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**"Urban tourism or
building a new kind of citizenship"**

di Xavier Marcé Carol

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Urban tourism or building a new kind of citizenship

by Xavier Marcé Carol[1]

This article presents a recent intervention of Mr. Xavier Marcé Carol, Councillor for tourism and creative industries of the City of Barcelona, at the conference "Urban tourism the construction of a new citizenship" held during the II^ Turespaña Convention last October, in which several thiughts on the current situation and the future challenges of tourism in the Catalan city have been developed. It is an article that first of all emphasizes the way of understanding tourism, not as a uniform sector, but as a highly cross cluster characterized by several stakeholders with different interests. However, the presence of tourists in a big city, characterized by its own rules and habits, can lead to several controversies due – for example – to the overcrowding of places originally intended for use by local population. The author, therefore, questions how to make tourism a sector capable of collecting agreement, be a source of progress and overall economic improvement, avoiding negative externalities.

Also because Barcelona cannot, and must not, do without tourism. In this direction, Councillor Marcé Carol reflects on the need to address the issues related to tourism management using an approach that is not tourism-centric. New conceptual schemes are deepened, which – according to the Councillor – need to be introduced into local tourism policies, so that residents and tourists form a singular citizenship: from the Special Urban Plan for Tourist Accommodation which regulates the global framework for the growth of tourist accommodation in the city, to the issue of tourist tax, up to mobility. In addition, the article reflects on the fact that, the over 14 million visitors welcomed by Barcelona (to which are added at least another 6 million day-trippers) are very different in their nature, therefore it is necessary to open the doors to more efficient and effective strategies, differentiated analyses, practical solutions and agreements with the interested private sectors. Despite this, Barcelona is not a tourist city, or at least not in the traditional sense of the term: it is a city with many tourists. A tourist city assumes that part of its services is available for tourist needs and, in the dialogue between the parts, tourists play a dominant role. On the contrary, in a city with tourists, the needs of the citizenship take priority and tourists are treated as temporary citizens.

In light of this, the article presents reflections on the fact that tourism policy of Barcelona cannot be framed only in promotional terms and the city has to set its interests in the selection of visitors: the characteristics that the city would like to acquire in the future guide the definition of the promotional policies, and they should be in accordance with the action plans intended to have an impact on the local community, the real protagonist of the city.

In the end, the article emphasizes the need to requalify the many professions involved in tourism, to raise the quality of the attractions, and to convey a positive message to residents with reference to the impacts of tourism in the city.

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[1] Councillor for tourism and creative industries at Barcelona City Council.

Urban tourism or building a new kind of citizenship

di Xavier Marcé Carol[2]

Questo articolo espone un recente intervento di Mr. Xavier Marcé Carol, Consigliere delegato al turismo e industrie creative del Comune di Barcellona, alla conferenza "Urban tourism: the construction of a new citizenship" tenuta durante la II^ Turespaña Convention dello scorso ottobre, in occasione della quale sono state sviluppate una serie di riflessioni sulla situazione attuale e le sfide a cui sta facendo fronte il turismo della città catalana. Un articolo che pone innanzitutto l'accento sul modo di intendere il turismo, non come settore uniforme, bensì come cluster altamente trasversale caratterizzato da numerosi stakeholder con interessi diversi tra loro. Tuttavia, la presenza di turisti all'interno di una grande città, caratterizzata dalle proprie regole e consuetudini, può portare ad una serie di controversie dovute — ad esempio — al sovraffollamento di luoghi in origine destinati ad una fruizione da parte degli abitanti locali. L'autore si interroga, pertanto, su come rendere il turismo un settore capace di raccogliere consenso, essere fonte di progresso e di miglioramento economico complessivo, evitando le esternalità negative. Anche perché Barcellona non può, e non deve, fare a meno del turismo. In questa direzione, il Consigliere Marcé Carol riflette sulla necessità di affrontare le criticità legate alla gestione del turismo utilizzando un approccio non turismo-centrico.

