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Inland territorial and tourism resilience in a polarized world¹

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Abstract. Globalization today is characterized by territorial polarization resulting from unequal geographical development (urban vs. rural spaces and coastal vs. inland areas) or from spatial segregation by reason of social class, ethnicity or gender, among others. The diverse problems lead to different diagnoses and alternative proposals: from degrowth in saturated spaces to the contribution of resilience for inland spaces as well as for impoverished countries.

This paper provides a theoretical and empirical reflection on tourism scenarios and alternatives in territories made disparate by unequal geographical development and are thus experiencing conditions of undertourism. Our results reveal, on the one hand, alternatives such as degrowth in scenarios that suffer from overtourism and, on the other, demands for new development opportunities that also favor resilience over the abandonment of disadvantaged spaces. Socio-territorial resilience is a specific, two-fold response to undertourism: it demands degrowth in saturated destinations while stimulating tourism activity in spaces that need it.

Keywords: tourism, polarization, degrowth, territory, resilience.

1 Introduction

The debate on tourist saturation (i.e., overtourism) and proposals for degrowth are in stark contrast with radically disparate realities in places experiencing undertourism, that is, where tourists could actually help prevent impoverishment and depopulation. In this paper, we take the perspective of unequal geographical development and contribute to the conceptual discussion on resilience as an innovative contribution. Our starting hy-

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pothesis is that socio-territorial polarization derives from unequal geographical development (which is consubstantial with capitalism) and that socio-territorial resilience is a specific response to demands for degrowth in saturated destinations while at the same time stimulating tourism activity in order to overcome the abandonment of disadvantaged spaces. This work forms a part of several more extensive research projects [1] that have been carried out since 2011, specifically in 16 Spanish regions that are investing in tourism as a means toward resilience.

2 Methodology

Methodologically, the quantification of sustainability and resilience in tourism implies significant practical and conceptual difficulties, not only because of the availability of the data [2] but because it is necessary to simultaneously establish clear thresholds for considering whether or not an activity is sustainable. Another difficulty is found in the diversity of territories, actors and interests, all of which converge on this transversal activity known as tourism. As such, we decided to triangulate various methodologies. First, we took a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews on a sample of 75 qualified actors and informants that were intentionally sampled by means of the snow-ball technique. These included –on the one hand– managers, owners and technicians who were directly involved in stimulating development of the territory while, on the other, we interviewed experts and other informants who are qualified in the fields of culture, politics and business. This allowed us to obtain detailed knowledge and understanding by analyzing the social and territorial realities based on the perspectives of these stakeholders.

Regarding the quantitative methodology, we selected indicators to serve as a fundamental tool for: evaluating variables; making temporary and territorial comparisons; decision-making; and evaluating transversal phenomena. Thus, in order to determine the tourist destination's degree of resilience to any disturbance, we first chose 100 indicators from those proposed by [3] the UNWTO and the Resilience Capacity Index (RCI-2004). We took a mixed socio-ecological and environmental approach that we adapted to tourism by following Luthe and Wyss [4] and grouping our indicators into four categories: Metabolic Flows, Social Dynamics, Governance Networks and Built Environment. Second, in order to determine the degree of territorial resilience in each of the selected regions, we used the territorial sensitivity index (β_r) proposed by [5] and chose four sensitivity indices to represent the economic, sociocultural and environmental aspects. We applied this methodology to 16 comarcas (counties) of Spain in the Autonomous Communities of Andalusia, Aragon, Castilla y León, Catalunya, the Valencian Community, Canary Islands, Balearic Islands and Galicia (see Fig. 4). Location map). All of these Communities contain counties with some relevant potential (such as natural or heritage resources) that could contribute to developing their own offers of tourism. These regions are representative of territories with different degrees of development and resilience while facing unequal development during social and economic crises. Depending on their specific tourism product, each one contains a recognizable cluster that already exists or is in the process of formation. Because this tourism cluster

can contribute to the local development of the selected regions, it is possible to subsequently study and analyze the resilience of each county from the points of view of the territory and of the tourist destination. Thus, for each area, we have made three detailed profiles: 1) physical characteristics of the territory based on an analysis of its tourist potential; 2) an in-depth analysis of the socioeconomic indicators of the territory's dynamics; and 3) the characteristics of the tourism cluster. The third is an enormously relevant aspect, since it reveals the evolution of each case and indicates the cluster's stage of tourism development.

