



RESEARCH ARTICLE

BEYOND THE SUN, THE SEA, AND THE SANGRIAS: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF TOURISM GOVERNANCE AND ITS IMPACTS ON THE BALEARIC ISLANDS, SPAIN

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the impact of governance on tourism development in the Balearic Islands of Spain. The government of the Balearic Islands has implemented policies aimed at promoting sustainable tourism in the region, such as the reduction in the number of beds available in tourist accommodation and the reduction in the use of single-use plastics. The investment in infrastructure, such as new airports and improvements to existing roads, has made it easier for tourists to access different parts of the islands, thereby increasing the number of tourists visiting the region and creating new tourism products. The private sector has also played a significant role in the development of tourism in the Balearic Islands through heavy investment in high-quality tourism infrastructure, including hotels and restaurants. However, the increase in the number of tourists visiting the region has put pressure on the environment, leading to issues such as overcrowding, noise pollution, and environmental degradation. This has also led to the gentrification of some areas of the islands, causing the displacement of some local communities. Therefore, it is important for the government and the private sector to work together to ensure that the tourism industry in the region is sustainable and benefits both the environment and the local communities. This paper provides insights into the positive impact of governance on tourism development in the Balearic Islands and the challenges that arise from tourism development. It also highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to sustainable tourism development in the region that takes into account the interests of all stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a significant industry worldwide, generating substantial revenues for nations and regions that have attractive tourist destinations. Spain is consistently ranked among the leading tourist destinations globally, while the Balearic Islands maintain their position among the country's most popular tourist destinations (Pons & Rullan, 2014a). The Balearic Islands comprise four islands located in the Mediterranean Sea, namely Ibiza, Mallorca, Menorca, and Formentera (Vidal, 2020). The tourist industry in the Balearic Islands is a substantial economic contributor, as evidenced by the fact that tourism is responsible for a considerable share of the region's gross domestic product (Manera, Garau, & Serrano, 2016). However, tourism development in the Balearic Islands is heavily influenced by governance, and this paper will critically examine the impact of governance on tourism development in the Balearic Islands of Spain.

The Balearic Islands have been a tourist destination since the 1950s when international tourists began visiting the islands for holidays (Pons & Rullan, 2014a). Since then, tourism has experienced phenomenal expansion and developed into a significant driver of the regional economy. In a given year, the Balearic Islands are visited by approximately 16 million tourists (GOIB, 2019). The reemergence of the tourism industry, the increased spending of Balearic households and

businesses, and the influence of public policies implemented by both the national and regional governments are expected to contribute to the acceleration of GDP growth in 2021 (*Spain | Balearic Islands Economic Outlook 2022 | BBVA Research, 2022*). The tourist industry was the primary contributor to the Balearic Islands' economy's continued strong development in 2022, which resulted in an outstanding annual growth of 10.7%, compared to 5.5% in Spain overall (*Spain | Balearic Islands Economic Outlook 2023 | BBVA Research, 2023*). Growth was once again significantly greater than the average for the country, which had a comeback in GDP of 5.5% in 2018 and is projected to continue growing at a faster rate in 2023, which, notwithstanding the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, should position the island's economy at the highest rising rate in Spain during the length of the three-year timeframe (*Balearic Islands | CaixaBank Research, 2023*).

Undoubtedly, governance policies, regulations, and decisions played a significant role in tourism development in the Balearic Islands (Pons & Rullan, 2014b). Throughout the years, tourism policies and governance mechanisms have evolved in the Balearic Islands in order to support sustainable growth in tourism. The government of the Balearic Islands has enacted a number of new policies in an effort to better manage tourism on the islands. These policies include capping the total number of visitors to the location, restricting the development of new

hotels, nurturing ecotourism, and fostering cultural and heritage tourism. These laws and regulations have been put in place with the goal of striking a balance between the economic advantages of tourism and the conservation of the environment (Alcaraz, 2018; Arbulú, Razumova, Rey-Maqueira, & Sastre, 2021; Serra-Cantallops, Ramón-Cardona, & Vachiano, 2021).

