

Socio-Emotional Reasons and Loyalty to Mass Tourism Destinations



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Introduction

In the course of the last decade, studies of mass tourism have taken an interesting turn. The traditional approach (Shepherd, 2002) warned of its negative impacts (Crick, 1989) and the unsustainability of the model and foresaw its inevitable future decline (Agarwal, 2002; Cooper, 2006; Knowles & Curtis, 1999). In contrast, recent studies put forward novel views of this type of tourism. These new ideas can be grouped roughly into two categories. The first is economicist and managerial in style, while the second focuses more on the social and emotional grounds for choice of destination.

The new economicist–managerial approach can be encompassed by the term sustainable mass tourism (Aguiló, Alegre, & Sard, 2005; Bramwell, 2004; Claver-Cortés, Molina-Azorín, & Pereira-Moliner, 2007) and bears witness to the success and endurance of many mass tourist resorts. These studies analyse the restructuring undertaken, or that should be undertaken, by these destinations, in order to minimize negative impacts, manage resources properly and improve and diversify the quality of their product (Ivars, Rodríguez, & Vera, 2012; Weaver, 2012). The second line of research, less abundant but highly suggestive, attempts both to reveal and to heighten the value of holidaymakers' performance: their emotions, feelings, experiences, practices and behaviours (Caletrío, 2009; MVRDV et al., 2000; Nogués-Pedregal, 2012a).

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Until not much more than a decade ago, tourist studies had judged these socio-emotive aspects pejoratively, basing themselves on preconceived notions of authenticity, banality or quality (Franklin & Crang, 2001; Obrador, Crang, & Travlou, 2009; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Wang, 1999). But, the new approach calls into question all a priori typologies, stereotypes and clichés around holidaymakers. And, developing this same tendency to reappraise the tourist experience, the space and time dimensions of mass tourism has become the object of particular attention.

Thus, space and time are no longer conceived of as merely physical factors, subject to seasonal stress and overcrowding but are now seen as dimensions which suggest multiple cultural signifiers (Caletrío, 2009; Minca, & Oakes, 2006), relevant to the individual and the family group (Larsen, Urry, & Axhausen, 2007; Kyle & Click, 2004; Trauer & Ryan, 2005) through the physical and sensory experience of the environment (Crouch, 2004).

This second approach forms a part of what has been called “the social turn in tourism” (Haldrup & Larsen, 2003; Heimtun, 2007; Urry, 2003). It introduces, redefines and/or calls into question concepts such as place, family and friendship (Coleman & Crang, 2002; Inglis, 2000, Obrador, 2012) and positions them as key objects for tourism studies (Larsen et al., 2007; O’Reilly, 2000). Thus, variables which had previously been fundamental to definitions of tourism, such as the differences between being at home and being away, lose their centrality. Further, these new studies highlight how some important functions of the home travel with holidaymakers to their destinations (Larsen et al., 2007; Trauer & Ryan, 2005). Also, the concept of the tourist is called into question through focusing on the actual holidaymaker’s experience (Römhild, 2012). Ethnographic studies show that some people categorized as tourists—under statistical or academic definitions—do not define themselves as such but prefer to see themselves as forming part of the place and community of destination; in fact, they act and behave in this way (Caletrío, 2009; Janoschka, 2011; Obrador, 2003; Van Noorloos, 2011).

These studies offer rich descriptions of individuals’ and their families’ experiences relating to others in holiday periods and locations (Löfgren, 1999; Smart & Neale, 1999; Wagner & Minca, 2012). Thus, new insights into the tourist experience emerge. Holidaymakers become a “chorus” (Wearing & Wearing, 1996) which creatively integrates itself into the construction of tourist areas (Caletrío, 2009), thus distancing themselves enormously from the stereotypical tourist, caricatured by some authors (Bauman, 1996; Urbain, 1991) as extraneous and unwilling to forge meaningful social ties in the destination. And this reinforces Urry’s (1990) argument that in the high modern age, tourism became a fundamental element for the reproduction of postmodernism’s social architecture.

Loyalty to “Stagnating Destinations”?

