

Mallorca and Tourism: a British perspective

Buswell R J (2011): *Mallorca and Tourism: History, Economy and Environment*. Bristol. Channel View Publications, 213pp.

Biographical note:

Professor Emeritus Richard Buswell (Rugby, England 1942) was, until his retirement, Head of the School of Behavioural and Environmental Sciences at the University of Northumbria, Newcastle upon Tyne. He is a geographer by training, specialising in the processes and patterns of urban and regional development from historical and contemporary points of view, on which he has published many papers and chapters in books. Much of his earlier research was on the spatial organization and locational characteristics of Industrial Research and Development (R&D). He is the editor and principal contributor to *Newcastle's Changing Map* (1998) and co-author of *Rutherford's Ladder: the History of Northumbria University, 1876-2006*. He has also written on tourism in the Balearic Islands and recently published a book entitled *Tourism in Mallorca: environment, economy and society* (Channel View Publications, 2011). He has completed the manuscript of a book, *Mallorca: the making of the landscape*, to be published by Dunedin Academic Press in 2012.

Mallorca and Tourism: History, Economy and Environment.

Introduction:

The title of this book largely indicates its content. It is designed to be a broad-ranging account of the *development* of tourism in one particular place – Mallorca – with *development* simply defined as change through time and space together with an examination of the processes that have brought about these changes since the late 19C. However, there is an attempt to bring to all readers a British perspective on Mallorcan tourism.

Mallorcan sources:

It is aimed at non-Mallorcan readers who are probably not familiar with sources in Catalan and Castilian. Much of the book's content will be more familiar to local readers.

In trying to bring to those less familiar with Mallorcan writings on tourism the author has leant heavily on secondary source material from the last thirty years and these borrowings – duly and properly acknowledged in the references, of course –include the principal works in books and from the journals; there seemed little point in 'reinventing the wheel'. Naturally this has been complemented by up-to-date statistical sources and by local fieldwork.

British perspective:

If this were the only purpose of the book that that would have been useful nonetheless. In addition, in order to present some kind of critique of Mallorcan and Spanish writing on this subject, the author has introduced a number of British perspectives that seem to be missing from some of the usual accounts. There are some important ones including:

1. How important were the early accounts of Mallorca from the second half of the 19C in helping to develop the attraction of Mallorca for potential visitors?
2. What is the relationship between the development of tourism from, say 1890 to 1936 with that from the mid-1950s onwards?
3. What was the role and function of British and later German entrepreneurialism in shaping tourism after about 1955?
4. The critical role played by aircraft in delivering tourists to Mallorca.
5. What are the characteristics of the investment cycles in Mallorcan tourism, especially since the oil '*prix choc*' of 1973 and more importantly over the twenty five years?
6. What are the relationships between 'growth' and 'environment' in Mallorca?
7. Who are the 'new' tourists and what is their economic function/impact?
8. What are the challenges the tourism industry is forcing Mallorcan society and economy to face?
9. Will the 'old' politics of Left and Right serve Mallorca well, especially *post* the current crisis?
10. Lines for future research in tourism

1. How important were the early accounts of Mallorca from the second half of the 19C in helping to develop the attraction of Mallorca for potential visitors? While many of the accounts of early overseas visitors are colourful there is very little hard evidence that their writings influenced the numbers and types of later tourists. The

transition from 'visitor' or 'traveller' to 'tourist' is not clear; from my reading there seems to be little connection, particularly as the majority of tourists of the '20s and '30s were from the Peninsula.

2. What is the relationship between the development of tourism from, say 1890 to 1936 and that from the mid 1950s onwards?

The growth of tourism in the 1930s was mostly in Spanish tourists. Although the number of foreign visitors increased their numbers remained relatively small and largely consisted of artists and writers, hardly the making of mass tourism. In addition there were increasing numbers of middle class, often quite wealthy tourists who came to new luxury hotels. Also, there were cruise ship tourists, especially American but their sojourns were brief. There were exceptions such as the working class tours organised by British groups from the Left especially after the Second World War and in the early 1950s. Overall the impression is that what followed in the late 1950s and the early 1960s was very different from what came before. The shape of the graph of tourist numbers shows a marked break of slope with numbers rising from less than 0.5m to 3.5m in a dozen years from 1960.

3. What was the role and function of British and later German entrepreneurialism in shaping tourism after about 1955?

The key to this change was the increase in the demand side of the equation – the activity of overseas and especially British travel agents and holiday companies. They provided new numbers of an unprecedented scale. This is an area where Mallorcan researchers have paid too little attention; understandably their emphasis has been on the supply side – the 1959 Stabilisation Plan, the Credit Hotelero, Spain's need for foreign exchange in a hard currency etc. But tourism is a push and pull activity. Mallorca had the natural resources for tourism (sunshine and beaches), land for resort development (urbanisation) and a history of small family hotels. To this the British added numbers, transportation (aircraft), tour management both for getting there and for activities while on holiday, and capital for hotels and other accommodation. More research needs to be done on the 'inward investment' in the 1960s from the archives and biographies of British tour operators and their owners.. The changing British government's attitude to overseas travel for the 'masses' also need further enquiry. The same points could be made about German activities somewhat later.

4. The critical role played by aircraft in delivering tourists to Mallorca.

'The aircraft invented mass tourism in Mallorca'. We now know much more about the role of a wave of entrepreneurs in the post-war period in buying ex-warplanes and later leasing more modern aircraft to transfer large numbers of tourists from West Europe quickly and (later) in relative comfort. But equally important was the development of airports in the regions of West Europe, often undertaken by municipal local authorities rather than national governments. Again, this rarely figures in Mallorcan writing. It warrants further research in the relevant archives in Britain and Germany.