Si approfondiscono, a tal proposito, nuovi schemi concettuali che secondo il Consigliere è necessario introdurre nelle politiche turistiche locali, affinché residenti e turisti formino un'unica cittadinanza: dal Piano Urbanistico Speciale per la Ricettività Turistica che regola il quadro globale per la crescita della ricettività turistica in città, alla questione della tassa di soggiorno, fino alla mobilità. L'articolo riflette poi sul fatto che, avendo gli oltre 14 milioni di visitatori accolti da Barcellona (a cui si aggiungono almeno altri 6 milioni di day-tripper) una natura molto diversa tra loro, si renda necessario aprire le porte a strategie più efficienti ed efficaci, analisi disaggregate, soluzioni pratiche e accordi con i settori privati interessati. E nonostante questo, Barcellona comunque non è una città turistica, o almeno non nel senso tradizionale del termine: è una città con molti turisti. Una città turistica presuppone che parte dei suoi servizi siano a disposizione delle esigenze turistiche e, nel dialogo tra le parti, i turisti rivestano un ruolo dominante. Al contrario, in una città con turisti sono le esigenze della cittadinanza ad assumere priorità e i turisti vengono considerati come cittadini temporanei. Alla luce di ciò, l'articolo presenta delle riflessioni sul fatto che la politica del turismo a Barcellona non può essere inquadrata in termini essenzialmente promozionali e la città deve impostare i propri interessi sulla selezione dei visitatori: sono le caratteristiche che la città vorrebbe acquisire nel futuro a guidare la definizione delle politiche promozionali, e dovrebbero essere in accordo con i piani d'azione destinati ad avere un impatto sulla comunità locale, la vera protagonista della città. L'articolo pone, infine, l'accento sulla necessità di riqualificare le tante professioni coinvolte nel mondo del turismo, elevare la qualità delle attrazioni e trasmettere un messaggio positivo per i residenti con riferimento agli impatti del turismo in città.

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[2] Consigliere delegato al turismo e industrie creative del Comune di Barcellona.

Urban tourism or building a new kind of citizenship

by Xavier Marcé Carol

1. Introduction

The world of tourism is filled with conventions and convictions. One of the most common is to see it as a uniform sector with its own rules of governance. This vision of tourism is highly prevalent in holiday destinations and results in an overarching view of the economy that distorts reality and leads to social imbalances. Clearly, tourism is a highly cross-cutting business activity with different intermediaries whose interests are hugely diverse.

There are realities in this cluster we could term visitor economy that are specifically focused around tourism activity (or perhaps the term traveler would better fit): this goes for accommodation, guides, merchandising and little else. The rest of the visitor economy shares interests with domestic consumption. This is true for restaurants, retail or culture, to cite just a few highly involved sectors.

In addition to this, we have the specificities of subsectors not directly tied to tourism but closely complementary to it: conferences, fairs, business travel, training, professional trips and, of course, the wide range of services that go along with them.

It is true that in competing to attract tourists or set higher spending standards, certain sectors have come up with specific strategies, whether through retail and hospitality (luxury shops, haute cuisine), taxes (making certain products cheaper) or thematic specialties (large festivals, exhibitions, etc.), which point to a certain preference for this type of public and, in certain instances, may include specialization.

Each of these strategies more or less directly impacts how tourism is positioned in each country, although for the most part they cannot be implemented without considering the contextual realities of the region, since they can rarely survive as visitor attractions alone.

In this sense, analyzing the world of tourism cannot be done purely through a one-way lens. In this light, if we widen our focus and analyze the many factors underlying this cluster generally referred to as tourism, different ways of understanding travelers and how we relate to them start to appear.

Nowadays, tourism is under enormous pressure. It moves a vast number of economic resources, plays an important role in generating wealth in many countries and cities, and has a high multiplier effect, enabling infrastructure development and mobilizing creativity, innovation and tech applications. Tourism creates employment, contributes to recovering abandoned areas, redistributes income and enables destinations to be positioned in a global environment. Nonetheless, this pressure also represents a huge responsibility. I don't think it will surprise anyone if I say that tourism is a sector characterized by intrusion in other people's realities. I don't mean this negatively or as a criticism, just as a description.

