

Tourism Planning and Management during COVID-19 Pandemic: A Lesson from Girona

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper aims to establish the significance of including the host community in the tourism planning and management processes in Girona-Spain. Additionally, it illustrates tourism data that correspond to periods before, during, and after the COVID-19 outbreak in the city. It explores the contribution of academia and stakeholders in the planning and management of the tourism system during the pandemic. **Design/Methodology/Approach:** The literature review references the residents, planning, management, and strategies for the contribution of local actors in the development of tourism models to be applied in the case study of Girona. It involves a qualitative methodology, using semi-structured interviews, and the Delphi method on the software Atlas Ti 8 regarding the residents' perceptions and the strategies of local public and private actors to establish sustainable models in tourist cities. **Findings:** The study reveals the effect and perceptions of residents regarding tourist activity in a historic center of a medium-sized city before the COVID-19 pandemic and five strategies proposed by both public and private organizations and residents, presenting unprecedented challenges. **Research Limitations/Implications:** The study does not include the perspective of tourists who have already seen Girona. **Practical Implications:** The strategies presented can be applied at the policy level in urban cities. Understanding resident-tourist interaction and effects will help prepare a better sustainable tourism development plan. **Originality/Value:** This paper is the first to present a tourism planning proposal for a city carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic with the participation of residents, public and private stakeholders, and academia.

Keywords

Urban Tourism, Community Participation, Over-Tourism, Tourism Management, Destination Management, Girona

1. Introduction

Tourism is a large-scale, currency-generating activity.

Accelerated urbanization has led to the growth of the tourism sector, allowing connectivity, the use of technologies, and new platforms to facilitate the mobility of tourists of all kinds (González-García et al., 2020). However, with this rapid change, urban cities worldwide are challenged to rethink new tourism models since previous ones aim to favor tourism workers and executives, leaving aside a susceptible element: the city's residents. The speed with which cities concentrate their population has been the study subject of some international organizations, including UN-HABITAT. In most cases, what we understand as development unfolds in a rapid and uncontrolled way, is a fact that transforms urban areas and their surroundings, generating socioeconomic changes that fragment and deteriorate the environment and territory (ONU-Habitat, 2012).

This study reveals the impact and perceptions of residents regarding tourist activity in historic centers of medium-sized cities before the COVID-19 pandemic and five strategies proposed by both public and private organizations and residents, presenting unprecedented new challenges; the research seeks to determine the importance of incorporating the host community in tourism planning and management processes. Tourist data corresponding to periods before, during, and after COVID-19 in the city are described to highlight the importance of the host community as well as to know the actions of the incursion of academia and external actors in the planning and management of the tourism system in the city under study during the pandemic (Zielinski & Botero, 2020).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Tourism Planning and Management in Urban Destinations

The importance of urban areas in tourism is well-known; the rising demand for heritage tourism, particularly in urban destinations, has put growing pressure on historical cities that might not have been designed to accept such large tourist volumes (Md Khairi et al., 2021). In the last few decades, tourism has noticed rising growth rates generating increased income, improving the balance of payments, creating jobs, and developing many local communities and the whole country's (Kovačević, 2020). For this reason, Cooper & Hall (2007) presents five approaches to tourism planning: economic, physical-spatial, community-oriented, sustainable, and touristic. These approaches are applied according to the destination's level of development. Tourism is recognized as a viable economic development strategy for developing countries (Nguyen, 2021). It is important to emphasize that contemporary planning focuses on sustainable tourism. However, this issue has been a source of controversy and debate for a long time since planning seeks to benefit tourism and improve the territory's residents' quality of life (Ramírez & Delgado, 2018).

2.2. Governance

The United Nations recommends that changes that occur in physical spaces, social fabrics, and financial aspects be responsibly planned if the responsibilities of the different actors are maintained to promote a productive development without affecting the locations' resources (Naciones Unidas, 2020). Implementing sustainable resource sharing to combat the impact of over-tourism on community resources would require challenging political reality (Agyeiwaah, 2019).

Urban heritage management is a complex system with many actors who have opposing visions and objectives in such a context—adding other groups that exert pressure, especially for economic interests, unregulated activities that respond to decisions of certain groups but not of a community (Jamieson & Jamieson, 2019). Therefore, planning and management require knowledge of the influence of each of these actors. The challenge is to develop equitable and effective governance systems that consider the complexity of the spaces and the entities that grow in them (Crawford, 2016).