With all this in mind, this contribution offers a small sample of the results obtained. The next section covers the conceptual aspects of unequal geographical development and tourism and territorial resilience (Section 3). Section 4 presents the comparative results of the case studies described above, while Section 5 offers a final reflection as a discussion proposal.

3 Unequal geographical development and territorial resilience tourism

Capitalism is based on unequal geographical development in the same way that it is based on the extraction of surplus value from labor. According to Karl Marx [6, Chapter 27, paragraph 15], one of the general laws of capitalism is to simultaneously stimulate the emergence of, on the one hand, concentrations of wealth for capitalists and, on the other, poverty and oppression for the workers. Just as crises are inherent to capitalism's temporary cycles of expansion and recession, the diametric spatial cycles of development and underdevelopment are also inherent to it [7].

Tourism contributes to this process in the same way as other activities like manufacturing. The globalization of tourism is thus shown to be unequal and asymmetric according to the appropriation of resources, territories, income, connections, knowledge or power. It can be inclusive for those in the dominant social classes while at the same time exclusive, depending on one's origins, race or purchasing power. International tourism itself is an activity that is not equally accessible to everyone. The international division of labor distinguishes the emitters of tourism from the receivers, with multinational companies maintaining their headquarters at the centers of the world economy while their production (namely, tourism services) occurs in peripheral places. This polarization feeds not only geopolitical tensions, but even wars and other expressions of tension and violence [8].

This unequal development within a booming sector such as tourism has also led to unequal reactions (both socially and institutionally) in the face of tourist saturation: overtourism. The discontent in these regions has reached such a level of magnitude that it has captured the attention of some industry players like the World Tourism Organization [9] and the World Travel and Tourism Council [10]. Meanwhile, the pro-tourist lobbies accuse disgruntled residents of being tourismophobes [11] while at the same time acknowledging the possibility that "an excess of tourism" may exist. Thus, UNWTO declares that "growth is not the enemy; the issue lies in its management"; in accordance with which certain authors propose redeveloping and restructuring more

mature destinations [12]. In parallel, the social movements of affected people explicitly address the idea of degrowth in tourism, connecting it with global discussions on degrowth [13, 14].

On a global level, tourism degrowth has been proposed as a means to curb unequal geographical development, consumerism, and the accumulation of wealth, in overtourism situations – specifically by fighting against the local population becoming dispossessed of their daily living spaces while mitigating climate change, the depletion of fossil fuels, the loss of biodiversity, and by exceeding the thresholds of biophysical resilience [15]. In this same context, undertourism corresponds to the situation when disadvantaged spaces that can find tourism to be an option that favors their resilience through adequate tourist development.

The concept of resilience has thus generated great interest among tourism researchers in need of understanding abilities for dealing with crises, disruptions and changes [16]. This socio-ecological approach to territorial resilience has been addressed by various authors [17, 18, 19, 20], and it establishes new scenarios of social, economic and environmental stability [21]. In this way, disadvantaged territories can become resilient tourist destinations by creating an attractive space to visit with organized tourist attractions, a comprehensive image and strategic planning, all of which favor the development of the destination. This strategy takes into account all stakeholders and strategies [22, 17], the ecological footprint [19], self-reliance, and the degree of vulnerability to internal and external impacts. Through this socio-ecological approach, vital importance is given to conservation, the balance of ecosystems, and quality of life while increasing the local community's participation in governance of the territory, as well as promoting equitable access to resources and services [3]. Other economic approaches [23] focus on market aspects, economic cycles, employment, GDP, or productivity, as the resilience of a territory depends on inherited structures, agents, and resources, among others.

If we begin with the conviction that unlimited growth is impossible on a finite planet [24, 25], territorial resilience is taken as the sum of economic and socio-ecological approaches, since sustainable development is not inevitably linked to sustained growth and it is possible that a change in direction can coexist with degrowth [26]. Given this postulate, two trends have emerged in applying the concept of resilience to territorial studies. The first focuses on territorial responses to occasional disasters; while the second focuses on a territory's ability to face processes of decline and transform itself into a new stage of development by combining its inherited and new features. Our contribution is that developing tourism at a destination –both in over or in undertourism– places greater emphasis on how tourist destinations and/or clusters can fortify themselves and their capacities rather than focusing on their vulnerabilities.

