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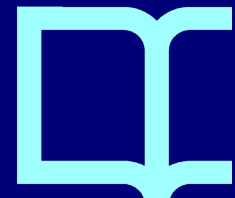
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# **Tourismification narratives and the “Transformative turn” in tourism. An analysis derived from the Spanish press debate on the Barcelona tourism model**

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## **Abstract**

This article analyses the content of 2,742 news items on tourismification and tourism-phobia in Barcelona published in the Spanish press between 2008 and 2020. Based on Foucault’s theoretical approach to the study of discourse and applying a content analysis method, the social construction of a tourism model is critically analysed through the examination of tourismification narratives. The dominant discourse on tourismification expressed by the Spanish press is organised into three narrative axes: the use of a local community point of view to highlight mass tourism as a contested social issue; governance as a solution for tourismification within the framework of the debate about the city’s tourist identity; and the use of tourism-phobia as a formula for politicisation of the discourse on tourism, to influence public opinion and develop power relations. The press discourse proposes a narrative that incorporates a critical reading of tourism in place of the previous growth-based discourse. However, while this discourse advocates for tourism as an invariable, necessary and strategic element of the city, even during episodes of extreme tourism crisis, it fights shy of alternative approaches that call for a “transformative turn” in tourism.

Keywords: tourismification, tourism-phobia, discourse analysis, Spanish press, interdiscursive dependencies

## **Introduction**

Barcelona is one of the most popular urban tourist destinations in Europe. With a population of 1.7 million inhabitants, in 2016 it received 9.8 million international tourists and 29.3 million overnight stays, as well as a significant number of visitors and day-trippers from neighbouring areas (Turisme de Barcelona, 2017). Since the 1990s, Barcelona’s extraordinary appeal has attracted a growing number of visitors, and the increasing pressure of tourism on residents has led to mounting concerns about the

tourismification of the city. The debate about the role of tourism features ever more prominently in public opinion (Zerva et al., 2018). Citizens' concerns, as expressed in city surveys, have led to an increase in the number of voices from social movements raised in opposition to tourism (Hughes, 2018), and changes have been made in urban management to redefine the tourism model (Martins, 2018; Russo & Scarnato, 2018).

Studies of tourismification have so far tended to analyse its causes; far fewer studies have addressed the effects it generates. This article aims to contribute to the analysis of tourismification by understanding this impact through the ability of press discourses to support certain attitudes, views and positions of power, and influence public opinion. Thus, the discourse on tourism is analysed as an indicator of a broader debate on the role of tourism, especially in relation to the balance between residents' desired quality of life and the will to maintain tourism as an economic development asset and the city's iconic tourism status.

Taking a Foucauldian approach as a conceptual starting point, we explore the creation of a Spanish press discourse on tourismification with an analysis of the news published between 2008 and 2020. Different narratives on the discourse of tourismification coexist as a result of the complexity of the phenomenon and its broad social scope: use of the local community as a means of denouncing the day-to-day impact of tourism, desired models of governance, and partisan use of tourism-phobia can be identified. The article also analyses the tourismification discourse from an evolutionary perspective, comparing the news published during two recent episodes of tourism crisis: the terrorist attacks on the Rambla in 2017, and the emergence of COVID-19 in 2020.

### **Tourism protest as a response to an uneven tourism growth model**

In recent years, many cities traditionally dependent on tourism have nurtured a sense of tourism rejection. Popular tourist destinations such as Venice, Barcelona, Palma de Mallorca, Amsterdam, Dubrovnik, Bhutan, and San Sebastián have become the focus of citizen protests and demonstrations (Seraphin, Sheeran, & Pilato, 2018; Singh, 2018). The protests respond to a common pattern in which perceived visitor saturation has generated

discontent, irritation and, sometimes, violent or aggressive actions against tourist interests. These destinations are being saturated with visitors according to a new phenomenon variously known as “overtourism”, “tourism-phobia”, “overcrowded locations” or “visitor pressure” (Kuscer & Mihalīs, 2019; Dredge, 2017; Goodwin, 2017).

The transition of capitalism from a Keynesian-Fordist model to a more flexible or neoliberal accumulation model has meant that cities and their resources play a predominant role in capital formation (Harvey, 2013). Tourism has gained weight in the urban economy by boosting entrepreneurship, business vitality and place attractiveness, offering competitive advantages and employment alternatives for segments of the population who have been side-lined in developed, post-industrial urban economies: low-skilled workers, women, minorities, the young and the long-term unemployed (Servillo, Atkinson, & Russo, 2012). The expansion of tourism throughout the city and its metropolitan area has been interpreted as the consequence of the geographical expansion required by the accumulation of capital. As a result, tourism has penetrated the private spaces of residents, negatively affecting their daily lives (Koens, Postma, & Papp, 2018; Mansilla & Milano, 2019). The convergence of the physical expansion of urban tourism, increased tourist flows and the emergence of negative externalities (privatisation of urban public space, loss of local commercial fabric, increased cost of living and housing, etc.) has resulted in the emergence of voices calling for new urban models with a different relationship to tourism. Moreover, these debates around tourism go beyond the anecdotal critical position of residents suffering the effects of overtourism, and aim to provide answers to the global problem of urban restructuring. According to Hughes, the current anti-tourism industry mobilisation should be interpreted as the latest manifestation of a long line of contestation against the social and cultural dislocation wrought by a process of neoliberal urban redevelopment that began in the early 1990s (Hughes, 2018). The public debate on the urban tourism model is therefore part of a wider debate on the right to the city (Lefevre, 2017), in which the anti-tourism position does not derive from tourism-phobia, but from the inequalities generated in the production process of urban space (Milano & Mansilla, 2019). The Spanish press, traditionally an important opinion maker in terms of tourism, has not been alien to this social debate; rather, it has actively used the media as a means to influence readers and public opinion about the social

