

Tourism planning, promotion and environmental sustainability: the case of Spain

Planificación turística, promoción y sostenibilidad ambiental: el caso de España

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Abstract

In terms of tourist destination's sustainable development, planning plays a key role, and an important part is the tourist promotion. In the case of Spain, the boom of tourism in the 50s meant a high level of income and popularity but also serious damage in the environment when tourist sustainability didn't receive attention yet. For the tourist development of a destination to be sustainable, the establishment of appropriate strategic plans is needed. Thus, thanks to the study of a real case, this paper allows the analysis of the influence of tourist promotion in the evolution of a tourist destination towards the sustainability. The method used has been double: firstly, Spanish government's official documentation has been reviewed in order to confirm the evolution of Spanish tourist planning in relation to sustainability; secondly, tourist promotion images and campaigns has been analyzed to verify the evolution of the conveyed image and its influence in the sustainable development of Spanish tourism. This analysis confirms that tourist promotion has played a main role in the development and growth of Spain as a tourist destination, proving that its adaptation to market's needs and sustainability was fundamental. Therefore, it is verified that tourist promotion –within a general planning strategy– means a key aspect for an appropriate development of a tourist destination.

Resumen

En el desarrollo sostenible de un destino turístico, la planificación juega un papel fundamental, y parte importante recae en la promoción turística. En el caso de España, el *boom* turístico de los años 50 supuso un alto nivel de ingresos y popularidad, pero también serios perjuicios en el entorno cuando todavía no se prestaba atención a la sostenibilidad turística. Para que el desarrollo turístico de un destino sea sostenible es necesaria la implantación de planes estratégicos adecuados, y este trabajo permite, gracias al estudio de un caso real, analizar la influencia de la promoción turística en la evolución de un destino turístico hacia la sostenibilidad. La metodología empleada ha sido doble: en primer lugar se han revisado documentos oficiales del Gobierno español para comprobar la evolución de su planificación turística en torno a la sostenibilidad y, en segundo lugar, se han analizado imágenes y campañas de promoción turística para comparar la evolución de la imagen transmitida y su influencia en el desarrollo sostenible del turismo español. Este análisis demuestra que la promoción turística ha jugado un papel muy importante en el desarrollo y crecimiento de España como destino turístico, y que su adaptación a las necesidades del mercado y a la sostenibilidad resultó fundamental. Se confirma por tanto que la promoción turística, dentro de una estrategia general de planificación, es cuestión clave para un correcto desarrollo de un destino turístico.

Keywords | palabras clave

Sostenibilidad, tourism, promotion, planning.
Sostenibilidad, turismo, promoción, planificación.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the concept of sustainability has been implemented in almost all areas of knowledge. In relation to tourism, numerous congresses, books and scientific studies have analyzed sustainable tourism and its importance for destinations (Fernández, 2015). Although sustainable tourism involves not only the protection of the environment but also long-term socio-economic viability, the first aspect is the one that normally receives the most attention, and it is the one that this work is mainly dedicated to. At times, in the tourism field, there is controversy regarding the damage that tourism can cause to the environment. However, this occurs when there is a lack of planning. Tourism development and sustainability can coexist as long as there is an adequate strategy to protect the environment (García and Díaz, 2014). In fact, tourism can even motivate the protection of natural resources, as is the case with the declaration of protected areas such as National Parks, for instance. Applying sustainability to tourism planning is essential, and in a leading tourist destination such as Spain this was already pointed out by the involved Ministries in 1999, when they indicated that destinations must protect their natural resources to be competitive in the long term (Ministry of Economy and Finance, and Ministry of the Environment, 1999), also taking into account respect for the local population and annexed territories.

In the same way that sustainable development should be one of the objectives of any policy and general action, the managers responsible for tourism development should understand that it is necessary to set limits to what can be achieved in the short and medium term (Bramwell *et al.*, 1996). Sustainable tourism encourages destinations and companies to pay attention to the impacts that tourism has on the environment, and demonstrates the importance of conserving natural resources.