All this has resulted in identifying mechanisms that reduce the effects of these disturbances and turn them into opportunities for future development of a destination. Thus, Lew [27, 28] highlights a destination's three possible resilience mechanisms: 1) a return to the pre-impact state ("an engineering approach", [29]); 2) an opportunity to learn and prepare for future impacts ("an ecological approach", [30]); 3) an opportunity to resist, transform and adapt better to new circumstances through ecological adaptive cycles ("transformational approach", [31, 32, 5]). This last approach [33, 4] advocates for ecological adaptive cycles as a model of regional resilience [34, 35]. Thus, Holling

and Gunderson [36] contemplate three dimensions and four phases that model the responses of ecosystems, institutions and societies (see Fig. 1).

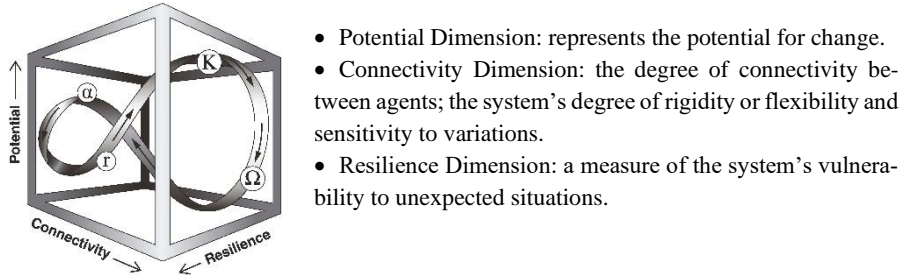


Fig. 1. Adaptive cycle properties. Source: authors, based on [35]

As the phases of the adaptive cycle follow one another, resilience expands and contracts, being that it is dynamic over time. These adaptive cycles of the tourism system have four distinct evolutionary phases (see Fig. 2).

In phase (r) (exploitation/growth) new opportunities and growth are generated, presenting low connectivity, resilience and potential (promotion of the destination is intensified; an increase in the number of international tourists and residents). Resilience progressively contracts towards phase (k) (consolidation/stagnation) as stability prevails and the system becomes more fragile and less resilient (a concentration of real estate and tourists; the expansion of second homes; deterioration of the environment and landscape). This is known as a mature destination, where investment in the destination's touristic and residential quality is weak. This would lead to decline (Ω) (collapse/liberation), through destruction or resurgence and redevelopment of the destination (α) (reorganization/renovation) through innovation and by restructuring the sector.

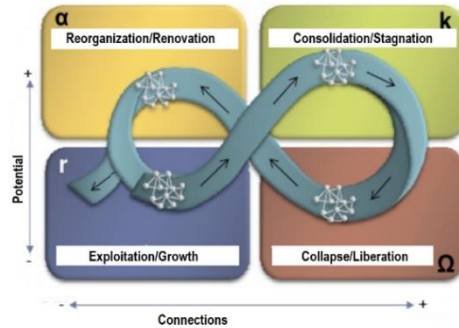


Fig. 2. Adaptive cycle of the tourist system. Source: [35]

Finally, the concept of territorial resilience in tourism refers to a tourist destination's ability to balance and absorb impacts and crises while considering their previous situation, resources, organizational skills, and their structural and functional adaptability. A resilient tourist destination is capable of forecasting and anticipating crises while developing new skills and conditions that will allow it to emerge reinforced [37]. None of this occurs without the factors that facilitate the destination's resilience: capacities (economic, socio-cultural and environmental development); connections (cooperation, communication, competitiveness, tourism innovation, and new technologies); and

properties (available resources, an existing business cluster for tourism, and destination image). Given that over time it is common for a given territory or destination to experience impacts, successive adaptive cycles can occur, leading to new recovery and re-orientation (see Fig. 3).