Nevertheless, there have been concerns over the impact of governance on tourism development in the Balearic Islands. Critics argue that the policies of the region's government have not been able to successfully achieve a satisfactory equilibrium between the region's economic advantages, sustainable development, and environmental preservation. Several researchers contend that the tourism industry has had adverse effects on the region's environment, cultural heritage, and social structures (Arbulú, Razumova, Rey-Maqueira, & Sastre, 2021; Garcia, Mestre-Runge, Morán-Tejeda, Lorenzo-Lacruz, & Tirado, 2020; Pons & Rullan, 2014a; Valdivielso & Moranta, 2019).

This paper aims to critically examine the impact of tourism governance on tourism development in the Balearic Islands of Spain. The specific objectives of this research are: one, to identify the primary governance structures and policies that have influenced tourism development in the Balearic Islands; two, to evaluate the effectiveness of governance policies and regulations in promoting sustainable tourism development in the region; and three, to assess the impact that tourism development has had on the environment, cultural heritage, and social structures in the region.

For the purpose of this investigation, a qualitative research methodology using a case study approach will be utilized. The case study will involve a comprehensive analysis of tourism governance policies and regulations in the Balearic Islands. The research will include a comprehensive evaluation of the existing literature and secondary sources, including government reports, online journals, and official websites on tourist governance and development in the Balearic Islands. A variety of sources, including academic publications, reports published by the government, and other pertinent materials, will be covered and thoroughly analyzed.

The results of this paper can significantly contribute to the existing body of knowledge about tourist governance and the growth of sustainable tourism in the Balearic Islands. The study will provide insights into the effectiveness of tourism governance policies and regulations in the region as well as pinpoint areas in which enhancements may be undertaken to encourage the growth of tourism in a sustainable manner. The study's recommendations can be adopted by the government of the Balearic Islands as well as the various stakeholders in the tourist sector to build efficient tourism governance policies and regulations that promote sustainable tourism development in the region.

Tourism in the Balearic Islands

The Balearic Islands of Spain, located in the western Mediterranean Sea, are one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world. Each year, millions of travelers from all over the world embark on trips to the islands to experience their unique culture and natural beauty. Majorca, Ibiza, Menorca, and Formentera are the four main islands that make up the Balearic Islands. The islands are recognized for their

gorgeous beaches, sparkling blue oceans, and exciting nightlife. Meanwhile, they provide a variety of tourism experiences, such as beach tourism, cultural tourism, and nature tourism (Balearic Islands | CaixaBank Research, 2023; Pons & Rullan, 2014a).

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, the year 2021 signifies the start of recovery for the area's travel and tourism industry. This is due to its contribution to economic output returning 28% in that calendar year, thus ranking it as the region with the quickest rate of recovery overall. The contribution that the tourism industry makes to the overall economy of European countries such as Spain has undergone a significant uptick in recent years. It rebounded by a substantial amount of 52.5%. The majority of the expansion was due to an increase in the number of international tourists who were able to travel more freely as a result of the easing of travel restrictions imposed by the administrations of these regions (Travel & Tourism Economic Impact | World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), 2022). There have to be strong governance rules and regulations in place to ensure the sustainable growth of the tourism industry in the area, which demands a delicate balancing act between economic rewards, environmental protection, and cultural heritage preservation.

Since the latter half of the 19th century, the Balearic Islands have been popular holiday destinations. Throughout the early years of the Balearic Islands' history, the islands' natural beauty and laid-back way of life made them very appealing to creative types, such as writers, architects, and painters (Manera, Garau, & Serrano, 2016). In the 1920s, the Balearic Islands rose to prominence as a preferred vacation spot for rich travelers. These travelers were attracted to the islands' opulent hotels and other high-class facilities. During this period, the Islands' popularity as a place to visit expanded, and they were renowned as one of the most popular tourist sites in all of Europe (Vidal, 2020).

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the Balearic Islands saw the emergence of what is now known as mass tourism. Because of advancements in low-cost air travel as well as the growth of the tourism industry, there has been a substantial rise in the total number of tourists that visit the islands. All across the 1970s and 1980s, the Islands continued to see a rise in popularity as a result of the increasing number of tourists that were drawn to the Islands' beaches, nightlife, and cultural attractions (Pons & Rullan, 2014a; Rosselló, 2022). During the course of its history, the Balearic Islands' economy can largely be attributed to the contributions made by the tourism industry, which has provided employment opportunities and generated revenue for the government. The islands are renowned for their natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, pristine beaches, and much more; as a result, they are an ideal destination for travelers looking for a variety of experiences (Islas Baleares | Natural Wealth, 2018; Islas Baleares | Cultural Heritage, 2018; Islas Baleares | Beaches, 2018).