By definition and for a short period of time, travelers become part of a reality with its own set of rules, debates, social projects and political realities. And travelers are rarely able to take part in them according to the criteria that shape each reality. In holiday destinations or where tourism is practically an economic monoculture, this conceptual dissidence is hardly a problem or, in any event, only in a generic or, I would say, academic sense. Nevertheless, it can be contentious in big cities.

Intensive use of a city's historical heritage; oversaturation in emblematic streets and neighborhoods; packed museums and facilities originally designed to educate and foster culture
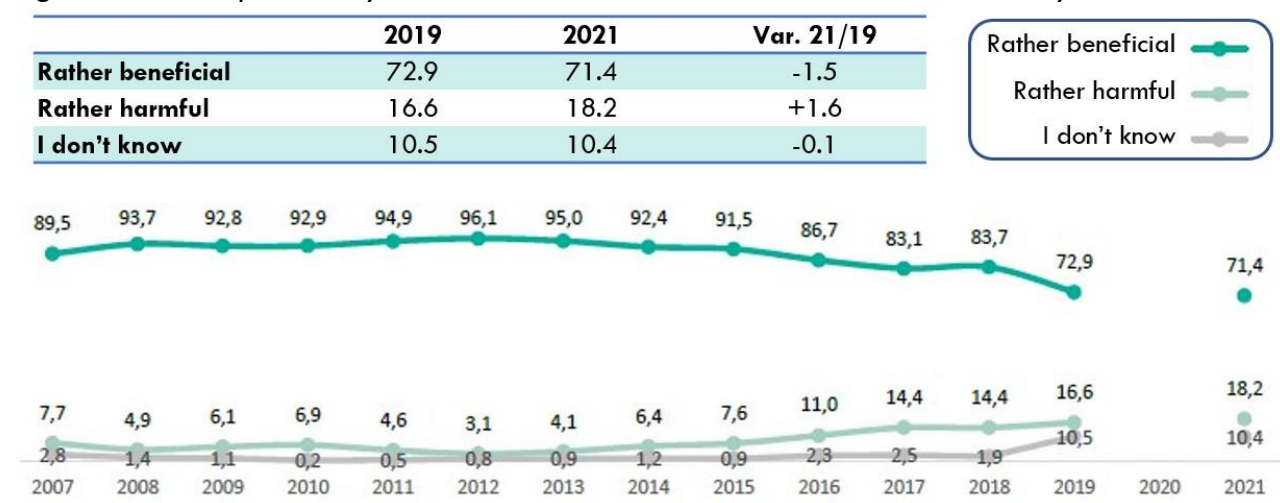
among local inhabitants; unorganized use of public highways to transport tourists, and the oftentimes careless and low-quality offer of restaurants and nightlife that for no real reason can come about in tourism-geared destinations comprise the basis of growing conflict in cities. In strictly holiday destinations, this type of always unjustifiable reality often receives scant social criticism. Whereas in big cities, it leads to many failures.

2. Making tourism a sector of progress and economic improvement

How to resolve, then, a contradictory reality: how do we make tourism a sector for consensus, progress and general economic improvement while avoiding negative externalities?

For example, Barcelona cannot do without tourism, nor should it. I will not go into the many reasons but, in addition to leisure travelers, business trips

Fig. 1 – *Citizens' opinion: do you think that tourism is rather beneficial for Barcelona city or rather harmful?*

	2019	2021	Var. 21/19
Rather beneficial	72.9	71.4	-1.5
Rather harmful	16.6	18.2	+1.6
I don't know	10.5	10.4	-0.1

Legend: Rather beneficial ●— / Rather harmful ●— / I don't know ●—

Rather beneficial: 89,5 (2007), 93,7 (2008), 92,8 (2009), 92,9 (2010), 94,9 (2011), 96,1 (2012), 95,0 (2013), 92,4 (2014), 91,5 (2015), 86,7 (2016), 83,1 (2017), 83,7 (2018), 72,9 (2019), 71,4 (2021)

