

Narratives of a conflict: discursive disputes about tourism in Barcelona

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Abstract

The article seeks to put in evidence terms and narratives that support the action of protagonists in the conflict surrounding the tourist activity in Barcelona, Spain. A vast discursive charge emerged from the conflict among the agents involved: business people, City Hall, social movements, and members of the Academy, producing their own lexicon composed of terms, such as *over-tourism*, *tourist phobia*, *anti-tourism*, and *tourist action*. Searching for meanings of expressive and metaphorical communication, representatives of the aforementioned segments were interviewed on-site. In addition, a survey of bibliographic and documentary sources was carried out to understand better the terminology used in the different and sometimes conflicting narratives created by the agents interviewed. The study showed an intense political and symbolic struggle among those involved, permeated with discursive resources in the search for legitimacy and power.

Keywords: Tourism. Barcelona. Conflict. Narratives. Speech.

Introduction

The initial purpose of this article is to put in evidence terms and narratives that supported the action of those involved in the conflict surrounding the tourist activity in Barcelona (Spain) and expressed the growing discomfort of the local population with the ways in which it was practiced. From the end of the 2000s, this discomfort began to provoke a series of protest and demonstrations, led by groups of residents and social organizations, that presented the environmental, economic and socio-cultural impacts resulting from the exacerbated promotion of this activity, especially in certain areas of the city. The complaint contradicted the usual developmental narrative of Tourism, present in common sense, and also insisted in manuals and documents made by renowned institutions, including the World Tourism Organization¹ (UNWTO) and the World Travel & Tourism Council² (WTTC). The conflict is not limited to Barcelona; it also finds echoes in different European cities, like Amsterdam (Netherlands), Barcelona (Spain), Berlin (Germany), Lisbon (Portugal), Madrid (Spain), and Venice (Italy).

Common complaints reported by residents of these different cities are frequently mentioned: increased cost of living in areas with a higher concentration of tourists, disruptions in the routine of daily life, frequent episodes of disrespect for 'norms of good coexistence', restrictions on access to public spaces incorporated into touristic circuits; replacement of neighborhood commerce, such as bakeries, small markets and restaurants, by sophisticated enterprises aligned with the conveniences of visitors; transformation of residential buildings into means of lodging, either at the initiative of residents - who make their homes available to tourists in exchange for the payment of rent -investors, including international investors, who acquire dozens of residential units to convert them into tourist apartments marketed in virtual vacation rental platforms (especially Airbnb), among other issues (COLOMB and NOVY, 2017).

For authors from academia and multilateral agencies linked to the tourism sector, such conflicts would be revealing the 'other side of the coin', putting in check the jingoist conception of 'tourist development' as a synonym of benefits obtained with the excessive promotion of the activity, disregarding its negative impacts.

The conflicts generated by the actions of social movements and the responses of private agents and public authorities were strongly marked by an intense burden of narratives on the benefits and losses of tourism, from part to part. Around the conflict were published academic texts, protest notes, positions of advocacy entities, interviews and articles in periodicals, and documents from various spheres of government, including the UNWTO. The circulation of this abundant written and verbalized material resulted in the consolidation of argumentations and

1 The World Tourism Organization is an agency affiliated with the United Nations (UN) that oversees the regulation and promotion of the global tourism sector.

2 The World Travel & Tourism Council is an internationally recognized serving as the primary spokesperson for the global tourism industry.

the creation of new terminologies, categories, classification systems, and explanatory theories about social reality.

According to Castells (2009), communication acts as a privileged field of observation, given the direct influence in the game of forces of political struggles in which the dispute for control of the circulation of formulations by agents is generated, so that “[...] el poder depende del control de la comunicación, al igual que el contrapoder depende de romper dicho control”, de modo que [...] “el proceso de comunicación influye decisivamente en la forma de construir y desafiar las relaciones de poder en todos los campos de las prácticas sociales, incluida la práctica política (CASTELLS, 2009, p. 24, our translation³).