2.3. Tourism Promotion

On the other hand, it is essential to know the most relevant strategies applied in the tourism sector to comprehensive planning. This, in turn, would highlight the importance of human beings' intervention to coexist and exchange information, knowledge, and experiences through messages that reach their destination by using different media, which have evolved with the arrival of the internet and its various applications, offering innovative and multiple channels for communication (Navarro Celis et al., 2020). Thus, the intention is to increase the sector's profitability and interact with consumers to access quality services tailored to their needs.

Tourist promotion strategies aim to offer modern methods based on the internet and new applications that users can easily access and allow them to live the experience as close to reality as possible. These tools aim to provide tourists with a fast response to problems that may arise at the destination (Ordoñez et al., 2019). Among the strategies used to generate a significant tourist experience is brand humanization, defined from the tourist's experience; personalized tourism marketing, based on the use of information and communication technologies, by implementing mobile device applications that would improve the tourist experience; implementation of digital marketing to take advantage of the promotion on social networks, web pages, search engines, and opinion pages, allowing the user to be close to the product or service; and, as a final strategy, to have online marketing tools based on the use of audiovisuals that have value for consumers (Chinchay-Villarreyes et al., 2020).

According to visitors' feedback, social media are places where destinations can build their reputation (Majó et al., 2018). To improve visitors' experiences and for residents to know how their city is projected towards tourism, an official website must be available, providing links to other complementary places of tourist interest. Also, all information must be updated and available in several languages (Majó et al., 2020).

2.4. Influence of Academia

Currently, academia is a crucial factor in generating research and transferring knowledge to local communities and, in turn, to the student population, beginning with the problems caused in the territory (Espinoza-Figueroa et al., 2021). Universities play an essential role since they provide the knowledge to develop competitive and sustainable tourism models. For this reason, education and research in tourism must contribute to the collaboration among local actors, such as the community, companies, and public organizations (Roxas et al., 2020), through practices that respond to tourism education.

The strategy is to connect to academia and encourage it to enrich cities' tourist models in terms of territory management issues, enhancement of the benefits of said territory, promotion of tourist attractions, and alternatives for a new offer adapted to a potential demand (Vaduva et al., 2020). This would foster relationships between academia and the community based on shared objectives that facilitate the resolution of problems presented between locals and tourists (Prince, 2020).

2.5. The Host Community Implicit in Tourism

One of the elements always implicit in the formation of cities is their residents. The city and its citizens have been understood as the political and institutional form of urban reality and, in turn, urbanism (Castro-Martínez et al., 2003). On the other hand, it is known that cities and their residents have undergone many changes over time, going from the Middle Ages with the first cosmopolitan cities to the 17th and 18th centuries with industrial cities (Fernández Christlieb, 2004). Furthermore, at the end of the 19th and 20th centuries, these spaces were formed as urban areas and colonies destined for mass industry (Rosas, 2013).

When the residents or the inhabitants of a specific urban area are referred to, it is mentioned that they are the individuals who live most of the time in the tourist area and consider it their home. It should be noted that they share with outsiders the use of both public and private spaces, making it necessary to work on a sustainable awareness since, in many cases, it is developed in a consensual manner, limiting tourism (Mihalic, 2020). For these reasons, the pillars that allow the development of tourism must be considered; among them, sociocultural and economic resources stand out (Bramwell et al., 2017), and therefore, the importance of knowing residents' attitudes and perceptions towards tourism, which influences how they coexist with this activity (Cardona, 2012).

For this reason, most studies mention the impacts of tourism and support for it (Mihalic, 2020). A resident is fully aware of tourism's strategic nature for the local economy and is willing to live with specific collateral effects, always within limits (Alonso & Tabales, 2018). According to the Naciones Unidas (2020), quality of life indicates that development can be carried out if the well-being of a geographical area is considered. At the same time, they care about the planet's integrity.

One phenomenon that most affects residents within the tourism field is exces-

sive tourism. This has led certain civil society groups, advocates, and activists to denounce tourism as an unsustainable expansion activity, which generates an increasing resource expansion to obtain significant gains for power groups. In contrast, the costs of maintaining said activity are borne by communities that are the actual owners of the resources (Milano et al., 2019).