Nature tourism is one of the Balearic Islands' most prevalent forms of tourism. The distinctive flora and fauna of the islands attract nature- and wildlife-loving visitors. There are numerous endemic species on the islands, including the Balearic shearwater, Balearic lizard, and Balearic warbler. There are also several nature sanctuaries and protected areas on the islands, such as the S'Albufera Natural Park and the Cabrera Archipelago Maritime-Terrestrial National Park (Islas Baleares

| *Natural Wealth*, 2018). The Balearic Islands' tourism industry famously includes a sizable portion dedicated to cultural tourism. The islands' rich cultural heritage attracts a large number of visitors eager to discover more about the region's history and culture. Since prehistoric times, the archipelago has had a lengthy and intriguing history. The Talayotic culture, which is distinct from the Balearic Islands, is a massive draw for history- and archaeology-minded travelers. There are numerous museums and art galleries on the islands that exhibit the region's culture and traditions (*Islas Baleares | Cultural Heritage*, 2018). Another prominent form of tourism in the Balearic Islands is beach tourism. The islands boast approximately 300 beaches, each with its own distinct personality and charms. Tourists flock to the islands from all over the world to soak up the rays of Mediterranean sunshine, go swimming in the pristine seas, and participate in a wide variety of water sports. Cala Agulla, Cala Millor, Cala Mondrago, and Cala Varques are several of the most renowned beaches on the islands (*Islas Baleares | Beaches*, 2018).

Governance towards Tourism in the Balearic Islands

Tourism governance supports interest groups to engage productive interaction with one another, contributes to progressive initiatives, and has been utilized to advance regional development and economy. In order to improve the legitimacy and effectiveness of public administration, governance entails the cooperation of several stakeholders, most notably public authority organizations, the economic sector, and social movements. With the contribution of all the resources above-mentioned, the Balearic Islands have experienced significant growth in the tourism industry. Undoubtedly, such growth cannot be achieved without effective governance, including increased investment, improved transportation infrastructure, and a focus on sustainable tourism.

Investments in the tourism industry have been crucial to the Balearic Islands' development. The government and private sector have made substantial investments in the construction of new hotels, resorts, and other tourist facilities, which has increased the number of visitors to the Islands (Hof & Blázquez-Salom, 2013). The government has also established a number of programs and initiatives to promote the Islands as a tourist destination, including the creation of new tourist information centers, the development of new tourist itineraries, and the formation of partnerships with travel and tour companies (Moon, 2022).

Access to the Balearic Islands is simplified by their convenient connections to the rest of Europe and mainland Spain. Due to improvements in air travel and the development of additional airports, more and more travelers have the chance to visit the islands without first stopping in mainland Spain (Martínez & González-Sánchez, 2021). The government has also made significant investments in enhancing the Islands' transportation infrastructure, such as the development of new roadways and the enhancement of public transportation systems (Ruiz-Pérez, & Seguí-Pons, 2020).

Early in 2022, the government of the Balearic Islands passed a new statute introducing circular economy principles further into the tourism industry. As a consequence of the new law governing sustainability and circularity (Goodwin, 2022), the

Balearic Islands could be considered "the first circular tourism destination" in the world (Noble, 2023). The government has implemented various initiatives to promote sustainable tourism practices, such as the development of eco-friendly hotels, the promotion of new tourist routes that showcase the natural beauty of the Islands, including a system of protected natural areas that help to conserve the Islands' unique ecosystem and wildlife, and the encouragement of environmentally friendly transportation options, such as sharing bicycles, electric vehicles, and affordable public transportation (Noble, 2023; Moon, 2022).