In many Mediterranean Spanish towns, from the last third of the twentieth century until the 2007 property crash, residential tourism had become the main and almost

sole economic driver (Durán, 2008). Forecasts for this sector noted that the model was already showing signs of stagnation preceding its decline (Aledo & Mazón, 2004; EXCELTUR, 2005; García-Andreu & Rodes, 2004; Knowles & Curtis, 1999). Studies highlighted the excessive concentration of building in coastal areas and the high level of seasonality, resulting in overcrowding in these resorts. Such research stressed that overdevelopment, along with poor planning, had led to shortfalls in infrastructures and services, combined with a degree of environmental deterioration which undermined the overall quality of the product (Greenpeace, 2009; Mazón, 2006).

However, these predictions have been stubbornly contradicted by reality (Claver-Cortés et al., 2007). Residential accommodation is still the majority option for Spanish tourists for their holidays within the country. The percentage of summer visitors taking up this choice has risen constantly. While in 1999, 67% of tourist journeys were to non-hotel accommodation; in 2011, this had grown to 73.1% (FAMILITUR, 2012). Foreign tourists also prefer residential accommodation: in 2012, 52.6% of foreign tourist overnight stays in Spain were in residential accommodation (FRONTUR, 2012, p. 44). The stock of residential tourist accommodation is huge. One 2008 study by the consulting company Live in Spain counted 203,710 dwellings catering to the tourist market on the Costa Blanca alone, followed by the Costa del Sol with 173,880 holiday homes.

Thus, a clear contradiction emerges. On the one hand, a phase of stagnation and decline in residential tourist destinations is foretold; on the other, however, the tables show strong loyalty to these destinations on the part of holidaymakers. The stock academic explanation for this has been so-called captivity or submission to structural forces. Residential holidaymakers are seen as enslaved to their second homes. Buying a second home on the coast obliges them to visit it year after year in order to recover their investment (Fernández & Barrado, 2011; Obiol & Pitarch, 2011; Torres, Esteve, Fuentes, & Martín, 2006). But, also, the second home purchase is explained as heavily conditioned by economic structures and agents (the property and financial sectors), since it has been encouraged by the deployment of fiscal and financial policies (Colom & Molés, 2004; Gili, 2003) making buying a second home a credible, profitable investment. The Spanish property marketing and advertising sectors, taking advantage of a national culture that has traditionally favoured purchasing over renting property, (Gutiérrez, Viedma, & Callejo, 2005; Méndez & Díaz, 2001), have also boosted the mass acquisition of the second homes. Thus, it is argued that in Spain, possessing a second home has become a privileged marker of social status (López, 2003). In brief, the second home tourists are characterized as passive, conditioned, incapable of rebelling against market forces, obliged to return constantly to their second homes in overdeveloped resorts and compelled to suffer an inevitable deterioration in tourist services and the environment.

A second explanation for the contradiction previously noted draws on the economic rationale underlying the decision to acquire a second home. Various analysts have highlighted the desire to make an investment (Fernández & Barrado, 2011; Gili, 2003) as one of the main reasons for the second home purchase in tourist areas. This investment is made especially by three types of buyers: (1) families where the

parents are between 45 and 60, at a stage we may call “retirement planning” (Gallent, Mace, & Tewdwr-Jones, 2005; Hall & Müller, 2004; López, Cabrerizo, & Martínez, 2007); (2) families whose purchasing power has increased, albeit temporarily (Paris, 2008), to the point that they can afford to plan an investment in a second home; and 3) people wishing to escape from the stress of large cities (Norris & Winston, 2010), whose expected returns on investment are enhanced by the hoped-for reduction in stress.

The study presented here, in contrast, positions itself in line with novel, more social and emotional, interpretations of tourists’ loyalty to mature residential tourism destinations. The “social turn in tourism” considers the social networks—of friendship, family, feeling or identity—that are constructed in these highly developed areas to be co-participants in the holidaymaker’s decision to return regularly to the same destination.