Rather harmful: 7,7 (2007), 4,9 (2008), 6,1 (2009), 6,9 (2010), 4,6 (2011), 3,1 (2012), 4,1 (2013), 6,4 (2014), 7,6 (2015), 11,0 (2016), 14,4 (2017), 14,4 (2018), 16,6 (2019), 18,2 (2021)

I don't know: 2,8 (2007), 1,4 (2008), 1,1 (2009), 0,2 (2010), 0,5 (2011), 0,8 (2012), 0,9 (2013), 1,2 (2014), 0,9 (2015), 2,3 (2016), 2,5 (2017), 1,9 (2018), 10,5 (2019), 10,4 (2021)

Source: Observatori del Turisme a Barcelona – Ciutat i regió, 2021. Note: 2020 not available.

are essential to modernizing our economy and maintaining a top position in areas such as biomedicine, communication technology and the creative industries. Installing base stations for cruise ships is key to positioning our port. And although the more-than-necessary enlargement of the airport is not due to tourism but rather a goal to economically consolidate and transform the city and its area of influence, local and regional tourism is essential for its sustainability and transcontinental connectivity.

In turn, Barcelona needs to face up to environmental transformation, drastically cutting emissions; solve the increasing levels of inequality that affect large cities; come up with urban policies that halt gentrification trends in all large urban areas; re-think its mobility and public space management models, and create inclusive education, culture and

sports policies that strengthen the sense of citizenship and go hand-in-hand with a process of personal and collective progress.

Within the traditional dynamics of tourism management, everything comes with wide-ranging contradictions. Allow me to illustrate a few details. Barcelona welcomes 50 million visits per day every year. This huge amount of partial, unique impacts, often tied to very short-term economic interests, are not easy to manage from the traditional prism of an economic sector with intensive production, immediate commercialization and maximum yields.

3. Don't have a tourist-centric approach

Does all this mean I view tourism negatively? That I am reluctant to see it develop or am a paid-up member of the radically critical ranks? Of course not! The truth is, finding solutions to problems from the same perspective in which they first appeared is not easy. As soon as we start to think about what this sentence actually means (I repeat, finding solutions to problems from the same perspective in which they first appeared is not easy), we realize that our mistake is to try and deal with these problems from a fundamentally tourism-centric approach.

Let's think about this more closely. The common way of thinking in sectors involved in the visitor economy is based around incrementalism. In this sense, the social and co-existence debate, as well as the direct effects of tourism in terms of gentrification and environmental impact, force us to introduce new conceptual blueprints into tourism policies.

Barcelona, for example, has designed a plan to limit tourist accommodation that represents a unique precedent for this issue. The Special Urban Plan for Tourist Accommodation (PEUAT) regulates the global framework for growth in tourist accommodation in all its guises (hotels, holiday apartments, youth hostels, etc) across the city.

Now, I cannot deny that in my opinion it is a tool with a certain ideological bent, institutionalizing an extremely rigid view of accommodation, particularly in highly ambiguous areas such as shared housing. However, taken as a whole, it has enabled Barcelona to manage tourism flows with quality criteria, avoiding the growth-focused pressure inherent to the interests of a certain part of the sector.

The PEUAT has enabled Barcelona to avoid the temptation to overcome the pandemic by competing in the tourism market through lower prices. The plan has allowed us to work on extending average visitor stays in the city, enabling us to maintain the occupancy rate without having to deal with the same number of tourists. The PEUAT is a clear urban planning tool and, regardless of any debate surrounding its level of acceptance, it does represent a clear example of coordination between public policies that naturally tend to have competing objectives.

A second example of tourism transformation designed from a perspective on its negative issues is the tourist tax. The tourist tax is a purpose-led tax model implemented through adding a supplement to the cost of traveler stays in the city. The basic goal is to finance some of the added costs caused by tourism, redistribute its economic impact and, of course, activate elements that enable tourist uses in the city to decentralize and diversify.

Its critics point out that it lowers competitiveness in accommodation, raises prices too far and limits the city's tourism potential, since it makes stays more expensive. None of this happens in a large city where hotel prices do not depend on mass

oligopolistic purchases by tour operators and where price depends on the rise and fall in supply and demand. Moreover, and this is important, the tax is not (nor should it be) managed as part of the charge for accommodation but rather as a city charge.