Concerns have been raised about the deleterious impacts of tourism on the environment and local communities in the Balearic Islands, despite the implementation of policies designed to promote sustainable tourism (Mooser et al., 2021). During peak season, for instance, the number of tourists visiting the islands has placed a strain on the local infrastructure, including water resources and waste management systems (Sáez-Fernández, Jiménez-Hernández & Ostos-Rey, 2020). This has led to concerns regarding the degradation of the environment and the deterioration of the quality of life for local residents (Deyà-Tortella et al., 2019). Furthermore, there have been concerns about the working conditions of employees in the tourism industry, particularly in low-skilled and low-paid positions (Alcaraz, 2018). Some stakeholders have criticized the government for failing to adequately safeguard the rights of industry employees (Chela-Alvarez et al., 2022). In the Balearic Islands, the relationship between governance and tourism development is complex, and there are competing stakeholder interests. While the government and private sector are interested in promoting the growth of the tourism industry, local communities and environmental groups are concerned about the negative impacts of tourism on the environment and quality of life in the region (Moon, 2022; Mooser et al., 2021; Sáez-Fernández, Jiménez-Hernández & Ostos-Rey, 2020).

Given the significance of tourism to the Balearic Islands' economy, effective governance mechanisms that balance the interests of various stakeholders are required. This requires collaboration between the government, private sector, and local communities to develop policies and practices that promote sustainable tourism and protect the rights of workers.

Impact of Governance on Tourism Development in the Balearic Islands

As a result of the tremendous growth of tourism in the region, the Balearic Islands have been forced to confront a number of serious difficulties. Although tourism has made a substantial contribution to the economy of the region, it has, at the same time, put strain on the environment and the local inhabitants (Mooser et al., 2021).

One of the significant negative impacts of tourism in the Balearic Islands has been the issue of overcrowding. During the peak of the tourist season, the islands are prone to experiencing overcrowding, which can result in problems like traffic congestion, extended wait times, and a strain on the available local resources (Amrhein, Hospers, & Reiser, 2022). Because of this, there may be an increase in noise pollution, and residents may have less access to public places. And inevitably, this may have a negative effect on the inhabitants' quality of

life (Moon, 2022). Degradation of the natural life environment is another one of tourism's unintended consequences in the Balearic Islands. The islands are home to delicate ecosystems and delicate habitats, both of which are susceptible to damage as a result of the growth in tourism. For instance, a rise in boat traffic may have a substantial effect on marine life (Ruiz-Pérez & Seguí-Pons, 2020), and an increase in the development of hotels may result in the degradation of natural ecosystems (Torres et al., 2021). In addition, the fast growth of tourism infrastructure in the Balearic Islands has resulted in the gentrification of certain regions, which has caused the relocation of local residents. For instance, the historic center of Palma, which is the capital city of Mallorca, has been converted into a tourist area, which has resulted in the eviction of a number of local inhabitants and the closure of a number of small businesses (Martín et al., 2018).

In order to mitigate the effects of this reputational damage, the government of the Balearic Islands has enacted a number of measures that are geared toward fostering environmentally responsible tourism in the region. For example, the government has imposed restrictions on the number of beds that may be made accessible in tourist accommodations (Noble, 2023) and has enacted laws with the intention of lowering the amount of single-use plastics (Moiá-Pol et al., 2006) that are utilized in the tourism industry. Moreover, the government has launched a campaign to promote responsible tourism (Noble, 2023). As part of this initiative, tourists are being urged to respect local customs and traditions, show support for local businesses, and encourage zero-emission transportation (Smith, 2019) while keeping in mind the impact on the environment. To assist in more equally distributing the advantages of tourism around the region, the campaign also intends to promote an alternate and unique blend of diverse tourism opportunities, providing visitors with an array of options to choose from. Among the most popular are active tourism, health tourism, and wine and oil tourism. (*Islas Baleares | Active Tourism*, 2018; *Islas Baleares | Health Tourism*, 2018; *Islas Baleares | Wine & Oil Tourism*, 2018; Serra-Cantallops, Ramón-Cardona, & Vachiano, 2021). The region caters to a range of interests, making it an ideal destination for those seeking adventure, relaxation, or a blend of both. These tourism sectors have had a positive impact on the region's economy, environment, and social well-being by contributing to the sustainable growth of the tourism industry, benefiting both the local community and visitors.

With a mild climate and stunning natural landscapes, the Balearic Islands offer a wide range of opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts seeking adventure. Whether it be hiking, trail-riding, exploring the captivating underwater world, or taking a scenic flight to observe picturesque landscapes, the region boasts exciting adventures that cater to all interests (*Islas Baleares | Active Tourism*, 2018). The increase in active tourism has led to the development of infrastructure and services in rural areas; it has also helped in the preservation of natural resources, as visitors are more likely to value and protect the environment (Mooser et al., 2021).