Loyalty is defined as a stable commitment to future purchases of a service or product of the same brand despite the endeavours of other companies (in this case, other tourist resorts) to change this behaviour (Oliver, 1999). However, the concept of loyalty in tourism has different characteristics, since the consumer has to travel, sometimes thousands of kilometres, to the site of consumption, and because the satisfaction with the previous stays clashes with the excitement of novelty. George and George (2004) have sought to define tourist loyalty as “frequency of past visits” plus “intention to return to the destination”, while other researchers have used “the number of days spent in a particular destination” as a measure (Lee, Backman, & Backman, 1997).

Yuksel, Yuksel and Bilim (2010) cite studies which have stressed the link between loyalty and the sense of belonging to a place (Brocato, 2006; Schultz, 2000; Walker & Chapman, 2003). This feeling of belonging stems from the way place forms a part of personal identity; from the form and meaning of emotional interactions occurring there (Kyle, Graefe, & Manning, 2005; Rubinstein & Parmelee, 1992) and from the social and affective relationships constructed in the tourist destination. Through these factors, the resort becomes a special emotional domain in visitors’ affective memory (Kyle & Click, 2004; Trauer & Ryan, 2005).

In a study carried out in seven mature sun-and-sand residential tourist resorts on the Costa Blanca (Alicante) and Costa de la Luz (Huelva), we investigated the reasons why Spanish holidaymakers faithfully return season after season to these highly developed areas. The initial hypothesis was that emotional reasons, linked to the construction of personal identity, sociability and memory and grounded in the social relationships built within the space and time of summer visits, contributed substantially to the loyalty of these tourists to their destinations. The main goal of this paper was to use quantitative data, derived from a macro-survey ($n = 2602$), to test the ideas of scholars such as Obrador et al. (2009), Caletrió (2009) and Nogués-Pedregal (2012a) who provide more complex and less pejorative and aprioristic ethnographic views of the mass tourist in residential tourist destinations. Many of these studies reflect an interpretivist (Haldrup & Larsen, 2009; Nogués-Pedregal, 2012a; Wang, 2000) and

phenomenological approach (Cohen, 1979; Li, 2000; Obrador, 2003; Rakic & Chambers, 2012; Toledo, 2003), with a predominance of qualitative techniques (Nogués-Pedregal, 2012b; Rakic & Chambers, 2012). Unlike these studies, our research is aligned with the post-positivist current of thought (Gale & Botterill, 2005), and we used a survey as the method of collecting data. Our adherence to this current is based on an ontological position which sees data as a product and which is primarily interested in unveiling the meanings given by actors to their multiple interpretations of reality (Henderson, 2011, p. 343).

Method

Study Area

The study designed to test our hypothesis aimed to analyse the social profile of the national summer visitors and their reasons for choosing the destination. A summer visitor (population universe of reference) was defined as any Spanish national staying for a holiday period equal to or longer than seven days during one or more of the European summer months (June, July and August), either in their own house or flat, or one that was rented or loaned. A survey was carried out of seven Spanish coastal towns: Denia, Altea, Benidorm, Santa Pola and Torrevieja on the Costa Blanca and Punta Umbría and Matalascañas (Almonte) on the Costa de la Luz. These towns were chosen for their specialization in summer sun-and-sand tourism (Domínguez-Gómez & Aledo, 2005; García-Andreu & Rodes, 2004; Mazón, 2006; Mazón & Huete, 2005), the high number of non-hotel places on offer (EXCELTUR, 2005) and their specialization in national summer residential tourism.

Data Collection

A total of 2602 people¹ were interviewed face to face in the seven towns during July 2008. Given the elusive nature of our population (from a technical-methodological point of view), Domínguez-Gómez, Aledo and Roig-Merino (2016) was taken as a methodological model in developing a validated sampling method. Grouped according to the towns surveyed, the final distribution of valid interviews was: 218 in Altea, 395 in Benidorm, 398 in Denia, 397 in Santa Pola, 393 in Torrevieja, 401 in Punta Umbría and 400 in Matalascañas, according to the data sources available when analysing the sample (FAMILITUR, 2012). The last sample unit (the respondent) was chosen by random selection at peak times and in the most crowded areas of the towns (i.e. beaches during the day and commercial areas in the evening).

¹ $P = Q$, maximum $E = 0.06$, Conf. Level = 95.5%.

