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Consequences of mass tourism in Mallorca

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Is “quality tourism” a sustainable alternative to solve the environmental problems in Calvià, Mallorca?

Paper

by

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1 Introduction: Tourism and the Balearic Islands

Tourism is one of the most important sectors for Mallorca's economy. Within the Mediterranean area no other region is as strongly determined by the tourist industry as the Balearic Islands which Mallorca belongs to. 84% of their GNP is gained from the tertiary sector¹ that tourism vastly contributes to. Their unemployment rate is the lowest and their GNP the highest of all Spanish regions².

Unlike any other destination in Southern Europe Mallorca is connected with the term of mass tourism.

But mass tourism did not only bring economic success to the island of Mallorca. Positive consequences are on the contrary overshadowed by the serious negative effects of failed regional planning and unlimited exploitation of natural resources.

In order to counteract these problems the Balearic government introduced policies which aim at a reorganization of the touristic structures promoting the so-called "quality tourism". "Quality tourism" is supposed to relieve touristic centres and attract a clientele with a stronger purchasing power.

In this paper I am going to first point out Mallorca's touristic development and its consequences for the environment by the example of Calvià, a region in the South-West of Mallorca. Secondly, I will analyse the advantages and disadvantages of "quality tourism", so that thirdly, a profound judgement whether "quality tourism" offers a sustainable development can be made.

2 The development of mass tourism on the Balearic Islands by the example of Calvià, Mallorca

Calvià has become one of the most important touristic regions in the Balearic Islands. With its centres of touristic attraction Palma Nova, Magalluf, Santa Ponca and Peguera and with a number of about 1.6 million visitors annually³ (about 25% of all Mallorcan tourists⁴) it is now the richest municipality of Spain.

The development of tourism in Calvià began with the first boom of international tourism in Spain in the early sixties.

In 1959 the Spanish government took steps to assist the tourist industry by simplifying the procedure of visiting the country. At that time Europe had begun to recover from World War II

¹ Vgl. Schmitt S. 83

² Vgl. www.mallorca.de

³ Vgl. www.un.org

⁴ Vgl. Schmitt S. 47

and gained new economic power entailing a higher purchasing power and thus more money to spend on holidays. As the Balearic Islands were now much cheaper than the rest of Europe, they were a major destination within the touristic boom in the 1960's.⁵ Based on the model of "sun and beaches"⁶ Mallorca became a popular region of mass tourism with its centres developing at the coastline.

Calvià is located at the south coast of the country possessing 57 kilometres of beaches and cliffs which make it a perfectly suitable destination for mass tourism. Additionally, it is situated in short distance of the airport of Palma, which makes it easily accessible. It has developed an extensive infrastructure with five marines and various maritime promenades.⁷

Since the 1960's Calvià's wealth has resulted from these centres that attract ¼ of all Mallorquian tourists.⁸

But in the euphoria of the touristic boom regional planning and the organization of building hotels and touristic leisure facilities in an environmentally friendly way was left out completely. The model of tourism development in Mallorca has been "based on short-term interest, unlimited building out of tune with local conditions, and an unsustainable exploitation of exceptional natural resources".⁹

3 Consequences

3.1 Economically outstanding

Economically speaking, Calvià has profited exceptionally from the tourist boom and the lasting attraction of the region. It is an incentive for an over 1.6 million people-strong flow of visitors every year to spend their holidays there and also for a lot of immigrants to settle in this area as they have found work in the prosperous tertiary sector.

The municipality has 40,000 inhabitants and includes 267 establishments attached to the hotel industry as well as a total of 120,000 touristic positions (hotels, flats and touristic residences). Moreover there are about 31,793 people employed in restaurant-bars, 2,057 in vehicle rental, 483 in supermarkets, 398 in souvenir shops and another 1,684 work in other tourist facilities. In addition to that 1,402 run beach businesses and 18,003 are involved in

⁵ Vgl. www.newsmallorca.com

⁶ www.un.org

⁷ Vgl. ebd.