meaning and the importance of tourism. From a different perspective, recent research on psycho-social aspects of overtourism has added new insight reflecting the complexity of the phenomenon. Focusing on the importance of the emotionally and individually perceived impacts of tourism on residents' life and city livability, a subjective dimension of overtourism is also considered, complementing the "objective " or physical tourism impacts related to crowding and the right to the city issues. Discerning between material and personal or internal factors influencing overtourism is then aimed to fill a knowledge gap. The objective dimension of overtourism considers factual and measurable manifestations of the phenomenon, while the subjective dimension connects with individuals perceptions and feelings about how overtourism influences their quality of life (Kohl, 2019; Pasquinelli & Trunfio, 2020).

## **Materials and methods**

The social construct of tourismification is expressed in narratives. Following a Foucauldian framework and the notion of interrelated dependencies (Jeffrey & Troman, 2011), this paper analyses the narrative components at three levels. First, at an external level, wherein the narratives are explored in the context of the general social, economic and political processes affecting Barcelona in recent years. Second, at an internal level, wherein the material object through which the narrative is expressed (the news item), dispersed and formally constructed, is examined through a metrical analysis of newspapers between 2008 and 2019. Finally, the narratives are examined interdiscursively, looking at the connections between different narratives and the appearance of counter-narratives.

The news items were extracted from the FACTIVA database (<https://professional.dowjones.com/factiva/>), from a search corresponding to 83 Spanish newspapers. Different keywords were used for the search, such as "tourism", "tourism-phobia", "overtourism" or "tourist pressure", and a total of 2,742 news items were obtained. During the process of data organisation, repeated news items, and those that failed to develop the topic in the text despite including the keyword, were discarded, thus

obtaining a total of 2,020 valid news items. Finally, 328 news items were selected for content analysis, according to both thematic criteria (the content had to refer to Barcelona) and type of newspaper (including national and Catalan editions, newspapers with a significant volume of tourism-oriented news, and newspapers with a specialised or a generalist information approach). The six newspapers selected were *La Vanguardia* and *El Periódico de Catalunya*, both generalist in character, with a national scope as well as a special focus on Catalonia; *El País*, a major national newspaper; *Diari Ara*, with a Catalonia scope; *Crónica Global*, with a specialist focus on the city of Barcelona; and *Expansión*, a national economic newspaper. The issues were identified according to a review of the literature on the causes of tourismification. A code reference book was then drawn up, including the definition and classification recommendations for each of the topics, and finally the textual content of the news was codified and then analysed. Data content was coded by pairs, and the researchers held meetings to discuss doubtful results, using peer review as a method to decrease the risk of bias and miscoding.

Initially, the fieldwork was conducted between October 2018 and December 2019, but was subsequently extended until 2020 to include news about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the city of Barcelona (26 items in total). This later information was subjected to a thematic text analysis rather than being codified.

### **Emergence and consolidation of discourses on tourism. What does the Spanish press talk about when it talks about tourism?**

Tourism is a socially constructed and discursive phenomenon, and different narrative stages can therefore be detected from the news published about tourismification. Our analysis of the Spanish press shows that the initial tourismification discourse, between 2005 and 2008, was expressed from the perspective of an academic debate on tourism-phobia (Delgado, 2008; Donaire, 2008). Although the number of news items published on this subject was very small, the expressiveness of the term and its ability to generate controversy and headlines attracted the attention of the media (Palou, 2019), especially after 2017, when several protests and actions in rejection of urban tourism erupted, with

strong international repercussions (attacks on the tourist bus or demonstrations by residents of tourist neighbourhoods against the nuisance of tourism) (Mansilla, 2019). Thus, from 2017 onwards, a substantive debate around the city's tourism model and how to manage the growth of tourism was stimulated.

Different indicators were constructed to measure the impact and coverage of the press discourse on tourismification (see Table 1). In the first place, it is clear that Barcelona is the centre of the debate on tourismification in Spain. Barcelona appears as the only reference until 2016, with tourismification issues being introduced, by analogy, in other geographical areas from 2017 onwards. The geographical coverage of tourismification in the Spanish press expands from an initial focus on Barcelona towards other tourist areas, but sometimes in a decontextualized way and reproducing, in destinations with different tourism production models, the same discursive strategies which support the Barcelona discourse.

However, there is a moderate negative correlation (Pearson  $r = -0.410$ ) between the publication of news articles about tourism and the number of tourist destinations in the region covered by the newspaper. This suggests that the geographical expansion of the debate in the Spanish press is conducted deliberately and is linked to local power relations.

[TABLE 1]

The volume of news items related to tourismification is minimal at the beginning of the analysed period, but increases dramatically to 96.3% of the total from 2017 onwards. At the same time, the mean length of news items increases according to the media relevance of tourism as a key social issue. Content analysis was applied to detect each newspaper's particular perspective on tourismification. The newspapers that produced a primarily negative discourse on tourismification were considered favourable to the continuance of the current tourism model, while those that emphasised tourism inequalities were considered to offer a more critical perspective of tourism. The conservative and economic newspapers were generally uncritical of tourism, whereas other newspapers presented a

view of tourism as a problem. The way in which topics were used was also diverse across newspapers. Some used tourismification issues to highlight increasing social concern about the impact of tourism and the need to improve tourism management, while others used these same issues mainly to foster ideological and political debate.