In Spain, the tourist *boom* of the late 50s meant a high level of income and international popularity, but also a high impact on the environment. Spain's response to the high interest of European tourists in search of sun and beach was an oversized development along the Spanish coast, one of the clearest examples of the consequences of mass tourism (OMT and ETC, 2009). For Spain, being a popular sun and beach destination meant an unplanned construction of large buildings, residential areas and new facilities, without thinking about the environmental impact. To all this we must add that the population density of the Spanish coastal towns is five times higher than the national average and triples during the high season (Vogeler & Hernández, 2003), with population impact being one of the most important aspects to consider in sustainable development (Castrillón *et al.*, 2015).

It is often assumed that tourism planning undertaken by the public sector must play a greater role in the development of sustainable tourism, since implemented campaigns and marketing strategies will have an impact on the destinations (Swarbrooke, 1999). The promotion of Spain as a tourist destination has played a fundamental role in the evolution of the country's image, and on the type of tourist products that are being promoted on the side of the Government. During the 1980s, the Spanish government made the courageous decision to change its strategy, focusing its international campaigns on interior and cultural tourism (OMT & ETC, 2009), repositioning its image and creating a tourism brand with a logo that still lasts to this day. It is not difficult to realize the changes and evolution of the different promotion campaigns that have been implement-

ed, mainly after the creation of the aforementioned brand in 1984. The goal of this paper is to analyze the relationship between tourism promotion and sustainability through a qualitative approach of the case of Spain thanks to the methodology described below.

2. Methodology and Sources of Information

To exemplify how the promotion of a tourist destination can influence the sustainability of a territory, Spain has been taken as a reference point due to its long trajectory in the elaboration of marketing strategies and its outstanding «re-branding», which not only maintains its traditional sun and beach market, but has also introduced Spain to new markets (OMT & ETC, 2009) in a more sustainable way.

In the first place, in order to know the objectives of the different plans and their relationship with sustainability, a descriptive analysis has been carried out based on the information obtained from secondary sources about TURESPAÑA¹ and tourism planning in general, analyzing its evolution through official documents developed by the central government to improve the competitiveness of Spain as a tourist destination and its sustainability, such as:

- Competitiveness plans (1992, 1996): *Spanish Tourism Competitiveness Framework Plan 1992-1995 (FUTURES I)* and *Spanish Tourism Competitiveness Framework Plan 1996-1999 (FUTURES II)*.
- *Strategies and Actions Plan of the General Administration of the State in Tourist Matters* (1997).
- *Spanish Tourism Quality Integral Plan 2000-2006 (Plan Integral de Calidad del Turismo Español, PICTE)* (2000)
- *Spanish Horizon Tourism Plan 2020 - Plan 2008-2012* (2007, 2012)
- *National and Integral Tourism Plan 2012-2015 (Plan Nacional e Integral de Turismo, PNIT)* (2012)

In the second place, an attempt has been made to locate images not only of the official campaigns of TURESPAÑA since the creation of the brand in 1984, but also of government promotional actions developed previously, enabling the observation of their evolution from the tourist *boom* of the 50s until recent years. To accomplish this, a descriptive and comparative analysis of the different campaigns has been carried out, focusing on the messages transmitted in each of them and their objectives, in order to compare and observe the evolution of the image of Spain in detail, as well as its influence as a sustainable tourist destination.

3. Analysis and results

3.1. Tourism policy in Spain

The first regulations related to tourism in Spain date back to 1905, but it was in 1951 when the first Ministry of Tourism was created, called the «Ministry of Information and

1 Public organization responsible for tourist promotion of Spain on an international scale.

Tourism» (Tena, 2006). At the time, Spain was already becoming a popular destination, which created the need to have an entity to organize the Spanish tourist phenomenon. However, the rapid and intense growth of tourism activity and its novelty in the country—with no legislative precedents—, gave rise to an unplanned industry that gained strength quickly and uncontrollably.