Table 1 Reasons for choosing a destination

Question: Please indicate three reasons why you have come to visit this area for your summer holiday (multi-answer, yes/no)
(1) I enjoy the area's climate
(2) I own a property here
(3) I have friends who spend their summers here
(4) It is the place where a member of my family used to come or still comes
(5) This is a place which has a special sentimental value for me (for my family)
(6) I enjoy spending time on the beach
(7) Nightlife
(8) Closeness to my habitual residence
Original survey formulation

Data Analysis

To determine whether loyalty to a mature residential tourist destination was related to tourists' social or emotional motivations (i.e. *socio-emotional* reasons), a two-phase analysis was carried out:

- (a) Firstly, a cluster analysis was made of the reasons for choosing the destination surveyed in TVC. In Table 1, the set of reasons and their original formulation in the survey are shown. To enquire into these reasons, dichotomous multi-response options were used (i.e. the interviewee could answer yes or no to each reason). All of the reasons contained in the questionnaire (except the option of "others", due to its low response frequency) were included in the clusters. The two-step method of clustering was selected due to its suitability to large samples (Cea, 2002).

Our analysis yielded three clusters to which almost all cases adhered.² Two of these, as we show below, had a high level of affinity with the concept of socio-emotional motivation in choice of destination. Our approach to grouping was verified with a multiple variance analysis. Therefore, in the analyses below, the independent variable adopts two values: either belonging to this group of cases (termed socio-emotionally motivated) or not.

- (b) Secondly, a bivariate analysis of this independent variable (socio-emotional motivation vs other motivation), obtained from the clustering, was carried out with each variable considered dependent in our hypothesis. The dependent variables (Table 2) refer, directly or indirectly, to destination loyalty and correspond to the indicators featured in the literature as valid for measuring loyalty. These are: (1) length of stay in a resort, where the holidaymakers who stayed longer were more loyal; (2) visiting the destination at times of year other than the summer and thus contributing to its de-seasoning, where the tourists who visited

²% of a typical cases inferior to 0.2%.

Table 2 Dependent variables

Question: How long will you be on holiday in this resort?
Answer options: One to two weeks/from 15 days to a month/between 1 and 2 months/between 2 and 3 months
Level of measurement: Ordinal
Question: In the last two years, have you visited this resort at times of year other than the summer?
Answer options: At Easter/long weekends/weekends (multi-answer)
Level of measurement: Each option is taken as a dichotomous nominal variable
Question: How many years approximately have you been spending your summer holidays at the same house or flat?
Answer options: This is the first year/between 2 and 5 years/between 6 and 10/between 10 and 20/more than 20 years
Level of measurement: Ordinal
Original survey formulation and level of measurement considered in the analysis

most at other times of year were more loyal; (3) and finally, we questioned respondents directly on destination loyalty, specifically asking how many years they had been visiting the resort.

In the bivariate relationship analysis we used the contingency coefficient for dichotomous variables and Cramer’s *V* for variables with more than three categories.

Reasons for Choice of Destination

The data obtained from the TVC survey showed a similar spread of reasons for choosing the destination to other studies on the same topic (Rioja, 2009). Affective reasons, friendships and family were shown to be strong motives for choosing a holiday resort. These three reasons together accounted for 57.85% of answers, positioning them as the second-ranking motive after climate, which totalled 74.2%, while the beach came in third place. Climate and the beach are the expected answers for destinations where sun and sand is the sole product; however, as Obrador and Caletrió’s work has shown, sun and sand have important qualitative attributes for tourists; in other words, they are much more than mere flat, sensory, physical spaces (Table 3).

Table 3 Reasons for choosing destination (multi-answer)

	%	<i>n</i>
Climate	74.18	1336
Socio-emotional reasons	57.77	1041
Beach	54.28	977
Own property	48.42	872
Closeness	12.10	218
Nightlife	6.55	118
Other	1.94	35

Source Authors

Socio-Emotionally Motivated Tourists and Destination Loyalty

Once the importance of socio-emotional reasons in the choice of destination had been established, it was necessary to determine which tourists could be defined as “socio-emotionally motivated”. Our cluster analysis yielded three groups into which 99.8% of the sample could be sorted (see Table 4).