A detailed content analysis, all newspapers considered, shows differences in the topics published (see Table 2). The ability to influence power relations is related to the introduction of certain topics into the public debate around tourism. The topics introduced around tourism are, therefore, a good starting point for identifying narratives that attempt to establish the norms and compositional codes of the discourse.

The topics identified follow normative guidelines in the configuration of the discourse according to the moment, the social context and the narrator's interests. The media agenda justifies some of the most published topics. In other words, the present is often used to construct the discourse that most interests the media, thus contributing to providing a certain view of social reality. This is the case, for example, with some of the topics that are repeatedly identified in citizen surveys as causes of the growing concern about tourism (for example, 16.93% of the news items refer to nuisances caused by tourism, 5.69% to access to housing problems, and 2.18% to higher prices). This relationship is also detected in topics related to regulation (15.74%), largely influenced by the city government's planning proposals of recent years. Topics about citizen protest (7.67% of the total) are particularly related to attacks on the city's tourist interests.

A second element explaining the distribution of the news topics is the ideological use of tourismification (19.41% of the total), an aspect that highlights how tourism is part of the political narrative in relation to public opinion.

[TABLE 2]

**The tourismification discourse in the Spanish press during the past decade**



A detailed content analysis of the news published about tourismification illustrates the construction of a narrative based on three main narrative axes: right to the city, governance and tourism-phobia.

### **Residents first. A tale of mass tourism from a local community perspective**

In the context of a city in which municipal surveys show a growing concern about the impact of tourism, the use of tourismification topics enables residents to play the leading role in the urban debate. According to the city survey (Enquesta Municipal de Serveis) tourism was not detected as a residents' concern until 2006 (0,5%), but a decade later it is among the main issues of concern (with a maximum in 2017 when tourism was the main residents' concern -15,3%- followed by a decrease to the sixth place in 2019 -5,2%-). Similarly, the Barcelona Tourism Report accounts for a steady decrease in the residents' opinion that tourism benefits the city (89,5% in 2007 compared to 72,9% in 2019).

The narratives reflect local concern about overtourism, but do not focus on structural urban inequalities or social imbalances. Furthermore, the Spanish press, contrary to social media, rarely gives a voice to stakeholders who represent urban resistance discourses, such as anti-tourism movements and some neighbourhood associations. The narratives focus on problems of citizenship, according to the logic that residents are an essential element in assessing the impact of tourism on tourist sites, as residents' compliance and opinion is a key requirement for the success and sustainability of tourism development. This local-centric vision uses a local community approach as a mechanism for generating narratives which highlight local urban problems such as loss of quality and overcrowding to warn of the possibility of Barcelona losing competitiveness as an urban tourism destination. In this respect, the narratives frequently use negative comparisons of Barcelona with mass tourism destinations (described as the "lloretization of Barcelona", after the coastal town of Lloret de Mar, despite the very different tourist model), denounce practices such as bachelor/hen parties, drinking in the streets, and late-night parties, in the fear that the behaviour of mass tourists, overcrowding and the environmental impact of

cruise ships will end up discrediting the promotional image of the city which has for decades been built on cultural tourism and heritage (Palou, 2006). It is worthy of note that some elements of the “local community” narratives are sometimes also used by other actors, resulting in some unexpected converging views. For example, hoteliers and social movements alike agree on the need to regulate illegal tourist flats, though they approach the issue from different backgrounds.

[TABLE 3]

### **Governance of tourismification within the framework of tourism as part of the city's identity**

A second major narrative axis is closely related to the first, as it focuses on the most appropriate management formulae to reverse or minimise the adverse impacts of tourism. The narratives identified are focused on governance and technical solutions for tourism management. The various stakeholders' interests and points of view result in diverse, nuanced narratives which are nonetheless intertwined into a meta-narrative built on the assumption that tourism is integrated into the city's identity. The importance of finding solutions to the impact of tourism as the leitmotif of the narratives is therefore interpreted as a way of naturalising the city's relationship with tourism. A number of narratives following this general premise can be distinguished. A first narrative, found particularly in economic newspapers, gives continuity to boosterism by evoking the non-negotiable nature of tourism on the basis of the city's economic dependence on the activity and assuming that, if tourism is threatened, economic decline and shrinkage will be the inevitable result. A second narrative assumes that tourism is here to stay and that, therefore, it is necessary to respond to the challenges posed by urban tourism by seeking a complex balance between the right to the city and the right to leisure. This narrative builds an imaginary future of the city in such a way that it is no longer possible to imagine Barcelona without incorporating the tourism variable into the urban equation. The territoriality of tourism is recognised both as a phenomenon not segregated from the rest of the city, and as a production agent that is a constituent part of the city's identity.

According to this perspective, the challenges of tourismification need to be addressed by means of a transversal planning approach and an urban project that limits tourism and recovers the residential use of the city. The governance narrative expresses the desire to build a solid dialogue between stakeholders, social participation, political transparency and a tourism planning project based on limiting tourism in the city, deconcentration, deseasonalization and mediation (Donaire et al., 2019; Milano, 2019).