Thus, this article proposed to focus on the narratives and terms that qualify and singularize the conflict in question, acting as slogans in defense of actions capable of mobilizing militants and attracting sympathies and adhesions, either in the sense of restricting or even suppress the activity in certain places, either in the insistence of its defense by the business community or in the justification of governmental actions to exercise control of the activity. Considering the framework of multiple and conflicting narratives, we sought to dissect their potential meanings, understanding, as Bourdieu (2004) to integrate the scientific work the duty to ascertain epistemological meanings and break the so-called ‘pre-epistemological ‘notions’, highlighting the different perspectives and social positions of its formulators.

In the arena of disputes surrounding the conflict, interviews were conducted on the spot during January and February 2019, with representatives of social, economic, and governmental agents allowed to extract directly from the words of these agents understanding of the use of the terms enshrined in the debate, and their respective positions. The methodology of this research also included consulting the specialized bibliography, articles published in journals, academic texts, and documents issued by government institutions, especially the City Hall of Barcelona and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

To make the complex universe in question understandable, the article was organized into five (5) sections in addition to this introduction. The opening item (section 1) aimed at a brief profile of the city of Barcelona and the conflict on screen, punctuating its emergence, more sensitive moments, and facts involved, landmark events. The following items (sections 3 and 4) focused on the narratives and terms that emerged and started to magnetize the debate. The first (section 3), was intended to report the terms, origins, and authorship in the heat of the debate, and in section 4, to advance on possible meanings from the data collected in the interviews with leaders of social movements, government agencies and entrepreneurs, in addition to what is found in the supporting literature. In section 5, some syntheses are presented from the possible understandings previously displayed.

3 “[...] the power depends on the control of the communication, like the counter power depends on breaking that control”, so that [...] “the communication process decisively influences how power relations are built and challenged in all fields of social practices, including political practice

Barcelona: Tourist City

Barcelona is the capital of the Autonomous Community of Catalonia and the second most important city in Spain in the economic sense. In 2021, its population was around 1.6 million inhabitants, which corresponded to 21.33% of the total inhabitants of Catalonia (BARCELONA, 2021). In the last two decades, Barcelona's population growth has remained stable, unlike the influx of tourists that tended to rise exponentially.

A report published in 2018 by the Spanish National Institute of Statistics (INE, 2018) showed that Barcelona led the ranking of Spanish cities in total overnight stays and that this value would tend to grow after that.

Barcelona Turisme⁴ data for 2022 indicated that the participation of this activity in the local economy was in the order of 15%, employing 12.5% of the economically active population (BARCELONA TURISME, 2022a).

Data from another survey by the same entity, the same data called attention to the clear predominance of foreign visitors (79% of total tourist demand) over domestic visitors (21% of total tourist demand), reinforcing the understanding of its role as a cosmopolitan, globalized city (BARCELONA TURISME, 2022b).

Horta *et al.* (2010) argue that the inaugural milestone of the touristification⁵ of Barcelona would have originated from the city's preparation for the 1888 Exposition, necessitating the structuring of the tourist service network (*ibidem*, p. 126). Additionally, the urban reform of Barcelona's historic center in the first decade of the 20th century is also said to have been another event driving this process. This time, the objective would have been to 'forge' a 'Gothic image' aiming at the circuit of European historical and cultural tourism, following the example of other cities on the continent (COLL, 2017)

However, as shown by García and Claver (2003, p. 113), it was with the hosting of the 1992 Olympic Games that Barcelona was transformed into a 'global tourist city', making the beginning of the current tourism model. Data presented by Milano (2017) confirm the exponential growth of tourist flows from the 1990s onwards, with the number of visitors staying in local tourist establishments rising from 1.7 million at the beginning of the decade to over 9 million guests in 2016 (*ibidem*, p. 22).

Given these numbers, it is not surprising that authors attribute the onset of problems and conflicts in the city to a surge in visitor flow. According to García and Claver (2003), as the tourist flow increased, residents felt a loss of priority in accessing commerce and other goods, due to the growing market preference for the 'new users of the city'. The peak moment

4 Governmental Tourism Agency of Barcelona

5 For Knafou (2001), the term touristification would translate the process of adapting the territory to enable the spatial organization of tourist activity in a given location. Among the agents that play a leading role in this process, the author highlighted visitors, the market and the State.

of tourism growth is believed to have occurred in the first decade of the 2000s, a period that coincides with the initial signs of discomfort among residents.

