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**Public Opinions of Stakeholders of  
Benidorm (Spain)**

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## **Public Opinions of Stakeholders of Benidorm (Spain)**

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### **Abstract**

Benidorm is identified as one of the main tourist destinations in Spain, proved by its number of hotels, close to 150 with 60.000 beds. In addition, this city provides 350.000 apartments for tourists, considered their second residence. Benidorm is geographically located in the southeast cost of the Iberian Peninsula, surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea and well known as Costa Blanca.

The early development of Benidorm as a tourist destination started in the 50's and through the years, Benidorm has been forced to be adapted to its main visitors new requirements in order to continue being considered a successful and updated tourist destination in Spain.

The aim of this article is to clarify and bring to light the issues and aspects to be improved in Benidorm. The information has been obtained from close to 30 interviews to stakeholders directly involved within the tourism industry, concluding that Benidorm needs to act in different but significant aspects. For example, the image should be improved needing important investments as well as the accessibility by road, train and the connections with the airport. The dependence of Benidorm to two types of tourists, English and the senior tourism, should be minimized. Additionally, the vast number of hotels in Benidorm is considered a privilege but the quality of the service provided is far from exceeding the expectations. On the other hand there is a problem regarding the commerce, due to the replacement of traditional shops by Chinese entrepreneurs. The responses were unanimous, failing in terms of qualification and salaries in relation to the human resources working for the tourism industry. Lately, the food and beverage industry is also detected to leave much to be desire in this important and touristic city.

*Index Terms*—Benidorm, hotels, human recourses, stakeholders, tourist, and urban ambience.

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## Introduction

The main purpose of this article is to clarify the reality that Benidorm as a tourist destination has to deal with. The information has been obtained from public opinions of those who are directly implicated in the Tourism Industry. It is going to be questioned important fields. Firstly, the article is going to study how the respondents perceive the image and ambience of Benidorm. Coming up next, this paper is going to discuss how the perceptions of stakeholders are regarding the type of tourists arriving to this destination. Then the opinion about the number of hotels and the quality that characterizes them and finally, the study is going to analyze how the human resources are managed. To conclude, it is going to be reflected the assessment and future perspectives made from the social partners.



Location of Benidorm in the Mediterranean Sea.

The methodology followed throughout this paper is based in an empirical study, done from 30 interviews along the months of February to May, 2011. From the answers obtained and the observation of the interviewees, the paper seeks to determine the real and current situation that Benidorm faces in terms of tourism. Interviewees were carefully selected according to their professional profiles, knowledge about Benidorm, (Gutiérrez, J., 2007), and with high level of influence and active participation in social and tourist life and local policy, (Janoschka, M., 2011) – hotel's associations, hotel managers, politics, bank managers, civil servants, merchant associations, restaurants owners, researchers and tourism students, journalists, trades union and employees of the industry –. The interviews were made with open and flexible questions.

## Landscape and urban ambience

The landscape and environment are considered crucial when the decision making process is taking place among all possible aspects that could give personality, character or identity to any tourist destination. It is not easy to dispose these two elements considered raw material of tourist activities, (Andreu, N. et al., 2005) and that represent the core assets for the attractiveness of a place. According to Antón et al. (2007), the image of a tourist destination has a great influence when tourists assess the possible destinations because it is what makes a place exceptional and different from the rest. Therefore, the perception of tourists about the chosen place and the image associated with it are considered key aspects to assess any holiday destination. It is necessary large amount of resources, such as streets alive, daily and night activities, attractive shops, cafeterias, bars, restaurants, pubs, and so on to make a destination as tempting as possible for tourists. Another factor that should add value

in tourism destinations is the city role. In other terms, the city itself is a product to sell, and a tourist should be able to visit and do many different things. A successful destination must combine avenues, streets, gardens, parks and buildings making the city as pleasant, attractive and charming as possible. To get a city with these characteristics involves an ambitious policy geared to constant improvements of the space and urban scene. This shall include a successful and adequate planning, from the beginning of its development ahead. Effective actions from the administration through economic aids, to improve, renew and increase infrastructures, are also needed to create a positive image. Examples of infrastructure are street lighting, well-paved sidewalks, urban facilities, roads, cleaning, garbage collection, accessibility, security and a long etcetera.