A third narrative centres on the denaturation of the city's identity due to tourism. This narrative, much less present in the Spanish press discourse, captures an alternative viewpoint of a projected city in which tourism appears as a usurper of local urban identity. In this narrative, tourism is associated with the loss of local identity and is equated with a threat that banalizes the spirit of the place and generates negative externalities for the locals while encouraging external economic interests and speculative investment. Some parts of this narrative focus on the lack of sustainability of the current tourism model and the explicit defence of tourism degrowth.

[TABLE 4]

### **Exploiting tourism-phobia as an asset in the struggle for political power**

The press discourse is a strategic element in the formation and maintenance of power relations. This is consistent with the fact that the third axis of the discourse on tourismification has a markedly ideological character, highlighting the current trend towards the politicisation of tourism (Milano, Novelly, & Cheers, 2019; Mantecon & Velasco, 2020). The main feature of this narrative is the use of tourism-phobia to legitimise or delegitimise social actors according to their preferences in relation to a specific tourism model. Specifically, two types of narratives can be distinguished. A first narrative involves the criminalisation and delegitimization of anti-tourism movements. Protests and attacks against tourist interests, both on the street and social media, are criticised. The formal content and the lexical and narrative elements used in the news descriptions play an important role in emphasising confrontation between polarised positions. Expressions such as “irrational violence inspired by street fighting”,

“vandalism”, “terrorism”, and “hatred against tourists” are frequently used. The narrative fosters the fear that Barcelona is losing international prestige, that the protests are eroding its tourist image, and that Barcelona is climbing the rankings of cities most hostile to tourism. The criminalisation strategy also appears in some news items as an appeal to citizen responsibility: residents who oppose the presence of tourists are accused of xenophobia and rhetorically reminded that everyone is a tourist. These arguments are contrasted with the cosmopolitan, open and welcoming nature of the city and generate counter-narratives of repair, whereby local government is advocated to reverse the harmful effects of the protests on the image of the city.

A second narrative is the political use of tourism-phobia for partisan purposes to wear down political rivals. With the background argument of loss of competitiveness, the political party in charge of the municipal government (Barcelona en Comú) and, in particular, the mayor, Ada Colau, are criticised for being ineffective and accused of promoting tourism-phobia. As stated by different authors, the residents’ concern about tourism expressed in the 2017 and following surveys ended up being associated with a kind of confirmation that the municipal government did not know how to manage tourism and has been contributing to strengthening the tourism-phobic sentiment (Pirillo & Mundet, 2020). On the one hand, although the first measures taken by the left coalition council were addressed to the limitation and control of tourism (ban on the concession of licenses for new accommodation, opposition to p2p apartment rentals leading to sanctions and other measures, boosting of new governance actions such as the creation of the Local Tourism Council) raised the popularity of Colau’s government, some actors from the civic society, such as the Neighborhood Association for Sustainable Tourism, feels frustrated with the slow progress in the policing of tourism and channels this frustration with new mobilizations and demands (Russo & Scarnatto, 2018). On the other hand, the publication of an opinion article in *The Guardian*<sup>1</sup> by Ada Colau, which criticized the consequences of tourism inequalities (economic overdependence, precarious working conditions and housing speculative processes) and stressed the strength of the tourism lobby and the influence it exerts on politicians, met with severe reactions from the tourism sector and led to a media reaction associating the discourse of tourism-phobia directly

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<sup>1</sup> *Mass tourism can kill a city*, *The Guardian*, 02/09/2014

with the municipal public administration (Pirillo & Mundet, 2020). Similarly, a number of negative statistics related to citizen insecurity, little control over tourists' unsocial behaviour or the rise in urban crime rates have been attributed to inefficiency or political negligence in tourism management. An additional political use of tourism-phobia is the debate about the Catalan independence movement, the so-called "Catalan process". The political conflict in Catalonia has been widely reported by national and international media in the past decade, most notably when, on 1 October 2017, the Catalan independence referendum, which had not been approved by the Spanish government, was violently repressed by police; in subsequent years, demonstrations, riots and police charges took place in different Catalan cities. Increasing feelings of insecurity affecting the main tourist markets in the weeks following those events led to the cancellation of numerous tourist reservations, and that helped to incorporate tourismification into the political debate being conducted by the mass media. Some newspapers linked the fall in reservations directly to the events of 1 October, 2017, blaming pro-independence supporters and political parties, and arguing that tourism-phobia played only a small role in explaining cancellations compared to the effects of the independence process. A parallel debate was generated in the Catalan press, where it was claimed that the anti-tourist attitude of radical left-wing parties and social movements hindered the Catalan process.

[TABLE 5]

### **Narratives in times of crisis: a comparative analysis of the Spanish press discourse on the Barcelona terrorist attack and the COVID-19 pandemic**

The constitutive character of discourses is their ability to respond and adapt to existing environmental conditions. Critical events that strongly impact tourism are therefore particularly sensitive to discourse change. There follows an analysis of the effects on discourse narratives as a result of two of the crisis episodes to have most seriously affected the Barcelona tourism dynamic: the terrorist attacks of 2017 and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

These two critical incidents are very different in nature and have wrought different effects on the tourism sector. On 17 August, 2017, a jihadist terrorist attack involving a van that invaded the pedestrian space on Barcelona's Rambla, the city's main tourist artery, left thirteen fatalities and hundreds of injured, most of them tourists. Despite an initial increase in cancelled hotel reservations in the days immediately following the attack, the recovery of the tourism sector was very rapid (Barcelona Tourism Observatory, 2017). The arrival in Spain of the COVID-19 pandemic, on the other hand, resulted in the declaration of a state of alarm (the lowest of three grades of state of emergency) which lasted several weeks, with the adoption of drastic measures such as the lockdown of the population, closure of borders and suspension of all economic and leisure activity considered non-essential. The impact of these measures has been an abrupt and radical drop in tourism figures, causing dramatic decreases in reservations in Catalonia (Agència Catalana de Turisme, 2020).