⁸ Vgl. Schmitt S. 47

⁹ www.un.org

providing tourist activities. It has also been estimated that Calvià owns a total number of 61,749 vacancies.¹⁰

Referring to these figures it becomes perfectly obvious that the tourist industry providing 85% of the Balearic Island's GNP, is the major source of income for the municipality of Calvià. Consequently its economy is entirely reliant upon it.

3.2 Environmentally devastating

At the end of the 1980's the effects of excessive urbanization as well as of the high touristic demands and consumption became obvious. The "inharmonious development"¹¹ of the mass centre of Calvià degraded landscape and environment and especially affected the beaches and cliff-sides.

3.2.1 Water consumption

Calvià's ground water table sunk to an alarmingly low level (18% of the original maximum volume in 2001)¹². Only in the years from 1960 to 1987 the area that had to be irrigated grew by 140%, from 12,219 hectare up to 29,128 hectare. Although a large part of the ground water was consumed by the agricultural sector (60%), a decisive amount of it now has come to be used for the irrigation of huge gardens which have developed due to the blatantly increasing building of weekend houses and second homes. Furthermore, the irrigated area within hotel grounds and tourist facilities, especially that of newly created golf courses, contributed considerably to the constantly increasing water consumption. Taking into account that Calvià's enormously growing population poses a great demand for water as well, the conclusion that the water consumption by far outstrips its production (collection of precipitation and production of desalination plants) can easily be made. The exploitation of water resources has additionally led to a decisive desalination of the ground water that makes it hard and even sometimes impossible for the processing plants to provide healthy drinking water. In some regions drinking from the water tap is restricted by the World Health Organization (WHO).¹³

¹⁰ Vgl. www.calvia.com

¹¹ www.un.org

¹² Vgl. Mallorca-Magazin Nr. 58

¹³ Vgl. Schmitt Ss.95/96

3.2.2 Deterioration of the landscape

Apart from the appalling water scarcity posing a huge problem to Calvià as to the whole of Mallorca, the area consumption in this region is outstandingly high. The percentage of tarmac covered surface area as a consequence of the creation of tourist facilities and infrastructure has increased dramatically in the last three decades. That is why the original and characteristic structure of biotopes has been damaged to a great extent. Within the touristic centres at the coast natural habitats have almost been destroyed completely.

According to an accounting of the distribution of the entire area of Calvià made by Schmitt¹⁴ in 1991 the build-up-area has quadrupled in the years from 1968 to 1991 (+311.6%). The area used for infrastructural development has increased by 155.3% and there have been created grounds for leisure-time activities and leisure parks in the size of 19,2064 square metres altogether making up 1.9% of the surface area of the whole region of Calvià. The most striking figures are the alarmingly high increase of wasteland by 280% and the blatant extension of urban areas by 1024.4% in the course of the years. In 1991 fallow land made up 10.2% of Calvià's total area. The accounting of forests shows that original forests (e.g. Olea-Pistacia-Macchie) have decreased and new forest compositions and structures have developed (forests with poor undergrowth). This development consequently led to an increase of forests (+32.5%). But contrary, the Triften, Garigue and Macchie population as well as cultivated fields and pastures have been reduced to approximately half of their original area. In fact it becomes perfectly clear, that this development does not show an increase of natural areas, but points out the remarkably high amount of damaged environmental structures or completely wiped-out biotopes. Apart from that, coastal areas (-31.3%), swamps (-89%) and moist grounds (-6.1%) are very much on the decline. Likewise sandy beaches have been extended (+12.8%) by additional deposits in order to widen the original beaches and thus meet tourist demands. Dunes have been leveled to a great extent and are now exposed to a real strain caused by their permanent usage by walkers. Apart from that waste deposits and constant grading have harmed the coastal biotopes.¹⁵ As a consequence a lot of coastal areas have been changed completely in terms of their natural ecosystems, vegetation structures and biologically determined cycles.