Besides, local businesses must improve consistently their companies to attract new tourist generations. The commerce has been with the lapse of time one of the economic activities that has contribute to enhance the urban image of Benidorm '*I don't know if the commerce of Benidorm has enough turnover but the image of the city with so many commerce is sensational, I like to go out in the street and see the ambience that the commerce gives to Benidorm (Bank Manager)*'. Through the discourse of the social agents, one of the most serious problems in Benidorm focuses on the commerce. It is not difficult to contrast the speech with the reality by just having a walk around the city, where the most remarkable thing is almost the total dominance of Chinese shops. It should be noted that due to the touristic character of the city, '*the commerce is addressed to tourists, with sixty of seventy opened hours per week (...). There are two different worlds, the commerce of Benidorm and the commerce of the "El Rincón", with different demands (Entrepreneur)*'.

In other words, to become the first destination for future tourists it seems to be a must an actualized agenda with appropriate refurbishment and renovation policies of hotels, restaurants, trades and any kind of tourism businesses.

The consistency Benidorm' image is undeniable and the interviewers' opinions are conclusive. They praise Benidorm' urbanism and its ambience. Moreover, they consider the image as one of the elements that distinguishes, characterizes and gives personality to the city, representing its main attraction. They are convinced that its ambience is superb all over the year. Likewise, the skyline focused on skyscrapers, mixing hotels with apartments, allows the concentration of large amount of people and all kind of services:

*'The skyline of Benidorm is known by everyone, do you know which skyline has Torremolinos or Valencia? The icon of Benidorm is its skyline and it is unique. (Hotel Staff)'*

The urban ambience of Benidorm propitiates to walk around the sociable streets, full of people all over the year. This is one of the major differences of Benidorm in relation to other cities in which their development has been focused on what it is known as a residential tourism, characterized by empty streets out of the high season.

*'Benidorm has one wonderful thing. Listen, when I worked in other coastal cities I finished work at 9 p.m. and there was no one in the streets. I was scared, you could not find anyone around and in Benidorm it's totally the opposite, I have never seen before what happens in this city (Bank Manager)'*

Despite these favorably estimations about Benidorm, the respondents perceive an unclear future. They believe Benidorm must face challenges to improve its urban space. However they also show skepticism claiming that due to the economic crisis and the vast lack of economic resources in Benidorm, -according to the newspaper 'Diario Información' 04/05/2011 is 130 million euros- it is very difficult to undertake all those priority actions to improve its image. Although Benidorm is considered an idyllic destination, criticism concerning its landscape is very severe. They perceive that the town is in decline with an evident damage; mistreatment and degradation of its urban scene in last years. They state that there is a lack on investment and that it is necessary to renew Benidorm because *'it's a new city that is getting old and it has to be recycle permanently. (City Councilor of Partido Popular (PP))'*. In this sense, we collect two opinions:

*'It's essential to invest in the image of Benidorm, to renovate the street lighting. It is not possible to have 50 years old lampposts in one of the main avenues and to find asphalt above the pavement. This is not possible because we live from the image of Benidorm (Politico PP)'*.

*'We have to change the image and give brightness to Benidorm. There are not parkings. In Poniente Beach there is an spectacular promenade, but there are not enough space to park more than two cars. They can only park in a patch, under a tree, like many years ago, how do they set up an impressive walk along the beach but they do not think about parking? In many places in Benidorm happens the same, there are not parking places (Trade representative)'*.

## **Tourists**

If we have been qualifying the landscape and urban ambience of a tourist destination as the raw material, the tourist is its main character. Without tourists, there is no possibility of tourism. But all tourists are not equal. One classification of tourists may be according to their expenditure power. This social segmentation takes a leading role when tourists are deciding which destination to choose. Those with a healthy economy will opt for destinations matching their level of income, rejecting at the same time those territories characterized by mass tourism.

All tourist areas should aim to be within top, however they have to adapt to their reality.

Some destinations are specialized in what is well known as Sun and Sea. Since the beginning of the modern tourism, its clientele is being recruited by tour operators through tourist packages. These companies capture potential tourists with the price as a key element to decide where to spend their holidays, hence the existence of many destinations with high number of tourist arrivals. But the revenue generated by those tourists is relatively low with ungenerous daily expenditure per person or not satisfactory enough for those implicated within this industry.