Social movements belonging to different city unions create tensions within the social and business sphere. This, in turn, has led society to present a front to fight for its rights violated by the collective actions of growth from the visitors' economy (Owens, 2008). Therefore, it is essential to maintain the concept of "Sustainable Tourism," widely accepted by governments, representatives of the tourism industry (Wall, 2020), and academia. Inskip (1991) identifies and defines five pillars of sustainable tourism: economic, environmental, social responsibilities, its responsibility towards tourists (that is, ensuring visitor satisfaction), and global equity in development.

2.6. COVID-19 and Tourism in the New Normal

The United Nations, presenting its latest report on COVID 19, noted that this industry employs one in ten people worldwide and provides livelihoods for hundreds of millions of people. The World Tourism Organization reveals data, among which it is mentioned that between 100 and 120 million jobs that belong to this sector are at risk. In addition, a loss of 1.5% to 2.8% of world GDP is expected due to the industry crisis due to COVID 19 (Naciones Unidas, 2020).

On the other hand, the World Tourism Organization (2021) mentioned that the COVID-19 outbreak had paralyzed the world, and tourism has been affected, creating an exacerbated uncertainty. In this situation, what is required is that information generated after the pandemic is updated and made available to tourists and tourism service providers. For this, the cooperation of several sectors is needed, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations (UN), to guarantee that health measures are applied to reduce the unnecessary repercussions in travel and international commerce. In addition, it is intended that affected countries position themselves again on the tourism map, emphasizing the resilience demonstrated by tourism, and thus be ready to collaborate towards its recovery (Guterres, 2021).

Due to the uncertainty generated in mid-March 2020, which came about due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the arrival of foreign tourists and hikers to Spain was reduced by 64% in 2020 compared to the same month in 2019. Given the closure of international borders in April and May, arrivals were non-existent (Statista, 2021). In 2019, tourism in Spain was characterized by having source markets, such as the United Kingdom, Germany, France, the Nordic Countries, Italy, the Netherlands, the United States, and Belgium. However, despite the country's efforts to save the summer season, many tourist-issuing countries decided to recommend their inhabitants not to travel to Spain. In some cases, such as the United Kingdom, they imposed on their citizens a two-week isolation period after their trip to Spain. These measures further weakened Spain's compli-

cated summer campaign carrying (Mena, 2020).

2.7. Tourism Crisis: A Systemic Approach

It is important to note that the World Economic Forum, when it presented its 2015, 2017, 2019, and 2020 reports, announced that the Spanish tourism sector is one of the most competitive worldwide. Among the data available from the *World Tourism Organization (2021)*, Spain ranks second among the countries most dependent on tourism, accounting for 14.3% of its GDP. Among the aspects that stand out are its infrastructure and offer, characterized mainly by having a differentiating cultural richness in the area, its tourist plant, and the security provided to tourists.

Other elements make Spain show a strengthened tourism system:

- 1) Joint work through the articulation of a model-based during the last six decades on increasing the number of visitors.
- 2) Specialization of a predominant product of sun and beach.
- 3) Automated business development, permitting speculative practices mainly about real estate entrepreneurs.
- 4) Presentation of a tourist image based on mass tourism.

On the other hand, there is the excessive dependence on tour operators, over-exploitation of certain tourist enclaves, and environmental degradation (Mantecón, 2020).

Among the main problems of the Spanish tourism system, the following are considered: cities, the workplace, nature, the state, and public administration (Mantecón, 2020) (Table 1).

Table 1. Pre and post pandemic problems.

Area	Problems of the pre-pandemic tourism system	Influence of the pandemic on the post-pandemic tourism sector
City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Congestion in tourist nodes. -Degradation of the use of public spaces and furniture. -Loss of residents' quality of life and rejection of tourist practices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Decrease in the number of tourists. -Inequality in the social sphere and access to technologies. - Isolation due to teleworking.
Workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Job insecurity. -Increase in informal work. -Subordination of local producers to the tourist economy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Stagnation of economic and tourist activity. -Loss of employment, loss of purchasing power.
The State and public administration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Excessive consumption of public resources. -Corruption in municipalities with economies sustained by tourism. -Integration of the tourism business in the transnational economy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increase in public spending. -Exoneration of fiscal expenditure, and all kinds of aid from the public sector.
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Environmental impact derived from tourist activity, destruction of the landscape. -Large-scale contamination. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improvement of air quality in cities. -Repair of the ozone layer.