Conceptually, the idea of a city charge is a necessary proposal for tourists and locals to establish a relationship that enables solutions to be found for many of the problems we need to deal with. In any event, the message to travelers does not come from the hotel or tourism sector, but from the city.

Now we are going to take a look at a hugely important third example: mobility. The general approach of tourist agents is to exploit the major heritage icons in the city. Obviously. Of course, they want the best facilities to transport tourists as near as can be to each of them and, where possible, create corridors between them. As a rule, these attractions are centrally located on streets and in squares where there is a high social demand for pedestrianization, and where public space is subject to frantic debate on alternatives to car use, etc.

It is hard to resolve these conflicts from a traditional tourism perspective because this often heightens them. We need to approach them from a different perspective: tourist bus routes in coordination with ordinary urban transport; strategic car parks that create stability, even at the expense of greater distance, etc. Once again, the city's interests should create the opportunity for the tourism sector to amend its mobility strategies with a view to ensuring greater medium- and long-term sustainability. In this instance, it is also a good idea to take advantage of the fact that most of our visitors are living with similar issues in their own cities.

Fig. 2 – *Global Destination Sustainability (GDS) Index, Barcelona city*
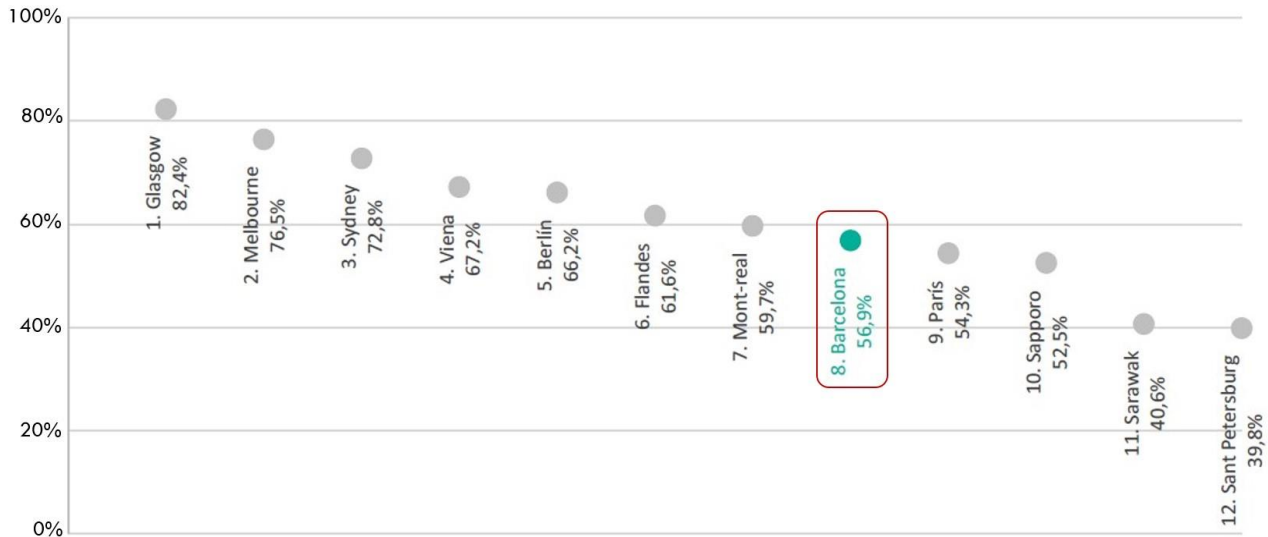
Source: Observatori del Turisme a Barcelona – Ciutat i regió, 2021. Note: Metropolis category ranking.

4. The positioning of Spain in terms of tourism

Once again, it is about finding solutions for tourism management from a perspective other than a strictly sector-focused approach. You work to ensure that Spain and its many destinations are well-positioned on the international tourism market. Without question, it is a strategic function involving huge responsibility, since Spain is an extraordinarily strong consolidated country in the tourism sector. This fantastic status means you need to maintain a very high hit rate and, as competition between destinations is extremely high and its ups-and-downs depend on many external and internal factors, your work is highly complex and demanding.