It can be seen from the composition of the clusters (Table 5) that numbers 1 and 2 came closest to the visitor profile with socio-emotional ties to the residential tourist destination. These two groups together accounted for more than 75% of all interviewees, and the main difference to cluster 3 was found precisely in the items indicating socio-emotional reasons (friends, family and specifically the sentimental value of the destination for them). This table alone signals the substantial emotional content of the residential tourism resort. The compositional differences between clusters 1 and 2 were found mainly in nightlife, the beach and principally climate: the three reasons most chosen by group 1, particularly climate, present in 64% of its components (contrasting with none in group 2). Group 3 differentiated itself from the others mainly in the socio-emotional reasons, as we mentioned previously, and also because of the higher likelihood of having a second home in the resort (53%). This reason, combined with the differences in the “closeness” option (not chosen by anyone in this group), resulted in a group 3 profile of typically seasonal

Table 4 Distribution of clusters

	<i>N</i>	% of combined	% of total
Cluster 1	1.164	44.8	44.7
Cluster 2	794	30.6	30.5
Cluster 3	639	24.6	24.6
Combined	2.597	100.0	99.8
Excluded cases	5		0.2
Total	2.602		100.00

Source Authors

Table 5 Composition of clusters

Reasons	Cluster 1		Cluster 2		Cluster 3	
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
Friends	21.05	245	32.75	260	27.70	177
Family	24.57	286	32.12	255	0.00	0
Sentimental value	9.54	111	21.41	170	8.45	54
Climate	100.00	1.164	0.00	0	100.00	639
Own property	12.29	143	53.27	423	100.00	639
Beach	57.47	669	57.93	460	46.48	297
Nightlife	12.37	144	10.71	85	0.00	0
Closeness	21.74	253	31.61	251	0.00	0

Source Authors

holidaymakers, conforming to the tourist type seen in the literature as the “classical” domestic summer tourist with residential motives. In order to statistically verify the three-group clusters, we made a multiple variance analysis of the eight reasons for choice of destination. All the F tests showed significant mean differences between groups ($p < 0.000$; $p < 0.000$ for the Levene homogeneity of variance tests).

These results should be evaluated positively in the light of the sociological profiles of the residential tourists, especially in the case of this survey. As we remarked above, our study was carried out in residential tourism resorts in the south of Spain, which have habitually been taken as the model in research analysing residential tourism from the 1960s onwards (Fernández & Barrado, 2011; Nieves, Terán, & Martínez, 2008; Sousa, Matias, & Selva, 2016). Thus, our survey was undertaken with “pure type” of tourist, a model in itself, with a markedly homogeneous sociological profile. In our view, it is extremely interesting to find such clear statistical differences within this group.

In order to address our research question (differences in destination loyalty according to tourists’ socio-emotional motivations), we divided all cases into only two groups: socio-emotionally motivated (included in clusters 1 and 2) and non-socio-emotionally motivated (the remaining respondents). Tests for the relationship between reliability and belonging to one group or another yielded statistically significant results in all cases. In other words, socio-emotional reasons in choice of destination were related to loyalty. The values of the coefficients calculated varied between a minimum of 0.129 and a maximum of 0.295, while all showed very interesting values for statistical significance ($p < 0.000$ in all cases).

Observing in more detail the relationship between socio-emotional reasons and destination loyalty (Table 6), we can comment briefly on the behaviour of each fidelity indicator. In the first place, it can be seen that the longer the duration of the stay, the greater the probability of giving socio-emotional reasons. This tendency appears clearly, with socio-emotional reasons growing in importance over the length of the summer visit while other reasons progressively lose weight.