There are some other destinations, also focused on Sun and Sea, but offering a differentiated product in terms of elitism and exclusory. That is why these areas are not considered mass tourist destinations and the prices are higher, limiting the access



to those tourists who are not able to afford it. Although these tourists are looking for same model of product they also search to differentiate themselves through the price. They aim for uniqueness and exoticism with great richness in the landscape and high level of sustainable tourism.

In the specific case of Benidorm, there is a consensus within the interviewees when it comes to identify the tourists coming to the city. They belong to middle and working classes, both Spanish and European, highlighting elderly and English segments. The group of elderly is channeled by the IMSERSO. Benidorm receives as well senior citizens who organized their trip through pensioners' associations that offer special prices to TT.OO for winter seasons and whose expenses never over go their pensions.

When the interviewees express their opinions about the tourists targeting Benidorm they state:

*'In Benidorm there are only senior tourists and English people getting drunk for small amount of money (...) there are old people with bags of food and they eat in front of the sea, they do not go to bars or restaurants, they do not consume anything, (Cafeteria staff).'*

They are sure that this low quality tourism is because it focuses exclusively in Sun and Sea. Nevertheless, they are conscious that *'Benidorm beaches are wonderful but there are also many other destinations with beaches. We should offer something else, (Civil servant)'*. A bank manager states, *'Elderly tourists don't create any conflict but they do not spend money (...) cheap tourism does not benefit Benidorm'*. Furthermore, some respondents believe that this dependency is also favorable for the city, *'I hope the tourist targeting that Benidorm would be with us forever, (Trade-union representative)'*.

## **Hotels**

Within the tourism industry, the hospitality is one of the basic pillars. The hoteliers have been always linked to the practice of tourism. The origin of hotels runs parallel to the very first development of tourism. Along the years, the hospitality industry has faced important issues and changes but its main purpose is still the same: to provide accommodation for those people travelling out of their usual places of residence. Hotels can operate throughout different business models of management, but there are two main axes that will shape their options: management of independent hotels and management through integration or grouping with other establishments, (Mazón, 2001).

Benidorm offers one of the largest collections of hotels across the Mediterranean: 150 hotels and 40.000 beds that Benidorm has been constantly renovating through the years. And it is about hotels, that the interviewees state the best opinions. For instance, *'without competence, this is the miracle of Benidorm (Politic PP)'* and a journalist claims *'No other tourism destination with such a good relationship between value-money has the number of hotels as Benidorm does'*, or *'There is an exemplary hotel industry (Tourism writer)'*. The positive comments are also about the service provided within the hotels, specifically about the buffets:

*'The buffets are extremely good; I have not been in any hotel of the world with this relationship value-money. Here the buffets are extraordinary, you can find more than 70 or 80 different products (Researcher)'.*

The interviewees express also their disappointment and concern with some negative aspects related with human resources management within the hotels of Benidorm. They perceive deterioration in spite of its importance, saying:

*'We must truly take care of the customer service. It should be the center of the business. The center is not the hotel itself; it is not the employee, not even the owner. The center of the hotel industry is the customer (Political PSOE)'.*

They also say *'The quality of treatment received by the client has dropped down considerably (Tourism technical)'.*

Furthermore, they blame hotels concerning the type of tourist attracted to Benidorm, with a very low purchasing power, stating that hotels are the ones who *'discredit the touristic product of Benidorm, dropping the prices and offering much less services even nearer the area called Rincon de Loix (Officer)'.*

About what is known as 'all inclusive' it is qualified as demolishing. They consider that this form of sale is responsible of the bad performance of the sector. They claim that 'all inclusive' leads in negative results in terms of competence between hotels.