Source: The author's elaboration based on (Mantecón, 2020).

It is important to emphasize that the health crisis has influenced social and tourist dynamics as time passes. The arrival of the vaccine has given hope for the recovery of tourism. At present, with the distribution of the vaccine, first-world countries have been able to adopt measures, creating policies to put the economy into motion and provide an alternative to the sector hit by the pandemic (Babii & Sanaa, 2021).

As a result, there are two dimensions of the crisis today. The first dimension is to strengthen public health and educate residents to take all necessary measures in biosafety, which would allow adaptation to this new reality. The second dimension is the most important because mobility between regions and countries has restrictions since zero tourists marked the pandemic. On the other hand, when we adapt to this new reality, intermediary tourism companies will be part of the fundamental actors in charge of recovering tourism, providing tourists with the necessary guarantees to visit destinations; these may emerge by considering the ability to adapt to new circumstances (Hernández, 2020).

Authors such as León Camargo (2020) mention that in addition to the economic impacts caused by COVID-19, there is a high media impact due to the countless news reports on this topic every day. At the same time, however, it is mentioned that said virus can be an opportunity for transformation, which will result in new tourist profiles. Changes in tourist behavior will also be seen, causing the appearance of new demand segments. Likewise, tourist needs will demand certain types of accommodation, food, etc. Destination preferences that provide the necessary security will be critical elements in determining behavioral changes and their impact on tourism (Hernández, 2020).

On the other hand, authors such as Higgins-Desbiolles (2020: p. 19) consider that the pandemic has allowed entrepreneurs to see tourism as a socially responsible activity, that is, to have an income to consider communities and resources. Additionally, the intention is for tourism to be reoriented in favor of the host community's rights and interests. Moreover, despite the crisis that we are experiencing now, in-depth research should be considered that promotes e-tourism and, in turn, opens spaces for it to develop (León Camargo, 2020).

Global restrictions due to COVID-19 have led to a decrease in different kinds of travel, which has led to tourism plummeting with devastating effects. Spain's the most vulnerable country since 14.3% of its GDP corresponds to tourism (Mena, 2020). These catastrophic effects have led to the paralysis not only of those countries but also of the planet.

3. Case Study: Girona-Spain

Girona is a city located in the Autonomous Community of Catalonia. It is the province's capital by the same name as the Gironés region. It belongs to the area of the Girona regions and the urban system of Girona according to the General Territorial Plan of Catalonia (Hernández, 2011). It has an area of 39.12 km² and an altitude of 70 meters above sea level. It is located 100 km from the city of

Barcelona, a highly recognized and valued destination globally. Additionally, its proximity to the neighboring country of France makes it an essential territory with a long tourist tradition, both on the Costa Brava and in the Pyrenees (Crous-Costa & Vidal-Casellas, 2013).

Regarding the characteristics of the city, we can mention that “it has a recovered historical nucleus of features, such as narrow and winding streets formed by the continuity of facades [...] small squares originated by widening or street misalignments; great variety of monumental buildings; and a built complex characterized by the superposition of styles that form a great monument”. One of the elements that transcend the city’s identity is stone (Fontes, 2010).

Girona is among the various tourist attractions in Catalonia. This city responds to the archetype of the medieval town, with a density of monuments and universal signs related to its historical condition (Galí, 2009). Due to these attributes, as of 2012, the city has experienced a considerable tourist flow, especially in the historic center. Before the pandemic, this situation caused an increase in rental prices, causing the displacement of residents outside the historic center. Among other inconveniences is the disagreement regarding mobility issues, especially during the festivities. On the other hand, the change in the use of spaces and the economic regression due to the tourist activity have made different groups express their dissatisfaction with the development of tourism in the historic center.

During the pandemic, the fiscal year 2020 is defined as the worst tourist season in history due to the global health and economic crisis caused by COVID-19. The fear of traveling, mobility and border restrictions, mandatory quarantines, forced stoppage of economic activity, the implementation of health and security measures, and fluctuating uncertainty have directly and negatively affected world tourism activity. According to data from the Observatory of the Department of Tourism Innovation of the Eurecat Foundation, in 2020, the province of Girona received 3,346,055 tourists, 57.7% less than in 2019, which generated 10,037,448 overnight stays, a figure that represents a 61.2% reduction compared to the previous year. On the other hand, in 2020, the Girona-Costa Brava Airport registered 172,213 users, representing a drop of 91.1% compared to 2019. In the same line, it should be noted that the airport infrastructure recorded 1994 operations with 17 airlines, while in 2019, there were 11,645 operations in charge of 36 airlines (Patronat de Turisme Costa Brava Girona, 2020).