The Balearic Islands' healthcare system has been internationally recognized and ranks among the top ten in the world. The healthcare service offers personalized care with state-of-the-art medical technology and a team of medical specialists of exceptional repute. Visitors to the region can

enjoy peace of mind and a comprehensive service that caters to their well-being and that of their families from start to finish (*Islas Baleares | Health Tourism*, 2018). The healthcare sector's international recognition has resulted in an influx of medical tourism, with visitors seeking high-quality healthcare services, which has led to the development of specialized services and facilities.

The Balearic Islands are also a land of vineyards and olive trees, and its wines and oils have been highly regarded since ancient Roman times. Visitors can discover these culinary treasures by approaching local wineries and mills, learning about the elaborate production process, and tasting some of the finest products the region has to offer (*Islas Baleares | Wine & Oil Tourism*, 2018). Wine and oil tourism have promoted the region's cultural heritage and the conservation of traditional production methods. Visitors' interest in these products has helped to preserve and promote local agriculture, generating income for small-scale producers and creating more employment opportunities (Serra-Cantallops, Ramón-Cardona, & Vachiano, 2021).

Moreover, a number of projects have been begun in order to lessen the negative effects that tourism has on the surrounding ecosystem (Anderson, 2009). For instance, the government has imposed a tax on rental cars as a means of discouraging the use of personal automobiles (Ruiz-Pérez & Seguí-Pons, 2020). As well, the government has initiated a program to encourage environmentally friendly modes of transportation, such as bicycling and using public transit (Noble, 2023). The government has also established laws with the goal of conserving the maritime environment, such as the creation of marine reserves and the restriction of boat traffic (Moreno & Otamendi, 2017). These policies seek to effectively prevent pollution and preserve marine life.

In general, the application of tourism governance has had a substantial influence on the growth of the tourism industry in the Balearic Islands. Tourism has given enormous economic advantages to the region, while at the same time, it has had a negative impact on both the natural environment and the local inhabitants. Although the policies implemented by the government of the Balearic Islands have helped to promote sustainable tourism in the region, there is still further work that needs to be done to secure the long-term sustainability of the tourism industry in the region.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the governance of tourism in the Balearic Islands of Spain plays an essential role in the process of fostering sustainable tourism development. The implementation of policies and regulations by the government of the Balearic Islands has assisted in reducing the adverse effects of tourism on the local environment while simultaneously fostering economic expansion and expanding job prospects in the region.

The government's policies, such as the limitation on the number of beds available in tourist accommodation and the reduction in the use of single-use plastics, have contributed to reducing the environmental impact of tourism. Additionally, the government's investment in infrastructure, including the construction of new airports and the improvement of existing roads, has helped to increase the accessibility of the different

parts of the islands and create new tourism products, such as active and health tourism. The private sector has also played a significant role in the development of tourism in the Balearic Islands. The investments made by the private sector in the tourism industry, particularly in the development of high-quality tourism infrastructure, such as hotels and restaurants, have contributed to the creation of new tourism products and employment opportunities in the region.

However, the growth of tourism in the Balearic Islands has also led to the occurrence of a number of unfavorable effects, such as overcrowding, noise pollution, and the degradation of the natural environment, as well as the gentrification of some areas of the islands, leading to the displacement of local communities.

Therefore, it is essential for the government and the private sector of the Balearic Islands to collaborate to ensure that the tourism industry in the Balearic Islands is sustainable and benefits both the environment and the local communities. To accomplish this, the government can consider implementing further policies, such as regulating the number of tourists entering the region, implementing measures to reduce noise pollution, and promoting sustainable tourism practices among tourists and tourism operators. Furthermore, the private sector can support sustainable tourism practices by investing in sustainable tourism infrastructure, minimizing the use of single-use plastics, and promoting zero-emission sustainable tourism practices to their clients.

Overall, the development of tourism in the Balearic Islands is not only beneficial to the economy but also has the potential to contribute to the region's sustainable development. By continuing to work together, the government and the private sector can ensure that the tourism industry in the Balearic Islands remains sustainable and benefits both the environment and the local communities.

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