There is no specific mention to any concept related to sustainability in the political plans until *FUTURES I*, which makes some references to the conservation of the environment (Velasco, 2010). The evolution of considerations related to sustainability in tourism policy occurred chronologically as follows:

- *FUTURES I (1992-1995)*. Through this competitiveness plan, the Government established new strategies to consolidate tourism as an economic sector, paying attention to its impacts, especially at the environmental level. Among its objectives we can find one in particular that talks about the conservation of the natural and urban environment and its compatibility with tourist activity (General Secretariat of Tourism, 1992).
- *FUTURES II (1996-1999)*. This plan included a program of new products that considered the sustainability of the projects in relation to the environment. This second competitive plan does mention the concept of «sustainability» as a key point and considers the sustainability model in the development of tourist destinations (General Secretariat of Tourism, 1995a).
- *Plan of Strategies and Actions of the General Administration of the State in Tourist Matters (1997)*. One of the strategies of this plan deals with the development of the concept of environmental sustainability and includes among its objectives the promotion of «sustainable tourism plans» in tourist destinations, and the incorporation of environmental management in tourism companies (General Secretariat of Tourism, 1995b).
- *PICTE (2000)*. One of its main objectives was the environmental sustainability of tourism activities. Within its program on the quality of destinations, there is a specific point addressing sustainability and the need to pay attention to the limits of growth in some tourist areas, as well as cooperation between tourism and environmental agents with the aim of establishing long-term sustainable aspects (General Secretariat of Tourism, 2000).
- *Spanish Horizon Tourism Plan 2020 - Plan 2008-2012 (2007)*. In this plan, the concept of sustainability is a fundamental aspect and one of the basic elements of the central model. One of its objectives was to improve the sustainability of the Spanish tourism model, ensuring the quality of the natural environment and applying the concept of sustainability to all tourism decisions (General Secretariat of Tourism, 2007, 2012).
- *PNIT (National and Integral Tourism Plan) 2012-2015 (2012)*. With this last plan, the central government aimed to promote a new vision of Spain, including sustainability as a need for the country to become a competitive destination. Following this line, the plan included an evaluation of the Spanish tourist offer with the aim of ensuring its management and sustainable development (State Secretariat of Tourism, 2012).

As this demonstrates, the evolution of the importance of sustainability in tourism policy is positive in the planning of public policies in Spain. In the period of greatest tourist growth in the country, there was no mention of any concept related to sustainability. Therefore, the Spanish tourist development had no planning, leading to serious damage to the environment. However, when the Spanish Government understood the importance of the sustainable management of tourism, political plans began to shift their perception of tourism activity, and the influence of sustainability on the development of tourism gained an increasingly fundamental role. This positive evolution is reflected in the projection of the image of Spain as a tourist destination, since the plans and programs are involved in strategies of tourist promotion, which are analyzed below.

3.2. TURESPAÑA

The Institute of Tourism in Spain (TURESPAÑA), created in 1990, is a body dependent on the central government and responsible for promoting Spain abroad as a tourist destination. Sustainability is one of the aspects that the Government wants to promote. Therefore, among its main areas of action we find: “the development of plans and programs that promote innovation, quality, sustainability and competitiveness of tourism products” (BOE, 2009). In addition, it is important to mention that TURESPAÑA is the most important tool in Spanish tourism policy, since it is not limited solely to the promotion of tourism, but also pays attention to those areas that may have a negative effect on tourism sustainability (TURESPAÑA, web). To this end, it has a General Subdirectorate for Tourism Development and Sustainability, responsible for the creation of strategies focused on the development and improvement of the planning and sustainable management of tourist destinations (BOE, 2009).

Tourism policies developed by TURESPAÑA fundamentally try to preserve the potential of Spanish destinations, with the commitment to assess the importance of the environment and thus reduce the socio-economic and tourist imbalance of Spanish territories (TURESPAÑA, web). However, TURESPAÑA's main objective is the promotion of Spain at an international level. To this end, it develops consecutive campaigns with the aim of transmitting a positive image of Spain as a tourist destination. The following section analyzes not only the TURESPAÑA campaigns but also the promotional actions developed before their creation.

3.2.1. Evolution of Spanish tourism promotion

Ironically, before the popularity of Spain as a tourist destination began, the promotional campaigns developed by the Government emphasized not only sun and beach tourism, but also the cultural and historical aspects of the country (figure 1), since the objective was to attract cultural tourists of a high economic level.