4. Methodology

This research aims to determine the importance of incorporating the host community in tourism planning and management processes. An exploratory qualitative study was designed based on the inductive method. First, a literature review was conducted regarding the topic; then, a semi-structured interview technique was applied, accompanied by content analysis since this activity offers us the possibility of inquiring about the nature of discourse.

Zoning of the historic center of Girona was carried out to determine the size

of the sample. The following criteria were established to choose the informants: people who reside in areas of tourist influence, who are affected economically by the tourist activity, and who live and work in the historic center. To determine the semi-structured interview sample, we considered the population size of the people who lived in the center of Girona in 2019, 9.409 citizens (Ajuntament de Girona, 2021), with a confidence level of 90% and a margin error of 15% by utilizing the sample calculation tool by Survey Monkey (SurveyMonkey, 2022).

After applying the criteria, a sample of 35 people was defined, and a semi-structured interview was conducted. The twenty-question discussion focused on four areas of inquiry: demographic, daily life, holidays, and tourism. Data was collected regarding residents' perceptions pre-COVID-19.

During the pandemic, data collection was implemented in a second stage using the Delphi method, where five sessions of the Girona Taula were analyzed between February and May 2020. Multimedia documents were analyzed, consisting of videoconferences, and video clips, among others (López & Gómez, 2006). Data were collected regarding the problems that emerged during the pandemic, where private and public actors and the members of academia presented strategies in the economic and tourist fields.

To process the information from both stages, the Atlas Ti 8 software was used. A cyclical analysis was carried out, which allowed the discovery of relevant elements in the study, for which a robust categorization framework was developed (Rodríguez Sabiote et al., 2005).

5. Results

To obtain the results, open coding was carried out where 350 codes were identified, followed by axial coding, where codes with similar themes have coalesced, and 64 principles were obtained. The population of the center of Girona is made up of 9409 inhabitants, 4787 men, and 5622 women. One hundred ninety-one inhabitants are between 0 and 15 years old, 6575 people are between 16 and 64 years old, and 1544 inhabitants are over 65 years old (Ajuntament de Girona, 2021). This made it possible to determine the perception of the residents who live and work in Girona's historic center. In the first analysis, four themes were determined: modification of urban space, residents' perceptions, local economy, and city council management. This information was collected during the pre-pandemic stage.

5.1. About the Changes in the Use of Space

The city has various public and private spaces. In 2021, there were no studies carried out by the Ayuntamiento de Girona to inform the impact of houses used for tourism in the historic center. Therefore, there are various resident movements such as "Més barri, menys pisos turístics" ["More neighborhood, fewer tourist apartments"] whose members have been the maximum speakers of tourist phobia, which is increasing in the city, as there is no sustainable tourist model

to obtain a moratorium on housing licenses for tourist use, that is, to extend the term of said licenses. In this case, one of the residents confirmed: “Because we put aside the residential use of existing flats in the historic center and set them aside for housing for tourist use” (La Vanguardia, 2019). The problem, according to the residents interviewed, is that the city council contradicts itself since it does not provide guarantees for the right to decent housing for residents (Plazas, 2021), which is highlighted by a displacement of the premises to other areas since the rent is unsustainable in the historic center.

Tourist flows increase, especially during festivities, generating demand for accommodations; in this case, tourists search for tourist apartments either by location or price. Overcrowding in the city is not only seen during festivities but currently throughout the year, generating severe mobility problems as the city streets are narrow in the historic center. In addition, inhabitants are oppressed since public spaces, such as promenades, squares, and parks, are affected to mount infrastructures for tourists. On this subject, several interviewees mentioned: “Obviously I think there is a massification of tourist apartments...”; “There is a lack of control over illegal tourist apartments...”. “During the festivities, the streets fill with people, and it is impossible to walk...”.

5.2. About the Perception of Residents

The residents’ tourist perception is based on the attitudes and behaviors of the tourists during their visit to the city. These perceptions are usually positive and negative. However, at the time of the interview, the informants mentioned certain contradictions regarding the tourism issue since they like to travel to other countries. Still, they do not welcome the presence of tourists in Barri Vell.