The different nature and effects of the two crisis episodes have also generated very different narratives in the Spanish press, whose interpretation of the terrorist attack was extremely homogeneous and drew conclusions which helped create an optimistic outlook for a rapid economic and tourist recovery. The impact was associated with an isolated and relatively predictable phenomenon which resulted in support for social cohesion, with newspapers highlighting the differences with other cities and emphasising the greater number of attacks committed in London, Paris and Brussels compared to Barcelona. Most of the articles provide a descriptive viewpoint of the terrorist attack, which is interpreted as a global problem and references to tourism-phobia or the impacts of tourismification are avoided. The narrative relativizes the facts and often compares the effects of the attack on the tourism sector with those of the political "process" or tourism-phobia events, which are considered to have a greater impact on tourist cancellations. According to the Spanish press, the main challenge for the tourism sector is to prevent new terrorist attacks, as any repetition could genuinely endanger the image of the city. Thus, the suggested solutions emphasise the need to improve security and enhance coordination between administrations. The discourse is built on the basis that the legacy and the lessons learned from the terrorist attack are positive: the attack is read as an opportunity to improve

cooperation and collaboration among stakeholders and strengthen the sense of collective identity, emphasising the city's resilience and the ability to rapidly recover tourism in the face of adversity.

The press discourse derived from the COVID-19 pandemic emphasises the instability of the economic and social context, due to the emergence of an unknown phenomenon that changes the rules of the game. However, the initial pessimistic discourse evolves towards a more optimistic outlook based on a narrative of economic reactivation. In the early stages of the first outbreak (during the first weeks of March 2020), most of the news published included economic and statistical data and analysed the economic impact of the decline in tourists (effects on GDP, tourist season forecasts, layoffs and, on a more secondary level, the impact on workers). The tone of the news is perplexity at the fact that the city's main productive asset is in danger and, consequently, the city may face a decline. Subsequently, from April and May, the discourse incorporates new narratives focusing on the strategic challenges for reactivation of the economy and, in particular, discussion on the role of safety and hygiene, the use of technology or the effectiveness of the Spanish government's return to activity plan.

Although the COVID-19 press discourse remains optimistic on the whole, the pandemic situation poses a greater challenge than that of the terrorist attack. The terminology used to talk about the COVID crisis shows greater uncertainty. The use of the term "reactivation" rather than "recovery" (the usual term in news about the terrorist attack) reflects uncertainty about the "new normality", inability to predict demand, and the assumption that tourism activity will have to start from scratch in many aspects.

The stakeholders involved in the construction of the discourse provide different narratives. Experts and academics point to an unavoidable change in tourist attitudes and global mobility (for instance, the growth of proximity tourism, increased use of the private vehicle, or a return to 1970s-style travel), predicting that a return to pre-pandemic tourism is a long way off (Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2020; Hall, Scott & Gössling, 2020; Ioannides & Gymóthy, 2020; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). In contrast, the tourism industry reads the crisis as an opportunity to move from quantity to quality, to strengthen tourism as a necessary

asset of the city (gaining in importance, once the negative effects of its absence have been demonstrated), or to make sector requests (measures against unfair competition from illegal tourist flats or promoting tax cuts). As for the local government, the discourse is focused on a more responsible city project to reformulate tourism in a way that contributes to the solution of problems both global (mitigation of the climate emergency) and local (housing and working conditions). Finally, the members of social movements argue that the lesson to be learned from the pandemic is that the true contribution of tourism to development is much smaller than previously supposed. They claim, therefore, that recovery should not be based on previous levels of tourism and that the pandemic is highlighting the need to carry out proposals for tourist degrowth.

### **Social construction of a discourse on tourismification in the Spanish press. Continuity or “Transformative turn”?**

The discourse on tourismification is the result of the power struggle enacted in the media to obtain influence over public opinion. Thus, the Spanish press discourse unifies and gives meaning to narratives that express the forms of articulation between tourism and power in a city that permanently coexists with tourism. The relation between the capitalist logic of tourism as an economic means of production and local resistance generates tensions and, as a result, different adaptive strategies are adopted through the use of media narratives.

Taking as a reference the framework of analysis of attitudes to tourism proposed by Mantecón and Velasco (2020), different press narratives are distinguished, suggesting the existence of differences among newspapers. Narratives of legitimisation and innovative criticism were found to carry equal weight. On the one side, we find narratives which tend to legitimise tourism as a means to guarantee the production of wealth and the progress of society, denying the existence of significant problems caused by the activity. On the opposing side are narratives based on innovative criticism, including a social democratic-inspired approach which, despite defending the economic value of tourism, questions the effectiveness of the practices developed in dominant tourist destinations as a means to achieve that end. This result coincides with those of other studies (Boom et



al., 2020) that point to the need to overcome the simplistic analysis of the tourism discourse according to the dichotomy of the official point of view, focused on growth and aiming to mitigate the negative impact of tourism (Aall et al., 2015), and the anti-tourism discourse, with little attention paid to the different causes and levels of perception of overtourism (Clancey, 2019). Finally, the most critical narratives are much less present in the Spanish press. These narratives propose a social transformation and the substitution of the political-economic order that regulates cities affected by overtourism (Mantecón & Velasco, 2020).