Traditionally, Spain has always been a great holiday destination. Our climate, coastline and competitive prices made us a top country for tourism from the 1960s onwards. Indeed, the impact of tourist spending, alongside remittances sent by the large waves of emigrants, enabled the economic developmentalism policy that characterized the second half of the Franco regime in Spain.

Fortunately, tourism in Spain has come a long way since those days. Historical heritage, culture, gastronomy, fairs and conferences, rural tourism, transport, quality accommodation, etc. are today the pillars of quality that enable us to maintain a level of prestige, competitiveness and, especially, interactivity across our economy.
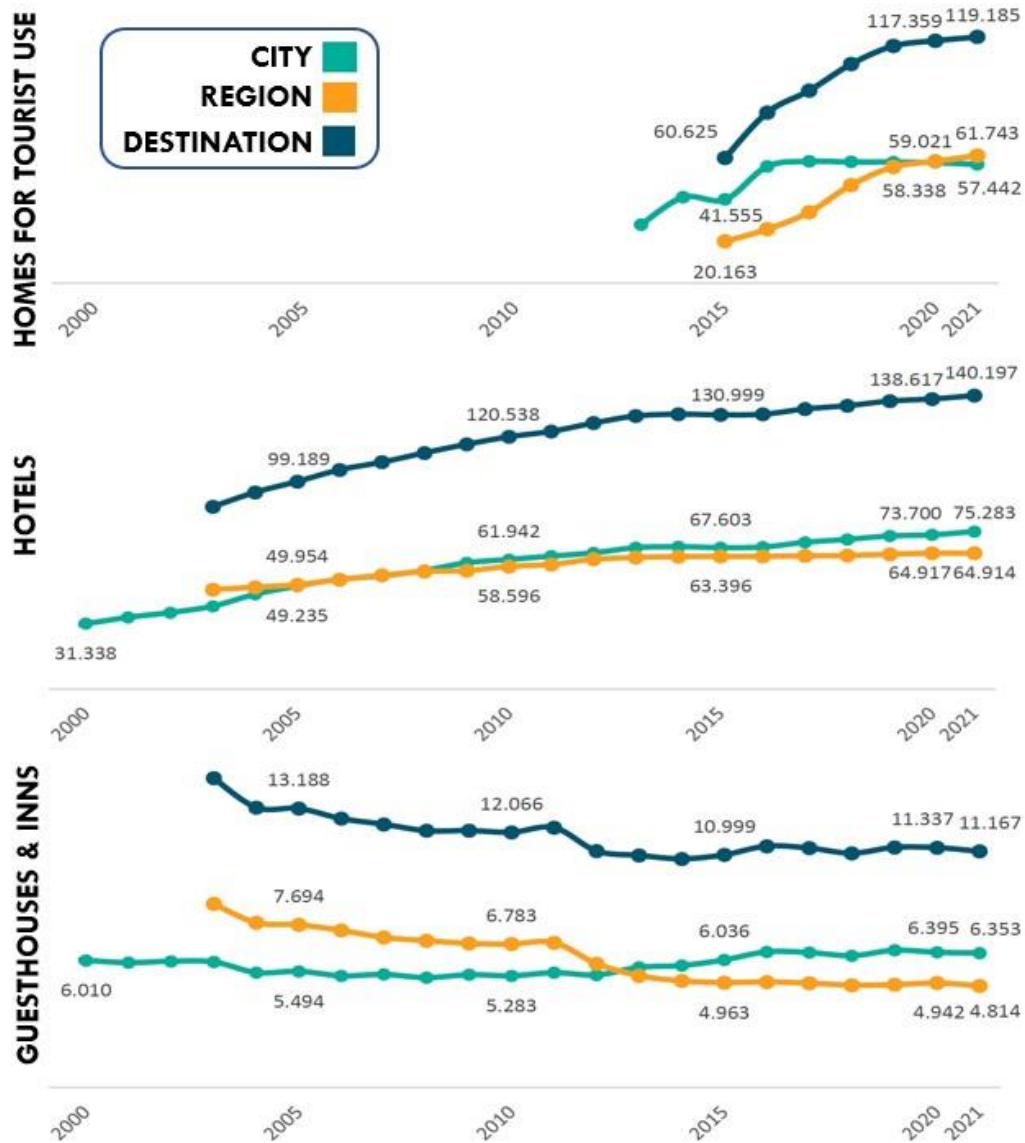
Sector agents are now highly aware of their responsibility (in line with the weight they have in our economy) in environmental terms and are working hard to ensure sustainable processes. Nonetheless, there remains a huge difficulty in positioning the role of large cities on the Spanish tourist map.