5. What are the characteristics of the investment cycles in Mallorcan tourism, especially since the oil 'prix choc' of 1973 and more importantly over the twenty five years?

If 3 and 4 help explain the important period of *take-off* in the tourism economy in the 1960s what factors are important for the subsequent 40 years? A list would have to include: i) the effects of the quintupling of oil prices after 1973 on both Britain and Spain ii) the restructuring of British tour operators after the dramatic collapse of Clarksons, Court Line and Horizon Holidays, leading to ABTA and more security for British travellers abroad iii) The merger of small Mallorcan hotels into 'federations' to give mutual support and better marketing, making them more competitive. iv) the rise of holiday apartments and apartotels as lower cost rivals to formal hotels helping to keep Mallorcan costs lower than many rivals v) the transition to democracy after 1975 and the pact between government and labour under Suarez and later Gonzalez vi) Spain joining the EU in 1986 and the EuroZone vii) the emergence of chains of hotels and the continuing rationalisation of hotels together with their considerable expansion abroad particularly in the Caribbean and Latin America but now world-wide – part of Spain's entry into a globalizing world.

But where will the next round of investment to come from and in what sectors of the economy will it be in?

6. What are the relationships between 'growth' and 'environment' in Mallorca?

The crucial question here is: Is environmental degradation a constraint on growth? The evidence to-date is that it isn't. In the tourism sector the damage is caused by sheer numbers and by the fact that tourists are notoriously unconscious of their environmental behaviour when away from home. Tourism is a consumer industry and it is difficult to

impose better environmental standards on a transient population. Educating the tourists may be a possible solution but who wants 'lessons' whilst on holiday? A long-run secular shift in attitudes at home and abroad may bring better results eventually. In the meantime Mallorcans should continue the good work they have started in this area.

7. Who are the 'new' tourists and what is there economic function/impact?

For a long time Mallorcans have bemoaned the degenerative impact tourism has had on society, language and environment but have been happy to accept the considerable economic benefits – *la gallina d'or*. Many commentators advocate an expansion of 'new' tourists at the expense of 'old mass' tourists through a policy of diversification. Highly laudable providing total income from tourism remains constant or rises. If more 'new' tourists' and fewer 'old' tourists results in a fall in GDP or per capita incomes, Mallorcans must accept a fall in their standard of living or at least trade it against a possible increase in their quality of life. Such moves usually benefit the higher social echelons and not the working class sector, already subject to vicious 'seasonality', who may not find this sort of solution so acceptable. Are there enough 'new' tourists with sufficiently high disposable incomes to fulfil this policy move? Golfers, cruise tourists, the conference trade etc have so far made little economic impact, and mass tourist numbers continue to rise in any case!

8. What are the challenges will the tourism industry force Mallorcan society and economy to face?

Many of these have already been mentioned – environmental degradation and resource depletion, the continuing rise in mass tourist numbers; the creation of foreign tourist enclaves unfamiliar or even unknown to Mallorcan locals; seasonality; shifting of investment overseas by Mallorcan capital etc. In addition the increase in Mallorcan population through inward migration with a higher birth rate than that of locals will cause tensions unless employment opportunities are increased. Second homes and increased permanent residents from north and west Europe will inflate house prices further. Both sets of population increases will put new and difficult-to-sustain pressures on social services in the public sector at a time when it is difficult to increase the tax harvest and invest in services. Changing patterns of household formation will increase demands for new housing. Instability in other parts of the Mediterranean will increase the number of visitors to Mallorca, if only in the short run. This may compensate for the drift of tourists

to competing areas – Turkey, Middle East, North America, Caribbean etc. Of course, Mallorcan capital may prefer to *follow* these shifts

9. Will the 'old' politics of Left and Right serve Mallorca well, especially *post* the current crisis?

The election of right wing parties in this year's elections will signal a move towards more market driven economic policies. For Mallorca this will probably mean more roads or road improvements, less public transport, (both will generate more cars and more pollution), a reduction in public sector services in an economy that has a high dependence on employment in this sector, the disappearance of E economy funded from Madrid. All will be met with strong trade union resistance. Yet the principal problem facing government is the *crisis, particularly the high levels of persistent unemployment*. Is a new politics required to confront this problem? Should more effort be devoted to developing a post-touristic economy – serving the needs of local industries and services outside tourism? More effort to diversify the non-tourist economy rather than tourism itself.

10. Lines for future research in tourism

- Research into non-Mallorcan sources on history especially in period 1955-1973. This will require abilities in English and German languages. At same time encourage British and German researchers to work in this period.
- Encourage government departments to develop more sophisticated place – based data collection and display e.g. post code and other small area statistics.
- Examine the changing world of airline strategies especially with reference to no-frills airlines
- Examine the use of the internet in holiday information and booking systems – technology, hardware and software. Social impact of new technologies – who benefits?
- Improve marketing to emerging markets – east Europe, Asia etc.
- More anthropological and sociological research into the behaviour of tourists especially 'youth' tourists and 'silver' tourists.
- Research ways of encouraging tourists to behave environmentally more responsible.
- Research new forms of tourist taxation

- Tackle corruption mentalities at all levels

Copies of Professor Buswell's book can be obtained at 20% discount from:

<http://www.channelviewpublications.com/display.asp?isb=9781845411794>