Conflicts and its repercussions

Since 2008, there were already signs of discontent among the local population regarding tourism in Barcelona. However, the trigger for popular dissatisfaction occurred in the summer of 2014, in an episode known as the ‘Barceloneta revolt’, where residents of the neighborhood of the same name, outraged by the proliferation of tourist apartments and various disruptions in daily life, took to the streets with loudspeakers, banners, and signs demanding action from the authorities to address these issues. Medrano and Pardo (2017) saw in this protest a ‘turning point’, signaled by the charge in perspective from the Barcelona City Council and scholars regarding the effects of tourist pressure on the city. In November 2015, the *Assembleia de Bairros pelo Decrescimento Turístico*⁶ (ABDT)⁷ was established, considered the first social organization dedicated to the fight against the impacts of tourism in Barcelona (ABDT, 2016).

In January 2017, La Rambla Avenue was occupied by over 2,000 individuals carrying banners and signs, denouncing the pronounced process of gentrification in neighborhoods with a high concentration of tourist services, the urban economy’s dependence on tourism, and other impacts stemming from this activity. With extensive media coverage, the event was characterized by banners and signs bearing the inscription: ‘Barcelona is not for sale.’ The density of the protests took both the public and the academic community by surprise, as they still held onto the rosy view of the ‘success of Barcelona’s tourism model’ (MILANO and MANSILLA, 2018).

Just as in Barcelona, other European cities like Lisbon (Portugal), Madrid (Spain), Venice (Italy), and Berlin (Germany) also experienced urban conflicts triggered by high tourist pressure. In April 2018, activists from these cities formed the so-called Southern Europe Network Against Touristification (SET Network), a social organization tasked with coordinating social movements critical of tourism in cities in the southern part of the European continent. The SET Network was guided by a similar agenda to that of the ABDT, with organized movements in the mentioned cities taking a leading role.

Publicization, Narratives, and Terminology

The resounding impact of protests like the ‘Barceloneta revolt’ and the occupation of La Rambla Avenue demanded swift communication of the events to bring to light the hidden aspects of the triggered conflict, aiming to garner support – as intended by organizers of the

⁶ In English, *Neighborhood Assembly for Tourist Decrease*.

⁷ Originally, the organization was established as the Association of Neighborhoods for Sustainable Tourism (ABTS), subsequently changing its name to the current one, as stated in the body of the text.

demonstrations – or to immediately counteract worldwide dissemination – as suited the business sector and international agencies dedicated to promoting tourism.

As the protests gained momentum, they began to make their way into newspapers and academic publications. Milano (2017) identified the summer of 2008 (June – September) as the starting point for the proliferation of news about the conflicts that arose. The author references the publication of an article⁸ in the Spanish edition of the newspaper *El País*, titled “Turistofobia”, which had a significant media impact at that time. A notable excerpt from the article reads:

La manera como el fenómeno turístico afecta la vida de las ciudades es un asunto denso y con múltiples facetas. Una de ellas es la aparición entre determinados sectores sociales de una especie de rechazo frontal al turista como factor de contaminación y peligro. Las intervenciones del público al final de unas jornadas convocadas hace poco en Barcelona por el grupo de estudio Turiscòpia, del Institut Català d’Antropologia, invitaban a tomar conciencia del alcance y la generalización de ese fenómeno, al que podríamos aplicar el neologismo de *turistofobia*, una mezcla de repudio, desconfianza y desprecio hacia esa figura que ya todos designan con la denominación de origen guiri (DELGADO, 2008)⁹.

The citation suggests that public dissatisfaction with tourists could stem from xenophobic sentiments of intolerance towards the unfamiliar and foreign. In the same vein, the initial news reports about the tourist conflict in Barcelona, as well as the first analyses put forth by scholars and journalists on the subject, referred to a similar term: “touristphobia” (KNAFOU, 2001; BLANCHAR and PELLICER, 2017). Along the same lines, others also adopted the term “anti-tourism,” further reinforcing the understanding of the supposedly intolerant nature of the social groups leading critical acts against tourism in that city (ALEXIS, 2017).