Figure 1
 Examples of tourist posters from Spain in the 40s



Source: Tourism Blog - El País.

During the 50s, tourism in Spain began to grow rapidly and the Government created a first slogan that would become very popular, and that is still remembered to this day: «*Spain is different*» (figure 2). This new campaign, although it continued with cultural promotion, began to highlight sun and beach tourism, which was demanded from abroad at the time and, therefore, would turn into the only image that was projected for years to come.

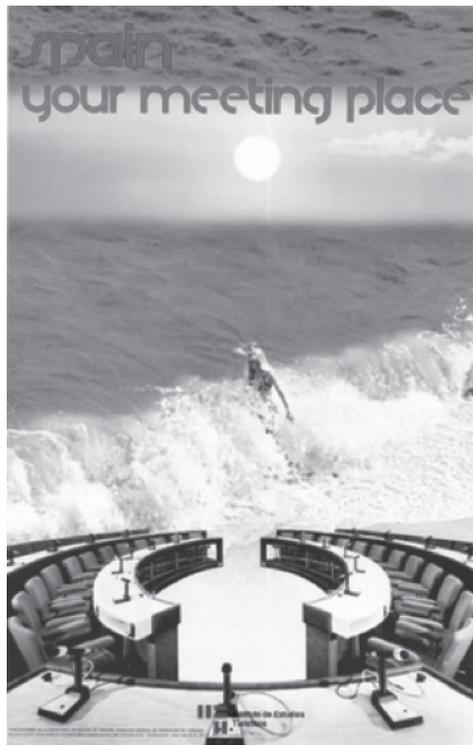
Figure 2
 Examples of the campaign «Spain is different»



Source: Tourism Blog - El País.

The slogan “*Spain is different*” was so successful that it transcended beyond tourism and became a popular definition of the Spanish character. The key to this success lies in the use of folklore as a characteristic aspect that takes advantage of stereotypes in a positive way, which made the message linger in the memory of the Spanish not only as a tourist slogan, but also as a characteristic aspect of that historical period (Plumed, 2012). However, despite the success reflected in the growth of tourism activity, the strategy was not well defined, and taking advantage of the popularity of a single tourism product proved unsustainable. Even when the government tried to promote new products such as business tourism, the campaigns used the image of sun and beach as a base element (figure 3).

Figure 3
 Example of the use of the sun and beach product
 in the promotion of business destinations



Source: Tourism Blog - El País.

During the 1980s, the government decided to invest more money and effort in tourism promotion, and it was in 1984 when the official logo (“El sol de Miró”) was created, which is still preserved today (figure 4). This fact gave way to a new stage in tourist promotion in Spain, since it marked the beginning of the use of a single brand

on an international level. This was a breakthrough in Spanish marketing campaigns, mainly because it began its journey in the 80s and is currently still used in leading positions of brand image. The Miró logo is present in all the communication elements developed by TURESPAÑA and has become a hallmark of Spanish tourism.

Figure 4
 Logo of the Spanish tourist brand: The Sun of Miró.



Source: TURESPAÑA (web).

From that moment, official campaigns began to develop consecutively in the following way (according to information obtained from the TURESPAÑA website):

- 1984-1990: «*Spain. Everything under the sun*». This *claim* was created based on the privileged position of Spain as a tourist destination for sun and beach, but with the aim of promoting all the diversity of its tourist offer, trying to demonstrate that in Spain you could do any type of tourism, even though the *claim* itself included the concept of sun.
- 1991-1994: «*Passion for life*». This campaign was the result of a study conducted at that time to discover the image of Spain. This analysis showed that Spain should be «sold» as an active and living country, without mentioning the climate, and promoting all types of tourism with the aim of avoiding seasonality and taking advantage of the tourist trends of the moment. In this way, Spain tried to enter more sustainable markets, highlighting the Government's efforts to conserve natural resources.
- 1995-1997: «*Spain by...*». This brief campaign included photographs taken by popular professional photographers at that time, reflecting their different ways of seeing Spain. Again, the aim was not to focus on the sun and beach model.
- 1998-2001: «*Bravo Spain*». The goal of this campaign was to transmit a modern, creative and innovative image of a country with a tourist offer throughout the year. In this way, the Government continued to avoid the image of sun and beach, since its objective was not to increase the number of tourists, but the quality of them and their distribution throughout the Spanish geography, which is fundamental for the development of a sustainable tourism.