*'There are even hotels with advertisements of their restaurant menu at the door with offers and low prices. They don't have enough with their guests; they try to attract people walking by. The occupation has dropped; hotels were always full along years and since new establishments opened the competence between them has increased and fights in terms of prices has also cropped up. Once they had enough with the overnight stays but nowadays they try to persuade them to remain in the hotel. This policy is very detrimental for the village (Hospitality association)'.*

## **F&B industry and hotel services**

A tourist could travel without sightseeing or spending time visiting monuments or cities but never without eating. *'A place is likely to be firstly remembered for what you eat and secondly for what you see (Clemente et al, 2009:87)'.* These authors are even stating that the number of people visiting a tourist destination exclusively to experience and to get to know its gastronomy is augmenting. Concerning this matter, we have found two antagonistic discourses in Benidorm. For some social agents *'the value for money in relation to restaurants is great (Tourism researcher)'.*

On the opposite hand, others social agents claim:

*'The restaurant industry in Benidorm is weak. It has never been considerate good. Tourist do not visit the city to eat and all renamed restaurants have failed (Social Researcher)'.*

Those perceiving the gastronomy of Benidorm as a positive issue assert that there are many good restaurants in city though the problem lies with the promotion. They also claim that there are pubs, clubs and cafes enviable in its operations, contributing to generate a good image of the city:

*'There are fantastic bars across the beach, thematic bars for Moto lovers, with rock music alive all day long. In Benidorm, you can find a mix of cultures at the same point and moment, for example the gypsy selling flowers, Pakistanis selling I do not know exactly what, three or four tourists drinking beers, people over 50 years old walking around, English people drinking alcohol at 4 p.m. and singing happily. You can also find young people right in front of this entire scene. Even Spanish people screaming ¡Viva España! And later again rock and roll all time (...). There are extraordinary sites, but tatty and poor at the same time. Instead of a real Elton John, you can find an imitator walking around Benidorm together with Elvis. But Benidorm is all about that. Can they pay the real Elton John? They prefer to laugh at the unreal one (Social Researcher).'*

Besides, there are also negative statements against the quality and the good image of the tourist establishments. *'Restaurants have had the same menus for 20 years (syndical representative); they highlight the lack of big restaurants with certain level of quality, to the extent of sending guest of some hotels to other neighbouring locations (Hotel manager).'*

*'Cafeterias and bars of the touristic area are all similar. They seem to be photocopies, same tables (...) there aren't good restaurants, all of them have menus of 8 or 9 euros, and you can even find 2 euro menus made from potatoes, chicken and dessert (Cafeteria staff).'*

### **Infrastructures and communications**

In this field, there is a total conviction about the bad management that Benidorm has done which has been considered far from acceptable despite the fact that many authors state that any communication system would be a success. *'If Benidorm is a key tourism destination, I don't understand what happens in this aspect, (Journalist).'* The most popular speech states that:

*'One of the biggest problems in Benidorm is communications; it takes too long to arrive. The train from Alicante is way too slow. There are not easy connections from and to the airport and the roads are tremendous, very problematic and with many black spots, (Bank Manager).'*

The access to Benidorm from the motorway is considered awful. When the high season arrives massive traffic jams come up. Benidorm is unable to absorb the traffic generated. *'The given image of Benidorm in this aspect is*

*unforgivable. The access from the motorway reminds a bottleneck (Restaurant owner)'.*

The communication of Benidorm to the airport El Altet, located 60 km from the city, leaves much to be desired. It only can be reached through the highway. Nowadays there is a private bus enterprise that offers transfers from and to the airport, but it is still inadequate:

*'The transport of Benidorm to the airport is awful. The solution would be a bus waiting for tourists at the airport main door every half an hour and paid by the Council city. In case there are no more than 20 passengers, they will pay themselves, (PSOE Politician)'.*

This weakness forces many tourists to use taxi services with the inconvenience that *'it is more expensive for tourists the trip from the airport to Benidorm than the trip from their hometown, (Union Representative)'.*

The opinion from the interviewees do not get better when they were asked about the communications with the neighboring towns. They contend that they are almost inexistent, *'between Calpe and Benidorm with a distance of just 26 km, there is only one bus early in the morning and another one late in the afternoon so she is forced to use her car (Cafeteria waitress)'.*

In relation to trains, it is also a lack of investment. *'Benidorm area seems to be cursed for a train (PSOE Politician)'.*  Benidorm has been marginalized for the AVE lines and that has pumped a debate among experts. No solutions have been yet presented. It is a point that did not have prominence on the political agendas of politicians for local elections in May 2011.