Contrary to this interpretation, counter-narratives were constructed to endorse the position of dissatisfied sectors of the population, shedding light on the debate about the model of promotion and practice of tourism in this city. Both in the bibliographic and documentary research, as well as in the interviews, it was possible to identify two terms frequently adopted from this perspective: “over-tourism” (MILANO, 2017) and “touristification” (ALBA SUD, 2018; JOVER *et al.*, 2018).

In broad terms, proponents of the term “over-tourism” focused on the negative repercussions generated by the excessive volume of visitors combined with the absence of

8 Signed by Manuel Delgado, professor at the prestigious Universitat de Barcelona.

9 The way in which the tourist phenomenon affects the life of cities is a dense and multifaceted issue. One aspect of it is the emergence among certain social sectors of a kind of frontal rejection of the tourist as a source of pollution and danger. The public interventions at the end of a recent conference held in Barcelona by the study group Turiscòpia, from the Catalan Institute of Anthropology, encouraged an awareness of the scope and generalization of this phenomenon, to which we could apply the neologism of “turistofobia”, a blend of rejection, distrust and contempt towards that figure that everyone now designates with the designation of origin “guiri”.

regulation by local authorities, especially concerning accommodations in specific areas of the city deemed ‘touristically saturated’. On the other hand, those who viewed the conflict from the perspective of “touristification” understood that the array of impacts brought about by tourism revealed the advanced stage of an unlimited tourism development model. This latter term frequently appeared in documents produced by social movements, such as the founding manifesto of the SET Network (ALBA SUD, 2018), mentioned in the previous section. Coherently, they countered the promotion of “touristification” with the proposal of “tourism reduction”, a term that gained currency in the argumentation of this group.

In the next section, the mentioned terms and narratives are presented based on the statements of their main protagonists.

Possible Meanings of Narratives and Terms

Throughout the year 2019, within the context of the research for the Doctoral Thesis that underlies this article, leaders of social movements, representatives from the business sector, local government officials, as well as the World Tourism Organization (OMT)¹⁰ were interviewed on-site. In this section, the most frequently identified terms and narratives from the collected statements and narratives from the collected statements and information obtained from studies, official documents, scientific works, and texts published in widely circulated journals will be presented. This is in accordance with the bibliographic and documentary research conducted at the time.

From the collected material, aspects present in the arguments were emphasized, aiming to elucidate the reasons and meanings behind the conflicts caused by tourism activity in Barcelona, according to the interviewees’ perspectives. The following terms will be examined in the context in which they were mentioned, seeking, as much as possible, to identify the affiliations of the testimonies gathered, as well as the references of the cited texts.

Touristphobia and Anti-tourism

The term ‘touristphobia’ certainly gained the most media attention at the height of the tourism conflict in Barcelona - that is, between 2014 and 2017. It frequently made headlines in

10 The reports were collected in Barcelona and Madrid in January and February 2019. On that occasion, leaders of 08 (eight) social organizations involved in conflicts surrounding tourism were interviewed in person. They are: Neighborhood Assembly for Tourist Decrease (ABDT), ALBA SUD, Association of Neighbors of the Gothic Quarter (AV Bairro Gótica), Association of Neighbors of Poble Nou (AV Poble Nou), Association of Neighbors of Vila de Gràcia (AV Vila de Gràcia), Platform ‘We Defend Park Güell!’ (We Defend Park Güell), Ecologists in Action and Federation of Neighborhood Associations of Barcelona (FAVB). In relation to representatives of the sector’s business community, representatives of 04 (four) entities were interviewed, which stood out as spokespersons for the category in this conflict. They are: Catalan Association of Tourism Professionals (ACPT), Association of Tourist Apartments of Barcelona (APARTUR), Union of Tourist Commercial Axes - Barcelona Oberta and the Barcelona Turisme Consortium. Two other interviews sought to capture the understanding of important institutions focused on the sector, one representing the Barcelona Municipal Tourism Secretary and the other representing the World Tourism Organization – the only interview carried out in Madrid. Detailed data from the interviews are contained in Felix’s doctoral thesis (FELIX, 2019), which can be consulted in full through Base Minerva, an institutional repository at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ): objdig.ufrj.br/42/teses/896075.pdf.

major Spanish media outlets, as revealed by a comprehensive analysis conducted by Huete and Mantecón (2018), who examined the content of about 40 news articles published on the subject.