Tourism fits this pattern perfectly when it is directly affected by various crises that are generated by more or less predictable impacts. As we have seen in certain territories that experience saturation stages due to excess growth, overtourism, an alternative to resilience is precisely a change of course in pursuit of degrowth. In others that are immersed in depopulation processes, crises and unfavorable dynamics, undertourism, tourism could imply a new adaptive cycle of recovery.

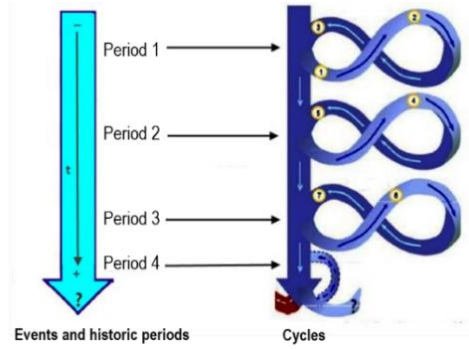


Fig. 3. Sequence of adaptive recovery cycles. Source: authors, based on [35]

4 Tourist resilience among the inland regions of Spain

In the following, we discuss the case of 16 inland regions of Spain, which have been analyzed in recent studies [38, 1] (see Fig 4). Their analysis has been complex, but below we summarize some of the main characteristics that have been identified².

Regarding the economic weaknesses of each analyzed cluster, we found that the recent economic crisis has had diverse consequences. On the one hand, there has been a change in the tourism consumption habits of the population, which has become oriented more towards national and, especially, proximity tourism. This can provide a good opportunity for the inland territories such as those analyzed here. On the other hand, the decrease in public investment income jeopardizes the viability of projects that depend heavily on subsidies. The difficulty in obtaining bank loans has not only contributed to reducing the number of entrepreneurs in this sector, but has also slowed down the expansion of the tourist accommodation supply. All the analyzed clusters have a greater or lesser degree of weakness in financing, but those with the greatest economic weakness are those dedicated to astrotourism, geocaching and Civil War heritage, particularly in comparison to the clusters focused on nature, sports and adventure tourism.

² The complete and detailed analysis of the results can be consulted in [38, 1]



Fig. 4. Analyzed regions and tourism cluster. Source: authors.

Regarding their socio-cultural weaknesses, some of the regions show low territorial resilience while, as a tourist destination, all counties lack large events and/or centers of attraction that help boost the arrival of visitors. In addition, the supply of cultural interest goods is scarce, with negligible numbers of museums and collections, as well as few relevant fairs and festivals. In all destinations, the local community is willing to interact with tourists, and in most cases this has increased throughout the analyzed period. In spite of everything, the high unemployment rate caused by the crisis has affected most of these destinations, which in many cases has led to labor emigrating to more established tourist destinations. In almost all cases the application of new technologies stands out as notably low or even lacking in regard to complementing face-to-face visits. Furthermore, the municipalities in this cluster have a small number of hotels adapted to disabled people. However, the satisfaction of visiting tourists in all clusters has been evaluated as good or very good.

In terms of environmental weaknesses, no county demonstrates low territorial resilience. However, as a tourist destination, these weaknesses pertain more to the low level of waste sorting, the excessive use of personal vehicles for accessing the destination, and the consumption of water and energy, all of which lead to high growth in their ecological deficits. Regarding governance, the institutional promotion of tourism at certain destinations remains weak as a tool for local development. In terms of each cluster's governance, a certain weakness is identified in the institutional promotion of tourism products, some of which have few public officials involved in developing the tourism. Upon analyzing the adaptive cycle position of the counties experiencing under-tourism yet nevertheless have achieved results (see Fig. 5), we find them to be in one of four major situations:

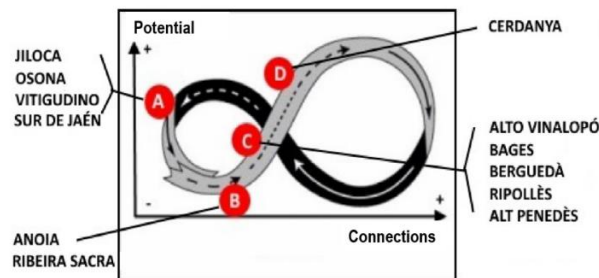


Fig. 5. Position in the adaptive cycle of resilience as a tourist destination for the analyzed counties. Source: Prepared by the authors, based on [36].