Table 6 Socio-emotional motivation and destination loyalty

		Rest		Socio-emot. motiv.		Totals
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
Duration of stay	One week–fortnight	948	52.56	377	47.44	1325
	15 days–one month	824	45.68	431	54.32	1255
	One month–two months	857	47.52	417	52.48	1274
	Two–three months	769	42.68	455	57.32	1224
Years holidaying in resort	First time	1186	65.79	272	34.21	1458
	2 years	1105	61.27	308	38.73	1413
	3 years	952	52.82	375	47.18	1327
	From 4 to 6 years	1055	58.50	329	41.50	1384
	From 7 to 9 years	968	53.70	368	46.30	1336
	From 10 to 12 years	1006	55.79	351	44.21	1357
	More than 12 years	677	37.55	496	62.45	1173
	Visits at Christmas	797	44.21	443	55.79	1240
Visits at Easter	809	44.85	438	55.15	1247	
Visits on long weekends	807	44.77	439	55.23	1246	
Visits at weekends	767	42.56	456	57.44	1223	
Only visits at summer	979	54.30	363	45.70	1342	

Although the tendency is not as clear in the direct indicator of loyalty (“years holidaying in the resort”), we found two indications that socio-emotionally motivated tourists were more loyal to the destination: (1) almost twice as many socio-emotionally motivated visitors chose the same destination for more than 12 years (the oldest) and (2) among first-time visitors, socio-emotional reasons were (almost) half as frequent as other reasons. General observation of the tables in this crossing of variables suggested that socio-emotional reasons gained weight with the repetition of summer visits to the same resort. This observation may be related to the increasing density of social relationships and the establishment and strengthening of emotional ties with the destination over the years.

Lastly, de-seasoning indicators also tended to confirm our hypothesis. The likelihood of finding socio-emotionally motivated tourists was greater at all times of the year except the summer. Only for the “pure” summer visitors (i.e. those who only visit during the summer) was this likelihood lower, with an interesting inversion of frequencies appearing.

Discussion and Conclusions

The data yielded by our TVC study concur with and support the work of Obrador et al. (2009), Caletrío (2009) and Nogués-Pedregal (2012c), all of whom offer a new and more complex view of the holidaymaker. Family relationships and friendships produced and reproduced during the holidays, in addition to affective identification with the resort, appeared as strong reasons for a sizeable segment of residential tourists when choosing their destination.

Our study thus shows the positive relationship between these socio-emotional reasons and residential tourists' loyalty to their summer destinations. It is notable that the longer the duration of the summer stay, the greater weight these reasons bore. Furthermore, they became more significant with the increase in the number of years visiting the same resort; so much so that "emotional" tourists were those who visited their second homes more often out of season, when neither climate nor beach (the classical attractions in Spanish residential tourism) were factors with a decisive or crucial interest for the resort.

The main limitation of this study is that our data were collected for a research project whose objectives were not specifically to analyse the social or emotional motivations of domestic holidaymakers. However, the research team found regularities which suggested the hypothesis we test here. The statistical techniques used were adapted to the situation revealed by our data, data which came from a "pure", homogeneous type of tourist, exactly as defined in the specialized literature. This is clearly an important limitation when distinguishing between "sub-profiles" corresponding to motivations for destination choice from within this "pure type". Here, our contribution is represented by our quantitative approach to research into social and emotional tourist motivations, and we would suggest that more quantitative studies specifically designed to analyse these motives be carried out.

The data yielded by our survey give quantitative support to the most innovative ethnographic analyses of summer tourism. Holidaymakers' cyclical visits to overdeveloped beach resorts can no longer be understood as a passive and alienating activity, conditioned by structural factors or pressures, or by material and economic calculation. On the contrary, destinations are given historical meaning, where the tourist's family meets other families and where, year after year, intense social relationships are recreated and strengthened. Thus, our summer resorts are becoming affective landscapes where highly valued personal relationships are constructed. Arguments of banality and superficiality found in the classic literature are being superseded by a new description of holidaymakers in highly developed resorts.

In the area of planning, our findings indicate the need to rethink objectives. Public intervention in the destinations analysed has traditionally been characterized by excessive growth in the supply of properties and attempts to enhance this supply through megaprojects (large-scale events, hypermarkets, emblematic buildings, etc.). These are politico-technocratic policy decisions in which local social actors rarely participate, and this approach is defined by its distance from the local context and its lack of consideration for tourists' needs and desires. Our data suggest alternatives

for local public policies that would be better oriented to visitors' real motivations. An important part of destination loyalty comes from factors closer to day-to-day sociability and personal interaction and from the preservation of a physical, social and affective landscape rich in meaning for the holidaymaker's personal history.

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