The three narrative types identified in the present study use elements and topics to build a dense and complex narrative that reflects the tensions therein. The first type of narrative focuses on the problems of tourism and expresses these through the voice of the local community. However, by taking for granted that these are the real problems that affect them and suggesting that there is a homogeneous attitude towards tourism, it results in more of a strategic discursive resource than genuine citizen empowerment. Foucault points out how power and the ability to contradict it (resistance to power) maintain a balance of forces and that, therefore, one is always followed by the other (Foucault, 1980). Giving the local community a leading role advocates for the common interest to legitimise tourism. However, the treatment of the local community in the Spanish press cannot be identified with resistance to established power; rather, it is assumed to be playing a passive, reactive role. Overall, the Spanish media-driven local community narrative lacks a better linking with the academic and social debates on the right to the city, social justice and mass tourism, and it is also needed to articulate the diverse voices representing the local community exploring new approaches to better integrate them in the process of tourism planning. As stated by Phi (2020) the analysis of overtourism impacts on the local community should not be separated from a broader discourse on alternative models to growth paradigm to effectively contribute to redefining the purpose and meaning of tourism in mass urban destinations, and helping to address the negative consequences associated with modern tourism from a local perspective (Phi, 2020).

In the second type of narrative, related to tourism management and governance, Barcelona is presented as an ideal model of a tourismified city, hence the discourse is

frequently reproduced in other geographical contexts, though tourism is developed under different local circumstances. On the other hand, these narratives emphasise the need to integrate the planning approach to tourism in Barcelona into a metropolitan context. This is part of a broader debate on metropolitan planning according to which, historically, the conception of the so-called “real Barcelona” (that is, the city that goes beyond its own limits as an interdependent entity) clashes with other conceptions of the territory. This debate is fundamentally political in nature, reflecting how territorial architecture considerations are another way to obtain influence in the struggle for regional political power. Finally, a number of discursive strategies that divert attention from problems arising from the social failure of urban projects are identified with these narratives, a strategy that has also been shown in previous studies on tourism-phobia and anti-tourism movements in Barcelona (Arias & Russo, 2016; Mansilla, 2018). However, the need for a deeper debate on some important issues related with the urban planning and the management of tourism in the city should be highlighted here. The media debate is focused on different technical solutions to limit tourism through urban and sectoral planning, but it should also be put into discussion some other important issues affecting sustainability and real urban change. How to address the degrowth paradigm in practice in a city characterized by an extended tourism sector, which is the real scope and what strategy can cope with the city’s economic dependency on tourism, at what extent it is possible to enhance bottom-up or self-management projects within the local tourism industry or a broader reflection on the relation between the development of tourism and global aspects such as migration, health or labor, are some examples of issues of substance to understand the current touristification process of the city which are not currently included in the mass media agenda.

The third type of narrative refers to the use of tourismification and, in particular, tourism-phobia for political purposes. The Spanish press places Barcelona at the centre of the debate on tourism and takes advantage of its privileged position to propose discursive strategies that favour specific political and economic interests. The use of narratives and counter-narratives with opposing objectives generates tensions that are managed from adaptive strategies useful for addressing subject positions, political discourses, or attitudinal dispositions toward tourism (Huete & Mantecón, 2018; Mantecon & Velasco,

2020).

The use of discursive strategies to delegitimise, criminalise or hide the discourse of opponents to the current tourism model is recurrent in the Spanish press discourse about tourismification. This result is congruous with those of other studies which point out that anti-tourist movements are removed from the focus of discussion. Attention is diverted to the attacks on the tourism industry, and information or knowledge related to the impact of tourism, produced by social and neighbourhood movements, rarely receives a mention (Pirillo & Mundet, 2020). In this way, critics and protests are delegitimised, as analysis of the responses of public administrations and the tourism industry to the impact of tourism and the demands of social movements confirms (Novy & Colomb, 2019). Nevertheless, and beyond the intentional dimension of tourism-phobia highlighted in the Spanish mass media, the tourism-phobic attitudes raise important topics related with the engagement of the local community in a sustainable tourism management and the increasing tourism politicization of urban social movements. Thus, this issue merits an in-depth debate about the factors causing these attitudes, including emotional reasons, worldviews and the historical presence of social urban movements groups and the proximity and face-to-face contact with local or neighborhood activists.

Discourse, understood as the production of meaning, emerges at a specific moment and is produced by the matching of the vision of local actors and the social relations generated by the political, economic, and social environment. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, an academic discourse of tourism transformation has emerged as a critical and alternative way to achieve tourism sustainability. This discourse is based on the premise that the pandemic will have a transformative social impact insofar as it questions some of the key aspects of globalisation: it argues that neoliberal capitalism is not the best way to organise the resources available, it shows that tourism has a direct responsibility for some negative global dynamics and plays a role in the spread of epidemics, and it proposes a reconsideration of the role of consumerism as a key element of individual identity (Higgins, 2020; Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020). The discourse is also nurtured by new positive practices that have emerged from the crisis which demonstrate real sustainability potential (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020; Brouder, 2020; Kousis, 2000), and suggest that consumer behaviour and environmental attitudes will change in relation to the modes of

travel and the destinations we choose (Ioannides & Gymóthy, 2020). Proposals such as prioritising social relations over economic value, a better fit for tourism in line with local community needs, or the adoption of a degrowth perspective, all derive from the transformative shift discourse (Fletcher et al., 2019; Valdivieso & Moranta, 2019; Gretzel et al., 2020). However, the dominant post-crisis discourse in the Spanish press is primarily focused on reactivation and a return to pre-pandemic normality, conditioned by a few temporary superficial changes in the way tourism is conducted and the changing tourist experience, for example, the preference for proximity destinations or the application of social distancing measures.