As these figures comprise accountings of the entire area of Calvià, one can imagine the circumstances prevailing in its centres of touristic mass attraction. Their landscape is dramatically marked by an enormous area consumption which includes a high level of air pollution that resulting from massive vehicle exhausts. Area consumption is mainly propelled by the demands of an enormous flow of visitors that is on top of that highly centralized in the

¹⁴ Vgl. Schmitt Ss.312/313

¹⁵ Vgl. ebd. Ss. 112/113

coastal areas. Additionally, its seasonality renders it even more concentrated and intensive. Most of the time, this results in the total degradation of soil and the complete destruction of natural systems and entire species.

3.2.3 Reasons

This fierce environmental destruction is due to the failed regional planning of the government of the Balearic Islands. Since the 1980's Mallorca was said to be an example for touristic mismanagement.¹⁶ The island's government obviously was not at all able to cope with the touristic wave that swept Mallorca. Although it actually had released urbanization laws, their effects turned out to be rather contra-productive than capable of regulating the islands "urbanización"¹⁷. This fact resulted in a completely haphazard and wild manner of building irrespective of any regional order and environmental conditions. Nowadays a great amount of formally constructed streets is not even used regularly as they turn out to have become nothing but sealed lines in the landscape.

That is why the absolutely urgent necessity of protecting those areas that are still intact in order to maintain their natural structures and biotopes has to be pointed out.

In addition to that the island's water problem that results from the lack of timely planning of water capacities and of a proper water supply and distribution, is one of undoubted urgency. Affecting all economic sectors and posing an excessive threat for the environment, it has to be tackled immediately by restoring the exploited water reserves.

These are two main aspects of environmental challenges in the region of Calvià.

4 Solutions

4.1. First solutions of the Balearic government

Obviously there seems to be a severe conflict between the manner of tourist development and the environmental protection in Calvià. As these problems are absolutely evident and not at all deniable, the Balearic government was forced to take countermeasures against the frequently progressing destruction of the environment. This for sure has decisive consequences for the continued existence of the tourist sector as the major source of income, for the population of Calvià is entirely reliant upon it. At the latest, the recession in

¹⁶ Vgl. Mallorca-Magazin Nr. 87

¹⁷ Vgl. Schmitt. S.94

1974 which had drastic effects on Mallorca's tourist industry resulting in the worst economical year since the Spanish Civil War forced the Balearic government to become aware of the constantly deteriorating environmental situation the island had to face. It could not be denied any longer that the scarcity of water and the degradation of the natural landscape had had their effects on the general touristic demand, for no hotel and no leisure facility can be run without water. Likewise the touristic demands sunk with the progressing environmental pollution.

Confronted with these concerns the Balearic government launched a range of diverse programmes in order to at least stop environmental degradation. Problems were widespread: On the one hand demonstrations against infrastructural extension as e.g the creation of a new highway were held, while on the other hand, the ecotax "Ecotasa" that had been introduced in 2001 was thwarted by the massive protest of hoteliers and thus abolished again two years later.¹⁸

In 2001 the Hydrological Plan for the Balearic Islands (PHIB) was introduced by the Balearic government including an increased employment of desalination facilities to compensate for the high water demand in an appropriate way. This, on the other hand, resulted in an extremely high energy consumption. In addition to that this calculation is heavily dependent upon rainfall (20% of the island's water supply are provided by desalination plants¹⁹) which does not lack a certain risk taking into account that Mallorca is likely to be affected by periodical droughts²⁰. In addition to that these measures do not achieve any restoration of the ground water²¹ as it would be needed to achieve an improvement of the environmental situation and in order to be prepared for years of low precipitation.

Overall, this plan does not offer any concrete improvements.

Momentarily, real sustainable improvement is tried to be achieved.

4.2 "Quality tourism" as a sustainable means of touristic development

Since the keyword 'sustainable development' has emerged, everybody is talking about it.

The Balearic government has promoted "quality tourism" as a means of touristic re-orientation aiming at the development towards this supposedly sustainable form of tourism. In Calvià such projects have already begun to develop.

