

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

MAGALUF: FACING A DISRUPTIVE TOURISTIC PLACE (MALLORCA, SPAIN)

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In this research we have focused on the case of the tourist destination of Magaluf in Mallorca. From the perspective of the anthropology of tourism, we have reviewed the numerous and varied antecedents from a critical perspective, established on the definition of disruptive place, to deepen in second place, in the significance from the experiences of tourists in that journey of escape. Finally, we have concluded on the value of these places to open gaps, on destinations as unique places.

1. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY: A DISRUPTIVE PLACE

Magaluf has become one of those mass, sun and beach tourist destinations that is almost impossible to avoid when studying tourism in Mallorca. Its international renown related to the so-called party tourism, has led to an interest in its academic study, very marked by deep polarisations. On the one hand, from the point of view mainly external to the destination, the excesses of this destination are denounced, as well as the ways to stop it, while, on the other hand, there are some precedents that validate the libertarian character, with the emphasis placed on the tourists themselves, without weighing up the consequences of the collateral consequences that derive (psychosocial, tourist image). However, regardless of the reference point and the approach from which it is analysed, all agree in admitting that this tourist destination manages to leave no one indifferent and ends up becoming a recognised place.

In this research we wanted to demonstrate precisely this controversial character as the central element that defines this disruptive and dystopian place. Sometimes certain places become known for satisfying needs that cannot be met elsewhere, and this leads us to understand their relevance. Its recognition allows us to understand its referent and to be able to adapt its forms from diverse logics and to take advantage of the legacy in its difference.

In order to achieve these objectives, an ethnographic methodological approach has been implemented. From the perspective of the anthropology of tourism, this complex approach allows us to move away from the usual pigeonholing of the destination with respect to the tourist-local polarisation of other more classical perspectives, and at the

same time adapts to the disruptive nature of the destination under study. The innovation of this work has been to provide an instrument that recognises the destination from its particularity and removes it from the usual stigmatisations resulting from the application of generic methodologies. The disruptive nature of the project fades away with the application of an adapted methodology that allows us to recognise its potential, both for further research and for concrete practical solutions. The ethnographic approach also provides a collateral advantage, as it is expressed in a transversal language that can be easily adopted by both academic interdisciplinarity and the general public.

In concrete terms, a mixed methodology has been implemented in order to complement from different angles and to be able to counteract and corroborate the information obtained. Firstly, indirect information has been obtained from the testimonies gathered in some of the previous works carried out on Magaluf. Secondly, fieldwork was carried out during a week in July 2023. Thirdly, 25 testimonies were collected (between tourists and workers). Fourthly and lastly, we also dug out the press on the Magaluf case (both local and British).

2. INTRODUCTION: THE QUEEN OF THE NIGHT

The construction of the imaginary of Magaluf as ‘the queen of the night’ has been relatively rapid (in less than 20 years) and has been brought about by the role played by the media in its dissemination, as well as in its reaction.

The origins of myths are often uncertain, as they are based on the sudden collective capacity to become irrationally attached to certain imaginaries. In any case, Magaluf came to represent a transgressive myth that captured an existing demand, in a very specific tourism niche. Its image became the best claim to represent an idealisation of a type of tourism, based on the practices of sociability and relaxation, as well as gambling to a lesser extent. Its existence materialised a concept in a place and became a mecca for its public. However, the success of its marginality would end up arousing the adverse reaction of the rest of the island destinations that were affected by the contagion of Magaluf’s image, and would initiate a counter-offensive process to reconvert the destination, without understanding that their reaction participated in the reinforcement of its image and its propagation.