A) a tourist destination that is still in the final stage of the redefinition and reorganization phase, with low but gradually improving resilience, high potential and still few connections (Osona, Sur de Jaén, Vitigudino and Jiloca); B) in the growth phase, with good resilience and potential while connections remain low but growing (Ribeira Sacra and Anoia); C) a destination in the final stage of the growth phase, with good resilience and increasing potential and connections (Alt Penedès, Bages, Berguedà, Ripollès and Alto Vinalopó); and D) La Cerdanya, the destination which currently presents the greatest resilience, with high potential and many connections, thus placing it in the conservation phase.

Regarding the sustainability of the selected clusters, the results of the indicators are very different. Thus, the high economic sustainability of après-ski and night skiing stands out, despite their being limited to the snow season. In contrast, many of them indicate low sustainability (at least by today's standards), such as geocaching, Civil War heritage, wheat ecotourism, adventure sports, astrotourism and archaeotourism. These are somewhat nascent tourist products and must still be established within the sector. What is more, they are located in destinations that still have a certain deficit in accommodation, infrastructure and services. In turn, wine tourism, the Festival of Moors and Christians, religious tourism and nature tourism all maintain a mid-level of economic sustainability, although with different nuances. Having passed through their first years of life, they form a denser and collaborative cluster in places that have already begun to be identified as tourist destinations for inland Spain.

5 Conclusions and further research for discussion

As well as tourism degrowth has been proposed as a means to curb unequal geographical development in overtourism situations, undertourism corresponds to the situation when disadvantaged spaces that can find tourism to be an option that favors their resilience through adequate tourist development. The results obtained empirically for inland undertourism territories indicate that the local planning must consider socio-territorial resilience; this is not only the natural and heritage resources of the territory, but also other very heterogeneous variables such as infrastructure, access, weather and safety. For this reason, it is essential to rely on complex analyses that include components indicating the different stages of each region and cluster. It is equally important to take into account their economic, environmental and socio-cultural sustainability, as a way to measure their resilience as a territory and as a tourist destination in their region.

Therefore, it is necessary to continuously evaluate and design the most appropriate strategies for the sustainable management of tourism products, both in over and undertourism situations, the clusters created around them and the destinations in which they lie. The processes for developing a tourism product must be reconsidered and reconfigured according to global impacts that affect local areas, and this must be done in coordination between the local public and private stakeholders with the objective of minimizing the risks from possible adverse events.

Our analysis verifies how each destination manifests its different resilience in terms of its own characteristics and capacities in the face of new economic and social demands from inland spaces. These use diverse development strategies while taking into account that their territories are becoming increasingly appreciated for their multifunctionality and distinct identity. Bearing this in mind, the development of tourism clusters must necessarily be suitable, not only in economic terms but also at the sociocultural and environmental level, with cooperative clusters being created around a particular product while complementing each other. What is more, it is also necessary to know how to manage the resilience of the destination, since transformational capacity constitutes a fundamental characteristic of sustainable systems (whether they be social, ecological, political, economic or technological). Innovation and learning are some of the most important aspects of adaptive cycles for any socio-ecological system; and this includes inland tourism, for which it is crucial to take into account how a society develops and interacts with its surroundings.

The adaptive renewal cycle shows us, on the one hand, that destabilizing forces are a factor in maintaining diversity, resilience and opportunity; thus, they are important for innovation. On the other hand, stabilizing forces are also essential for maintaining the cluster once the system has been reorganized. Ultimately, resilience contributes to defining socio-territorial responses to polarization, where degrowth in overtourism situations is as necessary as the stimulus of adequate development in undertourism processes. Thus, the socio-territorial resilience of tourism constitutes the ability to recover and implement compensatory measures as a response to unequal geographical development, which can be as disparate as the extremes of said polarization.

At this point, the agenda of future research raises some issues to be resolved: Does tourism planning and management make it possible to develop measures to compensate

for territorial polarization? What forms of stakeholder participation make it possible for cohesive and coordinated destinations to achieve resilience? How can tools be developed for identifying and strengthening the sector's weaknesses? What can resilience contribute to being prepared for possible adverse situations? What lessons can we learn from the successful and erroneous experiences of tourism policies aimed at territorial rebalancing?

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