¹⁸ Vgl. www.mallorca.de

¹⁹ Vgl. Mallorca-Magazin Nr.164

²⁰ Vgl. www.2uah.es

²¹ Vgl. Mallorca-Magazin Nr. 164

“Nowadays, environmental protection and tourism have to go hand in hand”, states Wolf Michael Iwand, environmental manager of the TUI corporation.²²

The sustainability of this new scheme is to be proved in the following.

4.2.1 Definition and major aims of application

“Quality tourism” is a form of “soft tourism”. The term “soft tourism” represents environmental and social compatibility as its priorities. In terms of environmental protection this means the creation of a balance between tourism and natural structures and resources²³. Consequently “soft tourism” is only practicable with a limited number of visitors.

In the region of Calvià quality tourism is estimated to attract a clientele with a higher purchasing power. Apart from that the inland is to be opened up in order to decentralize the massive touristic influence on the very centres and likewise to disperse the concentration of visitors on one season²⁴ by offering activities that are independent from the principle of “sun and beaches” that used to characterize the Mallorquian tourism since its boom in the 1980’s. “Quality tourism” comprises three different kinds of alternative touristic offers.

4.2.1.1 “Gulf tourism”

With the establishment of gulf courses and luxury hotels the government pursues two main aims. On the one hand a higher class of tourists is to be attracted (gulf tourists spend five times more money per day than the “average tourist”²⁵, and on the other hand the tourist industry is to be diversified in order to limit its seasonality. The gulf courses are mainly built on fields that formally have been used for dry farming. They are planned to be irrigated by used water, but this rule has not been stuck to yet.

4.2.1.2 “Nautic tourism”

Nautic tourism does also aim at the attraction of a clientele with a higher purchasing power. It comprises the extension as well as the new creation of harbours at the coastline in order to establish high-tech docks and yacht clubs. In 1994 500 million DM (250 million Euro) have already been gained by this touristic section.²⁶

²² Mallorca Magazin Nr.87

²³ Vgl. Entwicklung durch Tourismus? M7

²⁴ Vgl. Schmitt S. 244

²⁵ Vgl. ebd. S 240

²⁶ Vgl. ebd. S.237

4.2.1.3 “Agro-tourism”/“ecotourism”

The increased offer of holidays in the countryside aims at the decentralization of the massive touristic influence by relieving the coastal areas and its mass destination.

In 1968 the “Associació de Agroturisme Balear” was founded which concentrated on the establishment of this touristic branch section.

As this alternative form of tourism requires the opening up of the inland laws had to be introduced in order to regulate the development of this “Turisme Rural”. Meanwhile the “Conselleria de Turisme” had become aware of the fact that new developments needed to be directed and regulated in advance. It set up regulations that define ecotourism as being divided into three permissible categories²⁷.

The first category, “Turisme Rural” (rural tourism), comprises houses outside built-up areas that were constructed before 1940. These buildings must not be changed neither in architecture nor in size and their capacity must be limited to 50 beds in 25 rooms. The estates attached have to consist of at least 50,000 square metres.

The second category is the so-called “Agroturisme” (farm holidays). To be allowed to offer “Agroturisme” the houses must comprise a minimum holding size of 25,000 square metres and must have been build before 1960. Apart from the fact that their capacities are limited to 12 rooms and 24 beds, they are obliged to ensure continued agricultural activities.

The third category, “Turisme Interior” (tourism in the interior of the island), includes houses within built-up areas that are located in a minimum distance of 500 metres of tourist centres. Their construction must have taken place before 1940 and their maximum offer is permitted to comprise 16 beds in eight rooms. Additionally it has been laid down that one proprietor is not allowed to run more than three houses at the same time.

Ecotourism as well entails an increase of the price level. It is closely attached to touristic offers like wandering and bycycle riding.