3. DEVELOPMENT: TRAVEL AS RENEWAL

The testimonies collected by the tourists highlight the idea of travel as a form of renewal, and in this sense recover the basic idea of tourism, by leaving one’s comfort zone in order to experience and grow as a person. Despite the controversies generated, party tourism resembles a form of tourism and management that is much more classical and closer to the model developed by mass (Fordist) tourism, but adapted to postmodernity. It is a popular form of tourism, often still organised by companies specialised in stag and hen party tourism and end-of-studies trips (called Hen party, stag party, stag do, stag weekend, bachelor party or buck’s night). Package tours usually include flights with low-cost airlines, accommodation and travel to the destination of the stay exclusively, although sometimes it can also include tickets to events and clubs (as in the case of Ibiza). This form

of tourism considers the destination almost as if it were a form of resort in a concentrated and easily manageable way. Consequently, the impact on the rest of the territory is almost nil, as they practically never leave the destination, and even more so if we consider that they usually go out at night and spend the day sleeping or on the beach.

The maintenance of this traditional model of organised travel, in the party sector, is curiously similar to that of the senior segment and it is not so much a reaction to new technologies, but rather because in both cases it is group tourism, which makes this option more profitable, easier to book and even more favoured by the double insular nature of origin and destination (by making it more complicated to arrive by car). Most young party tourists tend to go in groups from their place of origin in order to share the experience together, as well as to feel safer as in some cases it is the first time they have left home.

However, the specialised concentration on the same destination, as well as often on the same places of origin (which translates into very specific and concentrated flights in the central area of England such as Birmingham, Durham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Nottingham, Newcastle and to a lesser extent Edinburgh, Glasgow, Belfast and London) means that even if a young person goes alone, they meet up with their peers in Magaluf. The renowned nightlife of Newcastle and central England brings this pop culture to Magaluf. This type of tourist destination concentrates leisure activities in very limited spaces, with a lesser impact, for example, than in cities that have become party destinations, such as Prague, Amsterdam or Malaga.

Several aspects converge in English party tourism in Magaluf. Firstly, young English tourists come to this destination as a getaway on a trip that has become almost an initiation step that they even mark for their memories, getting a tattoo of the island (very typical) as a souvenir of their experience. Secondly, the mass tourist destination of sun and beach has ended up becoming an ideal, as it has managed to satisfy the emptiness and deficiencies of groups who, tired of feeling excluded at home, have found in Magaluf a refuge where they can be, without being judged internally. It is no longer a passing fad as initially believed, but has become a milestone that participates in the recognition of a very specific subculture, which has ended up being recognised as a phenomenon of its own and popularised. Under the sun, the mirage becomes a reality and allows for a healing catharsis, in its collective and individual recognition. The journey to the place (its mecca) is the culmination of a process, but at the same time, in a certain way, it allows us to rediscover the healing place of the journey and the very reason for tourism itself. Its experimentation to fill the void may be seen outwardly as superficial or reprehensible, but perhaps we do not all have the same social right to a holiday equally.

4. CONCLUSION: THE ABYSS OF EMPTINESS

In this research we have analysed how the anonymity of tourist culture has sheltered young people in certain mass tourism destinations of sun and beach, who find in travel a form of escape from their exclusion of origin. Beyond the criticisms raised by the image generated and its impact on more regional tourism, as well as, in opposition, on the more paternalistic and condescending visions, focused on the right to experience for all, the disruptive approach from the perspective of tourist culture allows us to move beyond

dualisms and go deeper into the understanding of the appearance, meaning and necessity of these spaces which have ended up becoming, despite the lack of support, international benchmarks.

Despite how new it may seem, due to the media coverage, party destinations have a long tradition. Even in more puritanical societies, we find reactionary spaces that have concentrated leisure, outside of normative norms. Cities such as Paris for late 19th and early 20th century Europe, or more recently Las Vegas for the United States, Macao for China or even Bangkok, mainly for the Asian continent, have become necessary places. In addition, one might also consider the long tradition of certain 'red light districts' and port areas in many cities, commonly associated with the 'underworld' and the 'bohemian' character. These invisible places serve as escape valves and show in a way the cracks in the functioning of the system. Unlike other places that are defined by exclusion, in this case, they are constructed from the agglutination of a diversity made possible by the emptiness of the places on which they are established. The impossibility of their formal recognition does not prevent them from existing and becoming disruptive spaces from which to see the collective abyss of the forgotten and excluded, as well as their economic, social and cultural potential for the destination and for all those involved.