Barcelona welcomes around 14 million visitors, nearly 50% of whom come for conferences, fairs or to depart on a cruise. The average visitor stay in the city was 2.3 days in 2019. In reality, they are whistle-stop visits. Considering this information, it would be a good idea to find a more suitable term to avoid associating these people with the set of characteristics defining a traditional tourist profile.

Moreover, beside these 14 million visitors who generate 33 million overnight stays, Barcelona welcomes at least six million day-trippers from the Catalan coast (and from other destinations to a lesser extent) who spend a few hours in the city without spending the night there. In this instance, as you see, we use the term day-tripper.

Semantics is not neutral. Saying we have three million cruise passengers, three million conference attendees, eight million leisure visitors who stay in the city and six million day-trippers who do not spend the night is not the same as saying Barcelona welcomes 14 million tourists. Making this clear opens the door to more efficient and effective strategies, segregated analyses, practical solutions and agreements with the private sectors involved.

Fig. 3 – *Number of beds evolution in Destination Barcelona, Barcelona City and Region, 2000-2021*

HOMES FOR TOURIST USE

Legend:
- CITY
- REGION
- DESTINATION

117.359 119.185
60.625
59.021 61.743
41.555
58.338 57.442
20.163

HOTELS

138.617 140.197
130.999
120.538
99.189
73.700 75.283
67.603
61.942
49.954
63.396
64.917 64.914
58.596
49.235
31.338

GUESTHOUSES & INNS

13.188
12.066
10.999
11.337 11.167
7.694
6.783
6.036
6.395 6.353
6.010
5.494
5.283
4.963
4.942 4.814

Source: Observatori del Turisme a Barcelona – Ciutat i regió, 2021

Therefore, and despite these figures, Barcelona is not a tourist city. At least not in any traditional sense of the word. It is, however, a city with lots of tourists, just not a tourist city.

I said that semantics is important since different programmes and policies come out of it. A tourist city assumes that part of its services are at the disposal of tourism requirements and, subsequently, dialogues between stakeholders takes on a certain hierarchy where tourists assume a dominant role. By contrast, a city with tourists changes the order of this hierarchy and, subsequently, grants a dominant role to the city. In both instances, safety, cleanliness and mobility get managed, taxes are charged, and promotion plans are produced. Nevertheless, the order of things determines planning and a different type of dialogue.

5. Priority towards local community, not tourists

Cities are not holiday destinations. For many reasons, but especially because they cannot place their services at the disposal of visitors.

A city owes its existence to its residents. Its policies are designed to improve their well-being. They are not designed to ensure three to four marvellous days for tourists.

Obviously, cities offer all kinds of possibilities to anyone, but there is a fundamental difference from holiday destinations: tourists are not the priority audience for public services. In large cities, tourists are temporary citizens and, looked at in terms linked to the concept of being a citizen, this creates many contradictions.

Tourism leans towards concentration, either for reasons of accommodation location or the geographical spread of local attractions. In this vein, tourism has a gentrifying effect and standardizes what certain retail businesses offer, as well as increasing prices in restaurants.

They are inevitable realities and, therefore, natural. We should not take offence but rather take them as a basis to work on correcting some of these effects.

It should be stated that large cities also naturally generate some of these effects. Nevertheless, we must assume that tourism is, and will continue to be, a matter for debate, since it questions some traditional city frameworks and exacerbates natural impulses at high speed.