## **Conclusions**

The main contribution of this article is the identification of the components of the discourse on tourismification developed in the Spanish press between 2008 and 2020. The emergence of press narratives supported by particular norms at each historical moment illustrates an attempt to endow rationality and unify power positions to build a predominant social discourse on tourismification. The analysis of the narrative from a Foucauldian discourse dependency perspective facilitates the identification of the key issues in the debate around tourismification in the Spanish press as an expression of power.

At the intradiscursive level, the relationships between the object (the news on tourismification) and the key concepts through which it is characterised were examined. On the one hand, the broad press coverage of the tourismification debate over a thirteen-year period, has made Barcelona a point of reference for what can be called a contested successful urban tourism model. On the other hand, the language, terms and rhetoric employed in some of the news related to tourism-phobia confirm an interest in the politicisation of tourism. Thus, as the press discourse inserts tourism into a broader debate on the city's identity, it gains the attention of the public.

At an external-discursive level, it has been possible to follow the trajectory of an initial

discourse in which the concept of tourism-phobia played a leading role through to the emergence and consolidation of three main narratives that point out the contradictions and social tensions of the existence of negative tourism externalities in a city with a strong tourist identity. A new discourse on tourismification has emerged in the Spanish press during the period analysed, overcoming the previous legitimising and boosterism vision of tourism and opening the field to a more critical view. No link has been made between this discourse and a transformative shift, however.

Interdiscursive analysis of the tourismification debate in the Spanish press shows that, despite their dynamism and complexity, the narratives have failed to evolve significantly in over a decade, even in times of acute tourism recession. Although these narratives have focused on overtourism problems and claim to be driven by a local community perspective and an interest in tourism problem-solving, they remain disconnected from proposals for radical change to the Barcelona tourism model. The importance of economic and political factors in the social construction of the tourismification discourse in the Spanish press leaves little room for debate on social and environmental issues, or to focus on concerns about the impact of tourism on a global scale, while aspects that might constitute a shift in the tourism model are veiled.

According to Manuel Castells, power goes beyond communication and communication goes beyond power, but power is based in the control of communication, and counter power is only exerted if it is able to dismantle that power (Castells, 2009). The analysis of tourismification in the Spanish press has shown that tourism is a social debate issue of the first magnitude as it allows reaffirming power through communication while blurring or hiding the voices that, like those of the neighbourhood activists and social movements, are critics and act as a counter-power. The multiple discourses that make up the tourismification debate promote the construction of a new city model linked to the principles of sustainability (Mundet & Pirillo, 2020), denouncing the tourism former impacts, highlighting the integration of tourism in the city in identity terms and emphasising the role of local residents. However, the discourse on tourism is ideologically biased and focused on strengthening of power rather than resistance, giving scarce visibility and awareness of some of the social and economic and social impacts of tourism

among the public, as gender, health, climate change, labour problems or gentrification and resident's urban displacement.

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**Table 1. Importance and meaning given to tourismification topics in the Spanish press, 2008-2019**

| Indicators  |                                   |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Media coverage</i>  |                                   |
| Published news on tourismification (2008 to 2016) (%)   | 3.7                               |
| Published news on tourismification (2017 to 2019) (%)   | 96.3                              |
| 2. <i>Geographical coverage</i>   |                                   |
| Published news on tourismification referring to Barcelona (2008 to 2015) (% news in the whole period) | 91.02                             |
| Published news on tourismification referring to Barcelona (2015 to 2019) (% news in the whole period) | 44.03                             |
| Published news on tourismification referring to Barcelona (2008 to 2019) (% news in the whole period) | 42.56                             |
| 3. <i>Length of news item in words</i>  |                                   |
| Mean words of published news items on tourismification (2008)   | 607.3                             |
| Mean words of published news items on tourismification (2019)   | 2019.1                            |
| 4. <i>Main topic (topic [% of total published news per newspaper])</i>                                |                                   |
| <i>La Vanguardia</i>  | Overtourism [29.52]               |
| <i>El Periódico de Catalunya</i>  | Overtourism [32.52]               |
| <i>El País</i>  | Overtourism [26.62]               |
| <i>Diari Ara</i>  | Governance and management [30.09] |
| <i>Crónica Global</i>   | Ideology use [33.04]              |
| <i>Expansión</i>  | Governance and                    |

|  |                    |
|--|--------------------|
|  | management [42.93] |
| 5. Newspaper overview of tourism model (overview[% of total published news per newspaper]) |                    |
| <i>La Vanguardia</i>   | Favourable [55.32] |
| <i>El Periódico de Catalunya</i>   | Criticism [50.82]  |
| <i>El País</i>   | Criticism [63.83]  |
| <i>Diari Ara</i>   | Criticism [34.86]  |
| <i>Crónica Global</i>  | Favourable [60.78] |
| <i>Expansión</i>   | Favourable [93.94] |