Among the positive perceptions, those interviewed mentioned that tourism generates income and promotes new city attractions. They also agree that visitors seek recreation and leisure. On this subject, the interviewees say, “I perceive it positively because the city has attractiveness and that can generate jobs...”; “For me, it is an activity that generates income for the city and generates employment...”.

Among the negative perceptions, residents interviewed mentioned that the tourist circuits established in the city are not met, and people make the mistake of hiring guides who do not respect spaces, causing a change in social dynamics. There is no mass control, especially during festivities, since, in some cases, visitors outnumber residents. This generates disapproval from neighbors due to tourists’ behavior, violating the rules of coexistence in residents’ buildings. On this subject, the interviewees mentioned that: “I look at the group of tourists, and I go the other way...”; “It overwhelms me, there are coexistence problems...”; “Other people should consider adapting to where they go...”.

5.3. About the Local Economy

The first point of analysis is the neighborhood businesses found in different locations in the historic center, which have disappeared due to pressure from eco-

conomic power groups in the area. There are only two local handicraft businesses; the rest offer generic or foreign products. Also, there is unfair price competition since the services provided are intended for the visitor but not for the resident. The institutions' discourse focuses on tourism's positive effects. A line of academic reflection is developed that points out advantages and disadvantages, especially in cities. Among the points considered is the increase in activities directly linked to tourism consumption, the reorientation of an increasingly wide range of businesses to foreign customers, the conversion of housing into new tourist merchandise (De la Calle, 2019). The process of "touristification" is addressed, a method of irreversible change that affects the forms and functions of historic cities.

In the last decade, tourism has created a business model for tourists. In addition, there is a high turnover of businesses in areas such as Carrer Cort Reial, Carrer de la Força, Rambla, Plaça Indenpendència, areas adjacent to the Cathedral of Girona, and Pont de Pedra. This high turnover causes job insecurity on the part of employers. However, other informants mention that tourism creates sources of employment, generates income for certain citizens, and allows a tourist flow not governed only by tourist seasons but a flow maintained throughout the year. Occasionally, groups visit the city without generating any economic income since they consume the existing heritage but do not invest in the destination. The interviewees mentioned: "*They open businesses, but soon after they close them because they cannot cover maintenance costs...*"; "*There are monopolies, businesses owned by the same owner, that sell similar handicrafts...*".

5.4. About the Management of the City Council

For many years, the City Council has offered to carry out a study regarding the impact of tourist housing in the city. However, it has been noted that the entity responsible for governance censures specific movements that fight for equality in terms of the housing system for residents, thus generating discrepancies for promoting tourist phobia. The *Més barri menys pissos turistics* group wants the City Council to collaborate with corrective measures to avoid speculation in apartment rents and thus stop the displacement of the premises and the sale of said real estate to foreign economic groups with purchasing power. The group mentioned that the tourist model is simple. There is no control over the residents' well-being in issuing licenses for tourist apartments even though there is a saturation. The adequate promotion of accommodation establishments is not promoted to encourage tourists to make use of them in a more significant proportion, thus avoiding a fall into a chronic housing and social emergency, which the pandemic has aggravated. Likewise, the suggestion of the Generalitat to sanction irregular contracts regarding the issue of rentals should be maintained (Sindicat de llogaters, 2021).

There are clear guidelines on itinerary suggestions regarding tourist flows since tourists are received at certain times of the year without control. These

groups make visits and interrupt mobility in the city in some cases. Therefore, work must be done on the governance regulating these visits or generating more effective circuits for tourists to make their tours orderly. On this subject, the interviewees mentioned that: “*Massification of tourists generates flat rentals without regulation...*”; “*We are turning Girona into a bedroom city...*”; “*There is no clear governance.*”

5.5. Tourism Governance Measures during COVID

The Taula Gironina de Turisme is a transversal association that represents the tourism sector in all the regions of Girona (Alt Empordà, Baix Empordà, Cerdanya, Garrotxa, Gironès, Pla de l’Estany, Ripollès, La Selva). It was born to support and have a strong voice that watches over and defends the tourism sector’s interests in the Girona region. It was created shortly after the attacks in Barcelona in August 2017 because business people were concerned about the adverse effects that attacks could generate on tourism in the regions.