Therefore, tourism policy in Barcelona cannot be framed in essentially promotional terms. Although part of the sector takes undisguised incrementalist positions, Barcelona must set its interests on selecting visitors.

Allow me to qualify this goal a little so as to avoid any double reading. Barcelona clearly has an excellent position on the tourism market and its image/brand is consolidated and associated with truly solid features.

We are among the top cities in the world for safety, infrastructure, and standard of living; we are highly attractive to start-ups; and we are well-positioned in technology and postgraduate training. In addition to our heritage and beaches, culture and gastronomy are recurring themes in visitor opinions. Around 45% are repeat visitors, making us a well-positioned destination in global tourism awareness.

We do not have to constantly reference the city's traditional attractions to attain visitor numbers to keep Barcelona in the top international ranks. Undoubtedly, this work is already done and private tourism marketing

systems keep them active. It is the attributes that the city seeks to construct in the future, those that will enable us to modernize and generate new competitive spaces, new cultural attractions and a new creative consciousness, which should comprise the basis to work on defining our future promotional policies.

This is not an easy task since it means placing tourism at the center of analysis to define our city in the coming years. Moreover, it means doing this in consensus with all policies and action plans set to impact locals since, at the end of the day, they should be the real protagonists in their own city. It is the only conceptually strong and sustainable way to ensure tourists and residents comprise a single citizenship.

Is this not perhaps the philosopher's stone of tourism, the sector's ultimate goal, the justification for travel as an intrinsic right of all human beings and one of the main benefits of social progress?

Considering that these ingredients have not changed in recent years and tourism resilience is high, it is clear that we need to formulate new working hypotheses for promotion. I would like to end by mentioning a challenge we need to face up to soon. This affects tourism generally, although its impact on cities is particularly relevant.

It is common to confront economic crises with a wide-ranging will to re-examine and a firm commitment to correcting underlying causes. This idea comes with a commonly repeated mantra: every crisis represents an opportunity. It is also common to see how, after overcoming a crisis, we failed to do our homework properly.

So, the pandemic has forced us to think about an urgent need: retraining for the many professions involved in the world of tourism.

We are living at a time of great imbalance between labor supply and demand, in addition to a gradual decline in enrolment at intermediate and higher vocational training centers in most areas affecting tourism. Our sector has traditionally been seen as precarious, undemanding, and seasonal. As a sector where short-term profitability and low wages are prioritized, leaving quality proposals, service excellence, lifelong training and professional careers to one side. This is not strictly true, but only facts can turn this reputation around.

An agreement for job retraining in the sector that includes education (from VET to specialized courses), industry associations and unions; cuts across the hotel industry, hospitality and retail; looks to innovation and creativity to improve product and service quality, and has a central place in economic stimulus and quality job creation policies at national and municipal level would be the best answer to the crisis we have been experiencing in recent years.

6. Conclusion

Now, allow me to end with a few strong ideas for the sake of summarizing this modest attempt to share my thoughts with you.

- ▶ We need to face up to the problems caused by tourism from a perspective that goes beyond tourism itself. We need to come up with strategies that cut across all municipal policies.

- ▶ If we want residents and tourists to form a single citizenship, we need to generate new parameters, new promotion policies and new criteria for action. It is in this

context where we include the idea of a city charge, both in its potential economic and conceptual dimensions.

▶ Tourism policies should not be strictly promotional. We need to harness big data to better understand who visits us and prioritize those with a greater affinity with the city's values. These visitors exist in sufficient quality and quantity to maintain the occupancy levels we seek.

▶ We need to decisively move from commitment to action on sustainability. Listing products based on compliance with the SDGs is essential for improving quality. There cannot be a demand differential between local activity and activity aimed at visitors.

▶ Once and for all, we need to kick-start a general qualification project for tourism professions, improving education and revitalizing professional careers. One added value to this policy is the ability to transform the quality of tourist attractions and generate a positive message for residents regarding the impacts of tourism.

In short, we want to be leaders and achieve this from a perspective where tourism is not solely a net provider of wealth and employment, but also an essential pillar of transformation, modernization and progress for the entire city.

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