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## Consequences and resilience of tourism to the impact of the pandemic from a local management perspective for the case of Malaga

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Epidemics and pandemics, as well as all kinds of adverse natural and climatic phenomena had a significant impact on economic activity, and specifically, in the tourism industry worldwide.

Given the social component of tourism, in addition to a great relevance from a purely economic point of view, it is to be expected that a pandemic such as the one caused by SARS-CoV-2 will have a certain effect on the tourism structure. The tourist system of Malaga (Spain) is thus approached in this work through a multidimensional point of view because of COVID-19 and its implications.

Since the development of tourism as a mass activity on a global scale, it is hard to find an event that has so quickly and traumatically affected the entire international tourism chain as the COVID-19 pandemic has done since it went global in 2020. Entire segments of tourism activity were suddenly halted or semi-paralyzed, and mobility restriction policies have been nothing more than the final straw for a sector which, especially in the case of its most vulnerable tourist stakeholders.

According to Eurostat data, in 2020, the number of tourist overnight stays in the EU decreased by 52 % compared to 2019; decreasing from 3 billion overnight stays in 2019 to less than 1.5 billion in 2020. Additionally, seasonality was enhanced by the pandemic, such that 42 % of overnight stays were concentrated during the months of July and August (whereas in 2019 they did not exceed 32 %, i.e. ten percentage points less than in 2020). These data show the magnitude of the caused damage, since, except in contexts of war and economic collapse, no national economy or sector usually falls as much as tourism.

As a sample of the level of affectation that Andalusian tourism has endured as a consequence of the coronavirus crisis, if we compare the Annual 2019 of the hotel movement in Andalusia with the Annual 2020, it is observed that in 2019 24,028,493 travellers were hosted (out of a total of 133,781,996 in all Spain), that is, 18% of the total Spanish market, while, in 2020, the worst year of the whole pandemic for the tourist activity, 6.8 million travellers were hosted, thus, -69.4%. As for the airport movement, an important variable for the



analysis of international tourism in Andalusia, in 2019 this region received a total of 15.3 million passengers in 2019; on the contrary, in 2020 only 4 million people arrived, which implied a decrease of 73.6 % according to Regional Government data. These data confirm what was previously stated: the impact caused by the pandemic on the Andalusian tourism sector was not only significant, but unprecedented in the history of tourism in this region.

In this framework, the goal of this research is twofold: firstly, to analyse the impact that the pandemic had on the tourist activity of Malaga (Spain), especially in its most emblematic and quantitatively relevant places). Secondly, to critically examine the business, economic, institutional, and social responses that have been articulated to rebuild the tourist system.

The methodology of this work is based on qualitative research approach. Firstly, systematic literature review was carried out to identify sources that study the impact of the pandemic situation. This includes both information about the evolution of tourism behaviour before, during and after the pandemic; as well as documents that refer to the implemented post-pandemic tourism measures, to analyse the effectiveness of these measures. The space for analysis is the city of Malaga, although it has been considered to offer a general overview of the damage that the pandemic has caused to tourism worldwide and, in particular, within Spain.

The sources used have been, fundamentally, the institutional ones, in order to be able to compile information and from there draw a series of conclusions about the impact of the pandemic regarding the tourist activity in Malaga. Thanks to the search provided by a tourism database such as DATAESTUR (2022a), it has been possible to access a large number of sources of scientific journals specialized in tourism. The study has, in any case, a limited scope and universe, given that it intends to focus on a particular area that has its specificities, although it also has aspects of universality, as will be seen, with respect to other places of tourist importance in Andalusia, Spain and the rest of the world.

In order to make the most complete and detailed analysis of the impact of the pandemic on tourism activity in Malaga, we first undertook an outline of the general international and national picture of tourism after the pandemic, since the establishment of such a framework is essential to compare the results of the situation and the measures applied in Malaga in the heat of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The main hypothesis of the research is that the tourism industry in Malaga has suffered a strong shock because of the pandemic but has been able to take advantage of its previous strengths to recompose itself and readjust the sector to the new reality, in addition to having acquired knowledge and experience for possible similar situations that could occur in the short- and medium-term.

The results of this work suggest that that both tourism and the social, environmental and health variables are directly interrelated and condition on a destination performance. That means several positive and negative effects of each variable on the other ones.

The tourism industry in Malaga has made big efforts to recover from a pandemic situation and improve essential aspects of its operational functioning and structure, making it more flexible and agile in the face of possible similar situations that could occur in the future. However, more data is needed to better assess the medium and long-term effectiveness of the measures adopted by tourism stakeholder.

In any case, the initial hypothesis could be partially confirmed, despite the limitations. Tourism in the city of Malaga has taken advantage of the situation caused by the pandemic to advance in terms of organization, the incorporation of new technologies (for example, greater deployment of tourism intelligence) and greater awareness of the need to create a more sustainable tourism fabric in the long term. In this sense, the research confirms, with respect to the main objective, that the effects of COVID-19 on tourism in Malaga have been particularly devastating, in line with other tourist realities within the Andalusian region, Spain and the world.

Also, it is worth highlighting the confluence of the two main factors that are considered decisive and differential when it comes to assessing the response capacity of Malaga's tourism industry: on the one hand, the remarkable dynamism of the sector, which has been able to react quickly to the shock of the pandemic and the necessary recomposition that has had to be undertaken. On the other hand, the set of measures that have been implemented by public administrations at the municipal level not only to alleviate the situation, but to take advantage of the crisis and reinvent the sector, although such measures are still limited and in-



complete, and even taking into account that communication and feedback of interests between the major actors involved should be improved: tourism sector, public administrations and residents, a triad that is not always, as we have seen here, adequately harmonized.

Finally, this work contributes to offer empirical evidence about the effects of a pandemic on the tourism industry; that is, the economic consequences of a health and social emergency event of such magnitude as an epidemic that becomes a pandemic and significantly alters an entire economic sector and society. Given the strategic nature of the tourism sector in the economy of Malaga, the conclusions drawn from the present research may be useful both for future work related to the subject of study and for possible interventions by the public authorities when situations of a similar nature arise in the future.