Shortly after that attack, the representatives of the Girona Region Hospitality Federation, the Girona Campings Association, the Tourist Apartment Association, and the Catalan Association of Specialized Travel Agencies met. After that first meeting, other meetings followed, where more Girona organizations linked to tourism were incorporated and formed the current Taula Gironina de Turisme.

The first significant action organized by the different actors, both public and private, in conjunction with academia was to be part of the 2020 Debate: Tourism in the Girona region, meant to be held monthly between January and May 2020, and of which two days were held in Girona and Roses. The final objective was to define clear lines of work for the future and to document the set of proposals and initiatives, thus achieving at the same time a commitment from the public and private sectors to work together towards the same goal in favor of the region’s tourism.

During five days of debate, it was possible to identify six primary needs: to mitigate the impact of the pandemic (the most urgent), to increase promotion, to allocate sufficient resources for the care of public services, the environment, and heritage, to ensure environmental and economic sustainability, to deseasonalize in favor of global economic activity, and to improve the territory’s connectivity.

These days, all the entities involved in preparing the Strategic Plan for the tourism sector of Girona are involved. In addition, public and private actors collaborated to channel the different reflections on the current position of tourism in the regions of Girona and thus have a clear idea of how tourism can be directed faced with the new challenges generated by the pandemic (COVID-19) and the damage it has caused in tourism.

All through the development of these conferences there were personalities such as: Maria Àngels Chacón, Minister of Business and Knowledge; Marta Ma-

drenas, Mayor of Girona; Miquel Noguer, president of the Girona Provincial Council and the Costa Brava Girona Tourist Board; Jaume Fàbrega, president of the Girona Chamber of Commerce; Jordi Martí, president of the Taula Gironina de Turisme; Joan Roca, Chef Celler de can Roca; Marc Casadellà, expert in active tourism; Catiana Tur, Manager of Acave; Silvia Romero, head of promotion of the Palamós Town Hall; Jordi Mias, Federation of Hospitality of the Girona region; Ward Wijngaert, Manager of Campings in Girona; Àngela Galcerán, Manager of the Tourist Apartment Association; Teresa Vilà, Manager of the Association of Rural Tourism Houses; Dolors Vidal, Professor at the University of Girona; Jordi Comas, Professor at the UdG Tourism; Jaume Guía, Professor at UdG Tourism; José Antonio Donaire, Professor at the UdG Tourism; Joaquim Majó, Dean of the Faculty of Tourism UdG; Anna Garriga, Professor at the UdG Economics; Jordi Tubert, Event coordinator at Taula Gironina de Turisme; David Martínez, representative of banking entities, Spain; Genís Roca, expert in network management; Rosa Durán, Association of Guides; David Font, expert in biosafety; Maribel Vela, Representative of Nautical Tourism; Jimmy Pons, Co-Founder of Round Cubers.com; Moserrath Sierra, expert in International Markets Management; Ignacio de Juan Creix, expert in multimedia content management; Rafael de Jorge, expert in the use of technologies; and, Josefina Mariné, expert in tourist markets.

6. Strategies Provided by Members of the Academia and Public and Private Entities

6.1. Mitigate the Impact of the Pandemic

It is required that the administration provides 25% of the aid to help rescue the economy since tourism is one of the most affected sectors to prevent the closure of businesses and companies. A tax moratorium within the tourism sector needs to be implemented, considering that there was no income during the Pandemic. The private sector must prepare itself and make the necessary business decisions when restrictions are lifted. It is considered time to consolidate the current tourist offer without proposing an increase in taxes for the next few years. This recommendation made by all the participants can be found on the official website of the “Taula Gironina de Turisme”, in the section “Els reptes del futur” ([Debat 2020|Taula Gironina de Turisme, 2020](#)).

6.2. Increase Promotion

Ambitious promotion plans are needed to recover the gains lost during the Pandemic, which would help position the region as a safe destination with a high-quality offer. Thus, a new tourist tax needs to be designed for tax collection.

The private sector promises to continue with the ongoing improvement of the quality of accommodation and tourist services. At the same time, it reinforces all levels of management in terms of hospitality and generates a high-level Girona tourism seal.

6.3. Care of Public Resources, the Environment, and Heritage

The local and Catalan administrations must improve the urban-rural transition spaces, the industrial areas at the entrance of the municipalities, and the municipality's surroundings in general. It is necessary to intervene in peri-urban spaces, increase adequate policies to create sustainable beaches, and promote agriculture to increase respectable employment and local products used in the gastronomy offered in the city.