There are opinions stating that with the AVE *'more tourists will come to Benidorm, (Journalist)'.*  Also, *'AVE is an added value that places the name of Benidorm in every train station (PSOE Politician)'.*  And, *'I'd like that the AVE arrived to Benidorm because a tourist has to stop over in Alicante. It is not a good service and does not create a good image particularly in the Benidorm Brand, (PSOE Politician)'.*

Finally, we have to mention the north coast of the province of Alicante, between the Capital and Denia about 100 km, is traversed and connected by an strategic narrow track train. This line, identified under the name of TRAM, has been object of many renovations over the last five years. It is very slow because it has many stops and does not link Benidorm with the airport, *'it is expected that in a future, still in the long run, the TRAM would arrive to Altet Airport. TRAM stops in Benidorm are really bad. There are in the middle of a terrace, without access, disasters (Officer)'.*

### **Overall assessment and future.**

About the touristic future of Benidorm, the interviewees are very cautious. They are conscious that everything depends on how things will be done from now on. Some claimants make use of the story and evolution of Benidorm and *'its capacity to reinvent itself over the last decades day by day (...) the past was not free of efforts and nor will the future, (PSOE Politician)'.*

There are also assertions emphasizing safety *'the good of Benidorm is its safe ambience. You can go out at night without any danger, which is not likely to happen in other cities, (Tourism student)'*. Or they claim, *'Spain has been fortunate to have all the southern Mediterranean Islamized and where there were Muslims there is good tourism (Social researcher)'*. Likewise, they affirm that there are many things that must be changed in order to continue being an attractive city for tourists as the promotion of other types of tourism, such as sport tourism, or creation of loyalty programs, tourism packages for young travelers, and a deep program to revitalize the image of the city.

*'Benidorm must turn into a leisure city, a new and real one. This has never been discussed in depth because in Benidorm there are only elderly tourists dancing in the beach or English people drinking in the street. On top of it, if one day the AVE arrives to Benidorm, it will be possible to organize day trips to Madrid to visit the Prado and then sleep back in Benidorm (Social Researcher)'*.

## **Conclusions**

Once all social agents directly affected by the tourism development carried out in Benidorm have been interviewed, we can assure the article has reached its main objective.

In this paper, different opinions from a large group of stakeholders of Benidorm as a tourism destination are reflected. The range of responses has required the breakdown of the findings by topics of interest:

- 1.- As the image is concerned, there is a high percentage of the interviewees who perceive the image of Benidorm as the main attractive reason. However they claim inadequate financial investments to improve the image of hedonic destination for the tourist profiles that Benidorm is looking for.
- 2.- Concerning the tourist profiles coming to Benidorm, almost all answers were similar. Benidorm is confirmed to focus on two types of visitors with same economic levels: English and elderly tourists. This has been analysed by the respondents from two perspectives. On one side, it is a tourist that knows what he or she wants. They like Benidorm and as, they do not change destination they become a loyal and assured guest. On the other hand, some of the answers criticize the limited potential profitability that this target market provides.
- 3.- The most remarkable answers throughout this paper rest on what the hotels are concerned. The respondents were very optimistic when it comes to value quantity. Nevertheless, not only will the vast range of hotels be viewed as the only element within this subsection but also the quality characterizing the service provided by employees to customers. This service is, according to social agents questioned, even more important but unfortunately, critics were overwhelmingly indicating the lack of professionalism in what the treatment perceived is concerned.
- 5.- If the best reviews were addressed to the hotel establishments, the restaurant industry of Benidorm is considered abundant but lacking in creativity and quality. According to some respondents, the non-existent marketing plays an important role in

the poor promotion while for others, the turning point is that the same products are always offered.

6.- According to the analysis obtained from the interviews, one of the worst attractiveness of Benidorm is commerce. The vast majority complains about the substitution of the traditional trade by what is known as Chinese shops, characterized by its low quality, exclusivity and refinement. As a consequence there is a lack of investments from tourists and even the need to go to neighbouring towns for shopping.

7.- the accessibility to the city is not out of reproach either. Communications are considered bad, slow and with old fashion ideas. Most of the respondents agree that an investment in this regard would improve the image of the city making easy both the arrival and departure of old and new tourists and the possibility to open horizons to new excursionists and visitants representing new sources of income.

8.- Lastly, the future of Benidorm is called into question. Stakeholders do not know where the future of the city is going to either. There are conformists believing that the development of Benidorm is what makes it immortal. However, entrepreneurs are asking for an investment to clean out the image of the city.

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