

TOURISM AND NATURAL RISKS IN THE “RIAS BAIXAS” (GALICIA). CASE STUDY

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Spain is a territory of risk. The innumerable dangers and natural risks, mainly of a climatic nature, complemented by the exorbitant growth of cities, happened in recent years, as well as urbanization processes, in many cases chaotic and without control, in some regions of our country, make the Spanish territory one of the countries with the highest levels of natural risk in Europe, with the impact that it entails at a territorial level, economic and, above all, human. And, the thing is, we must not forget that, the so-called “natural risks”, population affect, both residents and those who come to spend holiday or leisure seasons; thus affecting tourism activities, and, thus, generating a significant impact on the economy of a country like Spain. In this way, we must bear in mind that Spain is conceived as a “risk country” –exposed to risks, dangers and impacts, both natural and anthropic or technological–, consequence of the complexity of their physical environment –marked by its geographic location, topography and climatic diversity–, its growing, diverse population, and, above all, in continuous movement, as well as an economy oriented, in many regions, to tourism –unquestionably, marked by the attractiveness of its physical, human, social and economic environment. In this way, in the present research, we proceed to study and analyze the impacts and dangers to which both territories and their people are subjected and its tourist economic activities, consequence of the continuous incidence of the so-called “explosive cyclogenesis”, that mark the character of a space such as the one encompassed in the so-called Galician “Rías Baixas”, territory in which tourism activities benefit and, at the same time, they are harmed by a climate that sometimes generates traumatic processes in the aforementioned activities, with remarkable repercussions.

On the other hand, note that the assessment of natural risks from the perspective of tourism activities is framed within the scope of territorial processes, whose realities are specified in the consequences derived from the enormous complexity generated by the spatial differentiation generated by the tourist activities themselves; in its relationship with the physical environment, they come into contact with meteorological phenomena that entail

risks, which are increased when the areas in which they are given conform in themselves “territories at risk”. While, it is not less true, that when we talk about the risks, dangers, damages and, in the last case, anthropic impacts, properly said, we must point out that, from a tourism perspective, over the last decades, in Spain, and specifically in Galicia, important changes are taking place; it is impressive to observe, as Leoncio Urabayen said “that the Earth was humanized “, as has happened in Spain.

The present research shows us how tourism and their activities, in the “Rías Baixas” it is associated to the fact that the development that a society tries to reach, it should be compatible with the respect, care and preservation of the social group of which it is conformed, as well as environment and the medium on which they settle. It presents the need to calculate, know and prevent extreme weather events. It is inferred that we must study and know phenomena that can have a decisive influence on the offer, and, to “posteriori”, in the tourist offer, in such a way that you get the best out of a natural resource as valuable as the weather.

However, in the present moments, the coordination between these supposed ideals, are threatened by all those risks, that from the climate are generated on the environment that affects, impacting in turn on the organized society, and tourist activities. The free development of an advanced and modern society is endangered that not only has the right to enjoy an adequate environment recognized, of a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, although on many occasions citizens are not given the opportunity -as fundamental pieces of the social entity that are-, to comply with a series of obligations that may allow them to conserve the environment that belongs to them by right. All this, in the context that the global climate is being significantly altered. It is being verified, that in recent decades there has been a warming resulting from the so-called anthropogenic environmental change, in part, the result of human activities.

It is generated then, in the duality “explosive cyclogenesis” vs tourist activities in Galicia, in general, and in the “Rías Baixas”, in particular, an image of vulnerability that can be cataloged as a “socio-natural” type, intervening “socio-historical” factors, in which the consequences on tourism activities can be seen at least nuanced through proper risk management, inherent to one’s vulnerability. From this perspective, the fact that in the “Rías Baixas” there are remarkable densities of population, above vulnerability increases in a very important way before phenomena such as those described; aspect that is aggravated to tourism (question that acquires remarkable interest when dealing with the change in the development model that is being experienced in the territory studied, from a model based on fishing, forest and agriculture plus livestock, towards another in which the economic and social reality begins to be characterized by the predominance of a service sector, in which tourism activities are opening up, although very slowly, due to natural phenomena such as “explosive cyclogenesis”, among others).

The risks studied in the present study, without a doubt, they affect notably in the tourist destinations of our study area, generating, in many cases a large amount of crisis. The tourist activities of the area are enormously vulnerable in situations such as those described; however, they usually recover with enormous rapidity, helping to the rapid restitution of the tourist image of the destination. In spite of everything the economic repercussions of the same ones affect not only to the general economy of the territory, but also to the

economic sectors related to tourism, vulnerable in a range of crisis we could say superior, and with a wider frequency, based on expectations, which can be altered if the ideas that the demand is made is affected, hence, proper crisis management is needed, aspect that in the previous cases, did not come to be perceived clearly and concisely (in fact, the study of the consequences of previous meteorological phenomena, is reduced to “short-term” issues, limited in space and time).

The Environment that surrounds us in our study area, fragile and often deteriorated and degraded, must be careful, through effective conservation measures, integrating itself into the economic development model, which in the case of Spain, in general, and of Galicia, in particular, is determined by the search for growth, often leaving in sight some of its deficiencies when combining it, with an equitable and equal distribution of wealth and per capita income of its inhabitants, that undoubtedly allows to develop and obtain a greener environment or if you prefer, healthier for the whole citizenry, protecting it from the different “risks, dangers, impacts and disasters”, as those generated by the so-called “explosive cyclogenesis”, that periodically affect the “Rías Baixas”. These are phenomena that reduce the tourist potential of this region of Atlantic Spain.