The private sector wants to support sustainable infrastructures, which generate minor environmental impacts. This change must be tackled through European aid aimed at this area. That is, invest in equipment, in terms of digitization of services, especially in medium-sized companies. Joint work between the different service provider companies is needed to attract tourists who value a high-level tourist product and create profits that create decent jobs in the area.

6.4. Deseasonalize

Due to climate change, it is necessary to make an unwavering commitment to deseasonalize visits to extend the season. The government must promote activities to create an offer that allows the autumn and spring seasons to grow through natural environments and sun and beach tourism.

As for the private sector, the promotion of traditional accommodations must be encouraged. The accommodation sector must firmly commit to opening spaces to complement its offers, such as congresses and cultural events. It should undertake promotion efforts in new markets, new tourist segments based on tourists' different age ranges, depending on the time of year, and, above all, promotion applied to each destination, complementing the low seasons.

Big data and digitization will help provide faster responses and promote nearby markets. One option would be to consider re-seasoning, defined as creating activities for a specific area and period, to have a more excellent offer and increase visitors.

6.5. Connectivity

Transport connections, especially public transport, are poor both on the coast and inland and even more so in the mountains. Girona has a first-rate airport that can adapt to bus frequencies, which can be increased and adapted to the arrival of flights.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The analysis undertaken during the cities' planning processes has served to know how the different groups, the members of a multidisciplinary scientific community, tourist workers, and residents of the city present their position vis-à-vis the institutional apparatus of tourism and at the local government level.

The proposals refer to opening to society a cross-section and multidisciplinary debate, which generates discussion and allows the voices of all the agents in-

volved to be heard to define strategies for a plan for the Girona tourism sector. This plan would originate from a consensus and be assumed by the political leaders present throughout the territory.

2020 is a good starting point for reflection and actions to promote the tourism sector in the coming years. The goal is to collectively define clear lines of work for the future and register the set of proposals and initiatives while achieving a commitment from the sector and politicians to highlight the benefits and transform difficulties into opportunities that promote controlled tourism development under coherent and inclusive governance sectors participate. The conviction is reiterated to articulate the local entities at the city level and those involved at the county level to develop broad political and social consensus around general strategic and territorial planning.

On the other hand, tourism studies in the city, in general, have focused on looking at the aspects limiting tourist activities, especially from the point of view provided by the residents. This has caused confrontations with governmental entities by the host community. However, these observations and the events during the pandemic can help give a baseline to assess ongoing processes, although it is not easy to determine whether these processes collaborate with planned tourism development in the city. Based on these problems, it is possible to analyze and reflect on the regional sectors and actors' positions to jointly seek viable solutions that adhere to an existing legal framework. In addition, with the researched information, a point can be reached that allows us to rethink tourism planning in the territory and generate a diversified and controlled offer, and thus empower tourism workers located within an established legal framework through a more significant promotion of the benefits provided by the city of Girona to visitors, without neglecting residents' quality of life.

The Girona tourism sector has proven its strength, even in economic crisis. However, now is the time to take a step further, based on a commitment to the community, its territory, and the environment.

7.1. Social Implications

Tourism planning constitutes a fundamental element in a city's development since it guarantees the integration of tourism in society, its economy, its culture, and the environment, creating synergies that increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the efforts of different local actors to promote tourism development among society, academia, and the entities that oversee governance (Rauda, 2017).

7.2. Practical Implications

The strategies presented can be applied at the policy level in urban cities. Understanding resident-tourist interaction and impacts will help prepare a better sustainable tourism development plan.

Therefore, there must be congruence between tourism development trends and these implementations, especially in medium-sized cities with similar characte-

ristics in their historic centers.

This research shows the bridge created between academia (Faculty of Tourism of the University of Girona) and the productive sector, given that the results present the “Taula de Girona”. This space was opened during the pandemic to promote the reactivation of tourism.

7.3. Research Limitations

The study does not include the perspective and experience of tourists who visit or those who have already seen Girona. Future research can analyze the behavior of satisfaction of tourists who visit Girona after having implemented the tourism planning strategies proposed by the “Taula Gironina de Turisme”.

Research in this direction will help city tourism managers to prepare tourism development plans actively and have specific city strategies to alleviate the problem of over-tourism in Girona.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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