4.2.2 Evaluation: “Quality tourism”

4.2.2.1 “Gulf tourism” and “nautic tourism”

The establishment of gulf courses as well as the creation of new yacht harbours and clubs achieve a limitation of tourist number without having to forfeit the amount of income. By rising the price level and by attracting a target group with a higher purchasing power the average

²⁷ Vgl. Schmitt S. 242

attendance can be reduced. At the same time the output accounted for by the tourist sector can be maintained nevertheless. Apart from that decentralization is achieved, for the gulf courses are created in the interior of the region. This way the coastal mass centres with their excessive touristic usage are relieved. Additionally, the seasonality of the “sun and beach-type tourism” is counterbalanced by the attractiveness of the touristic offer throughout the whole year.

In the region of Calvià there have already been created a decisive amount of such gulf tourism facilities. In Santa Porca, for example, four gulf courses have been built entailing extensive infrastructural supplements and the creation of large luxury hotel complexes.²⁸ Obviously, this form of tourism does not only promote positive effects, but does also have a lot and actually very decisive disadvantages. By the building of hotel grounds, gulf courses and a new infrastructure the area consumption is rather promoted than limited. The sites have to be connected so that the changing of courses which is a tourist attraction, is ensured. This again results in additional creation of infrastructure. Apart from the deteriorated coastal centres, the environmental structures and agricultural areas in the inland are affected. Consequently, this development does only mean a shift of the environmental problems and a distribution of the touristic usage additionally spreading to those areas, which are still intact. Moreover, gulf tourism poses a huge demand for water in order to irrigate the large gulf courses (about 1% of Mallorca’s entire water consumption is due to the irrigation of these courses²⁹) and to keep the newly created hotel complexes running. As a consequence it has to be pointed out that the additional water consumption is not at all favourable for the original plan of restoring exploited ground water reserves (cf. chapter 3.2). The only means of solving this problem would be the usage of industrial water for the irrigation of the gulf courses, that is planned to become stipulated in the future³⁰. These measures would at least regulate the problem of water consumption by imposing restriction on the extension of this new form of tourism.

A huge disadvantage of the yacht tourism is the building of high-tech harbours within new coastal strips that have still remained fairly untouched. This leads again to a higher degree of urbanization, air pollution and consequently to environmental destruction and an increase in area consumption. Furthermore, the pollution of the water by waste and by fuel exhausts poses an additional threat to maritime biotopes.

Overall, by a more profound analysis of yacht and gulf tourism as new means of sustainable development, it becomes perfectly clear that these alternatives may aim at some important

²⁸ Vgl. www.un.org

²⁹ Vgl. Mallorca Magazin Nr.164

³⁰ Vgl. Schmitt S. 240

goals, yet their implementation turns out to be not at all compatible with environmental protection.

This conclusion is a further incentive to have a closer look at the third form of quality tourism.

4.2.2.2 “Agrotourism”

Like any other form of tourism agro tourism does not lack the risk of becoming rather a strain for the environment. Favourable aspects of “ecotourism” are that it aims at the usage of houses that are already existing and that the amount of capacities is kept on a limited level, only permitting a stipulated amount of beds to be offered by each “hotel”. Moreover, it ensures an at least partially continued agricultural cultivation. Additionally, it offers a sociological advantage, for native people are connected more closely with the application of this form of tourism. Instead of only providing leisure activities for the visitors they are involved to a far greater extent being not only allowed but actually wanted to keep up their cultural structures (lifestyle, architecture etc.).

Nevertheless the penetration of a strong flow of visitors sweeping the interior of the region might lead to further load for the environment caused by the permanent usage by walkers and additional waste deposits. In comparison to “yacht and gulf tourism”, it is undoubtedly a very effective touristic alternative to be applied in Calvià.

4.3 Conclusion and future proposals

In my opinion “agrotourism” is the right approach to achieve the goal of diverting Calvià’s tourist industry towards a sustainable development. As it has become perfectly obvious from the analysis done in chapter 3, Calvià is heavily dependent upon the tourist sector. The following analysis of the effects that this tourist development has had on the environment (cf. chapter 3.2) points out the urgent necessity of changing the touristic structures in Calvià as within the entire island of Mallorca and the Balearic Islands. This becomes even clearer taking into account that a lot of new tourist policies have already failed (cf. chapter 4.1) or are not at all sustainable solutions for the two main problems that Calvià faces: The alarmingly high water scarcity and the decisive deterioration of natural biotopes and life cycles (cf. chapter 3.2). When analysing “quality tourism” (cf. chapter 4.2) which has been promoted by the Balearic government as a form of “soft tourism”, this examination points out that “gulf and yacht tourism” may be able to limit tourist numbers, yet this happens at the expense of the environment leading to additional damage (cf. chapters 4.2.2.1). The third form of “quality

tourism", "agrotourism" or "ecotourism", offers a greater range of conclusive advantages (cf. chapter 4.2.2.2).

