

DISCONTINUITIES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE MOST RECENT SPANISH TOURISM PLANS RELATED TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY OF SUN AND SAND TOURISM¹

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Tourism is a strategic activity for the Spanish economy, because of its compensatory effects on the imbalance in the balance of payments, and also due to its broad-based nature and its ability to provide momentum for other economic areas (Cuadrado Roura and López Morales, 2011). “Sun and sand” tourism is based on favourable weather conditions and on the use of natural resources in coastal areas. It is consumed *in situ* and therefore should not be considered in isolation from environmental planning or regional planning. Furthermore, its development should not exceed the capacity of the destinations involved (Vera Rebollo and Baños Castañera, 2004). In order to ensure the future sustainability of Spanish sun and sand tourism, it is necessary to address some of the environmental impacts it generates, which are mainly linked to its high spatial and seasonal concentration, overcrowding of the coast and the mass tourism that mainly affects the quality of the resources on which tourism is based, including sea water, beaches and the countryside. Sun and sand tourism must also face new challenges, including climate change. Public intervention is therefore necessary, and its effectiveness and relevance will be crucial in determining the success and future sustainability of tourist destinations. As a consequence, it is essential to analyse and increase the instruments for public action that enhance the sector’s future sustainability.

From the perspective of its environmental impact, the growth of sun and sand tourism in Spain has had shortcomings in planning. The lack of planning instruments was mentioned as early as the National Tourism Plan of 1953, but the first specific references

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to environmental sustainability did not appear until the second Futures Plan 1996-1999 (Velasco González, 2008). López Sanchez and Pulido Fernández (2013) believe that sustainability in Spanish tourism planning has been considered in a partial and mistaken light, and argue that many of the problems in the tourism sector are the result of an absence of strategic long-term planning guided by the criterion of sustainability. It is therefore necessary to analyse the environmental problems associated with coastal tourism in more depth, from the perspective of the policies that have been implemented in this area, and to study them from the perspective of Public Policy Analysis.

The main objective of this study is to undertake a critical analysis of the last three tourism plans approved in Spain, based on a specific study of their use of environmental sustainability criteria for sun and sand tourism. These three plans are: the Spanish Tourism Horizon Plan 2020; the Spanish Tourism Plan 0812, and the National Comprehensive Tourism Plan 2012-2015 (hereinafter Plan 2020, Plan 0812 and Plan 1215, respectively). Another two objectives arise from this primary objective: (1) to highlight the importance of argumentative analysis of the environmental issue in the context of tourism policies, while as can be seen in these plans, the same issue can be conceived, explained and prioritised in very different terms, with direct implications for the industry's future sustainability; and (2) to identify some of the traditional shortcomings in Spanish tourism planning, related to issues of environmental sustainability and insufficient coordination between tourism and environmental policy.

These objectives will be achieved by means of Public Policy Analysis. This approach means that the problem can be addressed from a new perspective, based on the conviction that a better knowledge of tourism policies will facilitate better management of tourism. Public Policy Analysis is understood herein to be a set of social science tools that enables research on public action, which can use different theoretical approaches, fulfil various purposes applied, focus on various objects of study, and use different techniques (Fisher et al., 2007; Parson, 1995; Subirats, 1989). Its development has enabled its theoretical and methodological approaches to be honed, and as a final step in the evaluation of results after the implementation of policies, has shifted the initial positivist interest focusing on the analysis of inputs and outputs towards more complex issues such as changes of scale in public policies in a globalised context, management of common property, the influence of ideas and paradigms, and the use of expert knowledge to justify decisions (Haguindéguy, 2015). In specific terms, this paper studies public policies focusing on environmental questions associated with the sustainability of tourism dynamics in sun and sand destinations, based on the perspective of analysing arguments and discourses (Fisher and Forester, 1993; Fisher and Gottweis, 2012). This is a critical, flexible and interpretive approach, which is very useful for analysing the complexity of the processes of public action related to tourism, and which has already been applied to other environmental issues (Hajer, 1993). The method consists of carrying out a critical and interpretive discourse analysis of the contents of the relevant public documents. A systematic review of the information shows not only the decisions taken, but also allows us to interpret and infer relevant details about the problems observed.

The method includes the following points: a) how the principle of environmental sustainability is included or otherwise in the vision of the plan; b) if the planning period

permits the inclusion of this strategic principle, which requires long periods of time to be established; c) whether the principle appears in the main strategic areas; d) whether the criteria for prioritisation (if any) determine compliance with this strategic principle; e) the proposals related to political coordination between tourism and the environment; and f) the frequency of keywords. For the purposes of the analysis to be performed, we propose six indicators for the six points mentioned above: 1) The strategic goal or vision; 2) The planning period (years); 3) The main strategic areas or lines; 4) The prioritisation criteria for the proposed measures; 5) Explicit coordination between tourism and the environment; 6) The frequency of keywords according to the subject concerned (*sustainable* or *sustainability*; and *environment* or *environmental*).

The results show that similarities, differences and restatements of environmental issues in tourism planning can be observed in Public Policy Analysis, and when linked to arguments and political ideas, they have influenced destinations' planning and success. Broadly speaking, the three plans analysed all mention the need to improve the tourism sector's coordination with other areas. They also include specific references to the environmental sphere, although these arguments are not always reflected in the measures proposed or their subsequent prioritisation. In general, the environment does not receive the attention it requires, considering that is a key resource for sun and sand tourism in Spain.

Discursive and argumentative research based on the content of tourism plans has identified discontinuities in the public authorities' understanding of the relationship between tourism and the environment, and consequently other discontinuities in the recognition and prioritisation of problems and in proposals of measures to manage tourism and the issues concerning it. For environmental issues, among others, political strategies that are longer-term than legislative cycles are essential, and this discontinuity is therefore a limitation on government and public action that determines the future sustainability of some destinations.

A comparison between the plans analysed leads to the conclusion that in Plan 1215, the environment is less important as an issue in its discourse and arguments than in the previous plan. Plan 2020 included the criterion of sustainability in its overall strategic vision, and even dedicates one of its core areas to the model's sustainability. The periods covered by the two plans also differ. Concerns about the sustainability of the model shown in Plan 2020 involved planning beyond the political cycle, and included a 14-year vision. However, the latest plan marks a return to tourism planning with four-year goals linked to electoral cycles. The references to the keywords reinforce this idea: *sustainable* or *sustainability* are mentioned more than one hundred times in Plan 2020, while they are only mentioned 35 times in Plan 1215. This is a decline of 67.6% - a figure very similar to the decline that occurred for the words *environment* and *environmental* (-64.5%), from 76 to only 27 references.

These plans highlight the need to improve coordination between the two policy areas (tourism and the environment), incorporating broad-based criteria of environmental sustainability and granting more weight than that reflected in the most recent nationwide tourism planning. Although the involvement of all stakeholders involved in tourism is necessary, it is the public sector that is able to lead and focus the sustainability of the tourism model.

Finally, the analysis highlights the need for a more in-depth study of tourism policies and public action for tourism, from the perspective of Public Policy Analysis. This will enable progress to be made on proposals for new analytical frameworks that provide a response to problems that have been persistent since the start of tourism and which have not been resolved. The methodology used allows us to analyse key issues in tourism planning based on tourism policy documents, and to understand the perspective of the public authorities in this regard. It is thereby possible to identify shortcomings in planning, in order to improve future instruments for intervention and to observe the evolution and continuity or otherwise of strategic ideas and concepts in tourism policies. From this perspective, it would be interesting to conduct further research which involves not only a longer evolutionary comparison, but also a synchronised comparison between different levels of government or between different destinations.