- 2002-2003: «*Spain marks*». This campaign also aimed to distance the image of Spain from the model of sun and beach as the only tourist offer. In this case, this was accomplished by conveying the idea that visiting Spain is a unique experience that changes the tourist. With this message, TURESPAÑA wanted to show a different tourist destination thanks to the high quality of its offer regarding culture, gastronomy, and nature.
- 2004-2009: «*Smile! You are in Spain*». In this case, the campaign was created with the aim of consolidating Spain's leadership as a holiday destination but also positioning it as a high-quality cultural destination to develop tourism based on product diversification and geographical redistribution. With this strategy, the Government was still trying to reach a balance between the different types of tourism, and to stop tourism activity from being centralized on the coast.
- 2008-2010: «*Spain. 25 years beyond the sun*». In this period, a special campaign was created to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Miró logo and the official tourist brand of Spain. This campaign was again aimed at leaving the image of country of sun and beach to the side, which can be seen in the *claim* that literally states “beyond the sun”, giving the idea that Spain offers much more as a tourist destination.
- 2010-2017: «*I need Spain*». This *claim* continues to highlight values similar to previous campaigns, although this time using a warmer message to reach different types of tourists, showing various lifestyles and selling not only destinations but also the emotions they evoke.

Analyzing all the campaigns referred to *ut supra*, it is evident that the Government has tried to convey a different image of Spain over the years, away from the image of a sun and beach holiday destination. Although some promotional posters still show the beaches and some *claims* mention the sun, the message has been evolving, mainly since the Government introduced the concept of sustainability in the management of tourist destinations.

4. Conclusion

Sustainability has become a fundamental aspect of tourism management, and the governments of each tourist destination should take it into account in their tourism policy planning. We can know the consequences of unsustainable management of tourism from the case of Spain, where a rapid and unplanned growth of tourism activity caused serious damage to the environment, mainly on the Spanish coast. The other types of sustainability, related to social and economic aspects, and which have not been considered in this work, are equally relevant.

Some data show that Spanish tourism still depends on sun and beach products: the months with the highest number of tourists are still July and August —corresponding to summer— (INE, 2016a) and tourist expenditure on «sun and beach tourism» is the highest after the general indicator of «leisure, recreation and holidays» (INE, 2016b). This shows that the image of Spain as a tourist destination is still related to this type of offer; which explains why the Government continues to promote this type of products. However, the image of Spain as a cultural destination is growing: spending

in the category of «cultural tourism» grew by 6.5% in 2016 (INE, 2016b), which shows that the tourist offer of a positioned country can be diversified with the objective of improving the quality of its tourism industry, managing it in a more sustainable way.

It seems clear that no one doubts the impact of tourism on the environment in which it takes place, and this concern is what has led to concepts often used today such as sustainability, sustainable development or sustainable tourism. The need to find that balance between tourism activity and sustainability leads to attempts to achieve responsible management of the territory and resources, which in turn motivates the search, by the responsible agencies, for planning methods at different scales. A redefinition of the destinations towards segments of greater added value is required, since sustainability has a clear return on investment and, if we look at the conservation of resources, it is urgent to bring sustainability to each and every one of the processes of the industry tourism, and ensure better communication (Fernández, 2015).

By analyzing the evolution of tourism policy and promotion in Spain, we can see how sustainable management can influence the tourism industry and how the messages transmitted in different campaigns also influence the image of the destination. Being sustainable is being competitive, and having a positive image is the key to proper positioning. Thus, the existing relationship between sustainability and tourism promotion goes through an adequate tourism planning, with the Government being the main party responsible for considering sustainability as a fundamental aspect.

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