**Table 2. Topics related to tourism published by the Spanish press, 2008–2019**

| Topics about tourismification   | News       | % of topic | % of total news |
|---|------------|------------|-----------------|
| <b>1. Urban conflict and inequalities from tourism development</b>                  |            |            |                 |
| Gentrification  | 21         | 6.23       | 1.04            |
| Tourist bubble  | 5          | 1.48       | 0.25            |
| Precarious employment   | 64         | 18.99      | 3.17            |
| Gender  | 3          | 0.89       | 0.15            |
| Housing   | 115        | 34.12      | 5.69            |
| Commodification of public space   | 26         | 7.72       | 1.29            |
| Loss of local shops   | 15         | 4.45       | 0.74            |
| Loss of local population  | 36         | 10.68      | 1.78            |
| Increased cost of living  | 44         | 13.06      | 2.18            |
| Tourism specialisation  | 8          | 2.37       | 0.4             |
| <i>Total 1</i>  | <i>337</i> | <i>100</i> | <i>16.68</i>    |
| <b>2. Overtourism</b>   |            |            |                 |
| Environmental impact and pollution  | 17         | 2.82       | 0.84            |
| Inappropriate tourist behaviour   | 342        | 56.72      | 16.93           |
| Carrying capacity   | 147        | 24.38      | 7.28            |
| Mobility and traffic problems   | 73         | 12.11      | 3.61            |
| Tourist presence in public space  | 19         | 3.15       | 0.94            |
| Health problems   | 5          | 0.83       | 0.25            |
| <i>Total 2</i>  | <i>603</i> | <i>100</i> | <i>29.85</i>    |
| <b>3. Management proposals</b>  |            |            |                 |
| <b>3.1 Actions to redress social and economic inequalities generated by tourism</b> |            |            |                 |
| Gender  | 0          | 0          | 0               |

|  |             |            |              |
|--|-------------|------------|--------------|
| Worker protection measures                                   | 4           | 0.75       | 0.2          |
| Labour law   | 8           | 1.5        | 0.4          |
| Social laws  | 12          | 2.25       | 0.59         |
| <b>3.2 Tourism management</b>                                |             |            |              |
| Limitation of tourism activity                               | 41          | 7.69       | 2.03         |
| Decentralisation of tourism flows                            | 22          | 4.13       | 1.09         |
| Linking tourism to other economic sectors                    | 1           | 0.19       | 0.05         |
| Regulation measures  | 318         | 59.66      | 15.74        |
| Measures to deseasonalize tourism                            | 16          | 3          | 0.79         |
| Tourism product diversification                              | 10          | 1.88       | 0.5          |
| Taxes  | 61          | 11.44      | 3.02         |
| Degrowth   | 40          | 7.5        | 1.98         |
| <i>Total 3</i>   | <i>533</i>  | <i>100</i> | <i>26.39</i> |
| <b>4. Citizen reaction to tourism and protests</b>           |             |            |              |
| Street protests and demonstrations                           | 68          | 43.87      | 3.37         |
| Actions against tourism industry interests                   | 87          | 56.13      | 4.31         |
| <i>Total 4.</i>  | <i>155</i>  | <i>100</i> | <i>7.67</i>  |
| <b>5. Political and ideology</b>                             |             |            |              |
| Partisan use of tourism-phobia                               | 185         | 47.19      | 9.16         |
| Controversy about the impact of tourism-phobia on city image | 207         | 52.81      | 10.25        |
| <i>Total 5</i>   | <i>392</i>  | <i>100</i> | <i>19.41</i> |
| <i>Total news</i>  | <i>2020</i> |            | <i>100</i>   |

\* “Regulation” includes several topics: quality in tourism products (28.4%); tourism policies implemented through strategic planning (19.7%); proposals for redistributive tourism models (17.1%); and others [expert consultation, legal reforms, citizen participation processes] (34.8%).

**Table 3. Narratives and issues included in the discourse on the local community**

| <b>Narratives</b>   | <b>News examples</b>   |
|---|--|
| Narratives related to the massification of tourism in the city. | October 2012 “Tourism-phobia: the dark side of tourism success”<br><i>Diari Ara</i><br><br>September 2017. “Social mobilisation: Residents say “enough” to mass tourism”, <i>Diari Ara</i> . |
| Narratives that capture citizens’ concern about tourism         | June 2017. “Barcelona residents cite tourism as their main concern, before unemployment”, <i>La Vanguardia</i> .   |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Convergence of narratives between stakeholders | August 2017. “President of the Hoteliers Association: Tourist flats have caused ‘tourism-phobia’”, <i>El Economista</i> . |
|--|---|

**Table 4. Examples of narratives on tourism management and the governance model**

| <b>Narratives</b>  | <b>News examples</b>   |
|--|--|
| Narratives in defence of the growth model.                             | June 2016. “Figures support tourism as a powerful economic sector”, <i>Expansion</i> .   |
| Narratives focused on the naturalisation of the urban tourist identity | February 2014. “‘Tourism-phobia’ forces a change of strategy”, <i>La Vanguardia</i> .<br><br>January 2017. “Colau manages to approve the Special Urban Plan on Tourism Accommodation (PEUAT) in a last-minute agreement”, <i>La Vanguardia</i> . |

**Table 5. Narratives and issues included in the discourse on ideological and political use of tourism-phobia**

| <b>Narratives</b>  | <b>News examples</b>  |
|--|---|
| Narratives of delegitimization and criminalisation of the anti-tourism protest | July 2017. “Arran claims authorship of attack on Barcelona tourist bus”, <i>El País</i> .<br><br>May 2017. “Threatening graffiti in Park Güell adds tension to the tourism conflict”, <i>El Mundo</i> . |
| Narratives involving the partisan use of the concept of tourism-phobia         | July 2018. “Colau miscalculates with speech encouraging tourism-phobia”, <i>Diari Ara</i> .   |