y Economía de la Empresa*. Vol. 15, No 2, 2009, pp. 77-92, ISSN: 1135-2523. Universidad de las Islas Baleares
- McHarg, Ian L. (1971). *Design with Nature*. New York : Doubleday-Natural History Press.
- Morgan, M. 1991. Dressing up to Survive: Marketing Majorca anew, *Tourism Management* , 12 (1), págs. 15-20.
- Palmer, T., y Riera A. (2003): “Tourism and environmental taxes. With special reference to the Balearic ecotax”, *Tourism Management*, Vol. 24, pp. 665–674.
- Petrus, Joana M.; Tovar Jover, Jaime (2010) Anàlisi de las condiciones de seguridad en la Playa de Palma (Mallorca). Plan de Acción Integral Playa de Palma. Consorcio Playa de Palma
- Roselló, J., Aguiló E., y Riera A. (2005): “Modelling tourism demand dynamics”, *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 44, pp. 111–116.
- Rullán i Salamanca, Onofre (2002). *La construcción territorial de Mallorca*. Palma de Mallorca, Editorial Moll.
- SECTUR. 2005. *Compendio Estadístico del Turismo en México 2005*. Secretaria de Turismo de México.
- TNO INRO (2002): *Sistemas de alerta rápida para la detección de destinos turísticos en declive y de sus mejores prácticas de prevención*. Comisión Europea. Luxemburgo, Oficina de Publicaciones Oficiales de la Comunidades Europeas.
- Vera Rebollo, J. Fernando y Baños Catiñeira, Carlos J. (2010) Renovación y reestructuración de los destinos turísticos consolidados del litoral. *Boletín de la Asociación de geógrafos españoles*. Nº 52 2010 pp 329-353
- Vera Rebollo, J. Fernando; López-Palomeque, Francisco; Marchena, Manuel J.; Antón, Salvador, (1997), *Análisis territorial del turismo*, Barcelona: Ariel.

Notes

- ¹ Passive protectionism is based on declassification operations of the potential urban land or the increase of restrictions for the transformation of the rustic land; although it often lacks management instruments.
- ² “Protocol Ratification Instrument related to the integrated management of Mediterranean coastal areas.” (BOE from/03/2011).
- ³ Landscape European Convention signed in Florence in the year 2000 (BOE of 5/02/2008).
- ⁴ Landscape unit: “Portion of territory characterised by a specific combination of landscape components of an environmental, cultural, perceptive and symbolic nature and with clearly recognisable dynamics which result in an individuality differentiated from the rest of the territory,” according to Landscape Observatory of Catalonia <http://www.catpaisatge.net>
- ⁵ Thesis project carried out by the author, “Balearization. Majorca, the laboratory of experimentation in tourism and its coastal manifestations”, made an in-depth analysis of the characterization of each of the specifically tourist settlements as well as their location and management rationales in the lead up to constructing regional tourist systems.
- ⁶ The concept of positive externalities is used in both urban economy and environmental economy fields. The use of this concept in tourism economy, is understood as the profit generated by each of the tourism enterprises toward the rest of the enterprises of the same sector in the same area (localization economies) as well as in the local landscape capital value, such as agricultural activities or natural spaces. See on Polése, Mario (1994). *Economía Urbano-Regional: Introducción a la relación entre territorio y desarrollo*.
- ⁷ The concept of minimum elements of tourism refers to architectonic and urban pieces, which form the tourist space, developed by Rosa Barba, Rosa PIE, Ricard (1996), *Arquitectura y turismo: Planes y proyectos*. Barcelona: Centre de recerca i projectes de paisatge.
- ⁸ The resilience in this case is defined as the capacity of the coastline area to fit in the impact that tourism economic activity has caused, leading to a strengthening of its values through the incorporation of natural dynamics in the planning strategies. Concept worked by the author as a professor of the Extreme city workshop . Climate change and the transformation of the waterscape. Università di Architettura di Venezia IUAV (2010) <http://www.juav.it/extremecity>
- ⁹ Planning guidelines ruled by coastal dynamics of each coastline type, in “Integrated and interdisciplinary scientific approach to coastal management” in *Ocean & Coastal Management* n.52, pp. 493–505, 2009. Journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ocecoaman
- ¹⁰ Methodology used in preliminary regional planning of Tenerife Island (PIOT). *Tourism regional planning* (1992), by Joaquin Sabate, Miguel Corominas, and Isabel Castiñeira.