After having analysed its aims and applications, I have come to the conclusion that, if regulated and controlled properly, "agrotourism" could be a sustainable alternative to decrease the touristic strain on Calvià's environment. Additionally, it is highly compatible with the maintenance of social structures and, according to my opinion, will experience a far greater acceptance by the native population.

Moreover, the development of "agrotourism" causes the price level of average holidays to rise, so that consequently the economy is not affected by the limitation of visitor numbers that is entailed by this reorganization of tourist structures. In my eyes, Calvià's economy will even profit from this diversified touristic offer. Indeed, mass tourism, the present major contributor of Calvià's economy, might soon lose its attractiveness being a concomitant of the gradual environmental deterioration (cf. chapter 4.1).

Overall, I find the measure of promoting "agrotourism" to be the most sustainable form of development in Calvià. If visitors could be motivated to obey some environmental rules and be made aware of the need for an environmentally friendly behaviour, this form of tourism could be a great opportunity. As inquiries show, there is a high touristic demand for "holidays on farms" and a clear trend towards "ecotourism"³¹. This demand again would have to be regulated by the municipality of Calvià, for it is only compatible with environmental protection as long as it is limited and controlled. If not, touristic overexertion would again only lead to a distribution of the gradual environmental degradation of the coastal areas all over the island.

The most important measures to ensure a balance between tourism and environment could be a strict regulation of the flow of visitors, a proper signposting of hiking trails and cycle paths, the integration of the native population and an increased offer of guided tours.

"Agrotourism" is the only sustainable form of "quality tourism". The observance of the above-mentioned rules being provided, it could be a great chance to solve Calvià's environmental problems.

³¹ Vgl. Mallorca-Magazin Nr. 87

5 Literature

5.1 Secondary literature

Schmitt, Thomas: Ökologische Landschaftsanalyse und -bewertung in ausgewählten Raumeinheiten Mallorcas als Grundlage einer umweltverträglichen Tourismusentwicklung
Steiner, Franz, Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH, Sitz Stuttgart, **1998**

5.2 Sites from the internet

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<http://www.calvia.com/Pages/Idiomas/Ingles/Pages/econ/iecon.htm>

<http://www.mallorca.de> **(23.02.2004)** - Emotionaler Zwiespalt
In: Die Bevölkerung
http://www.mallorca.de/die_insel/bevoelkerung.shtml

<http://www.mallorca.de> **(16.02.2004)** Ecotasa – Eine Steuer für die Umwelt
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Ökosteuer „Ecotasa“ abgeschafft (25. Oktober 2003)
In: Reise und Tourismus – Allgemeine Infos
<http://www.mallorca.de/tourismus/ecotasa.shtml>

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<http://www.mallorcamagazin.net/thema.dba?164+1+3113>
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<http://www.mallorcamagazin.net/nachrichten.dba?58+2+1170>

<http://www.mallorcamagazin.net> **(14.03.2004)** – Gabriele Küster: Musterbeispiel Mallorca
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In: Fomento de turismo de mallorca

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<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un/unpan002855.pdf>

<http://www.2uah.es> (14.03.2004) – Water Transfer vs. Desalination Plants: A Computable General Equilibrium Model for the Balearic Islands

<http://216.239.59.104/search?q=cache:Q8Z3MgJn25YJ:wwe.2uah.es/econ/papers/General...>

5.3 Other sources

Entwicklung durch Tourismus? – Worksheet handed out by Mr Adler: M7,8,9,11

6 Appendix