While authors like Knafou (2001) use this terminology, it was observed that its dissemination in academic circles did not thrive, most likely due to theoretical inconsistency, swift rejection by social movements, and abusive use by sensationalist media in a clear attempt to discredit the protestors.

Especially concerning the news disseminated in major media outlets, as previously mentioned, it was noted that the intended semantics in combining the terms 'tourism' and 'phobia' resembled related terms frowned upon by progressive public opinion, such as xenophobia, homophobia, fatphobia, transphobia, etc. This revealed a clear attempt to associate the protestors - and, with them, the respective social organizations responsible for the protests - with an alleged escalation of xenophobic sentiment, intolerance, and contempt towards different cultures and nationalities, often fueled by far-right-aligned political forces.

In the interviews conducted in Barcelona, a representative from the local business sector, from the Association of Tourist Apartments of Barcelona (APARTUR), an important entity linked to the Catalan tourism-real estate sector, used the term 'touristphobia' when expressing her opinion about the conflict. In her view, 'touristphobia' would be a localized issue 'in certain areas of the city', where the most relevant or "top" tourist attractions are located, in the words of the interviewee.

Another representative from the local business sector, this time from the Union of Tourist Commercial Axes - Barcelona Oberta - representing local tourism service providers, also used this same expression to refer to critical manifestations of Barcelona's tourism model, attributing to the so-called "low-cost tourism" (usually practiced by young people with limited financial resources) the main reason for the discontent of segments of the local population: "[...] this type of tourism [low cost] is what has saturated many neighborhoods and, therefore, ignited the spark of touristphobia [...]".

It is worth noting that similar criticisms involving 'low-cost tourism' appeared at different moments in this interview, as well as in the statements of another business entity, the Catalan Association of Tourism Professionals (ACPT). We found it strange that the representative of the latter rejected the term 'touristphobia' and used it numerous times during the interview, albeit always in a critical tone, questioning its appropriateness.

When asked about the relevance of using the term 'touristphobia' to describe critical manifestations of tourism in Barcelona, the representative from the World Tourism Organization (OMT) stated: "I would say no. This is a reaction to the perceived impact of tourists and it is very important to look at this issue beyond the headlines, regularly measuring the opinions of residents".

As for the position of the representative from the Barcelona City Council, the notion of 'touristphobia' was not completely dismissed. On the contrary, in her opinion, it would

be a behavior representative of about 20% of the local population and something “absolutely anecdotal”.

It was also noted that representatives of social movements mentioned the term only to criticize its misuse in an attempt to manipulate public opinion. It is worth highlighting a passage from the interview with the representative of ABDT, one of the main organizations involved in local protests, as previously mentioned in item 2 of this article, where he vehemently rejects the use of the term to classify those who contest the Catalan tourism model: “tourist phobia is, obviously, an insult. It is a campaign mounted by tourist lobbies at a time when they are precisely losing their hegemony in history”;

It was identified that some works in the academic literature have resorted to the term ‘anti-tourism’, in line with ‘tourist phobia’. For example, Alexis (2017) uses it to formulate his hypothesis that an ‘anti-tourist sentiment’ would have emerged in Barcelona and Venice as a reaction to the failures in the tourism management of these cities by the local government, based on the concept of ‘tourist carrying capacity’¹¹ and the ‘seasonality of the activity’¹². However, in the interviews conducted, no mention of the term was observed.

Thus, although with distinct nuances, it can be affirmed that the terms ‘touristphobia’ and ‘anti-tourism’ were used with very similar meanings to refer to dissatisfied sectors of the local population, who would be reacting emotionally and aggressively to the impacts caused by tourist saturation. A potential solution to the problem would tend towards appeasing the ‘spirits of the protesters’ rather than directly addressing the impacts caused by the adopted tourism model.

Overtourism

The use of the term ‘overtourism’ has also been recurrent in attempting to clarify the tourism conflict in Barcelona and other cities affected by similar issues. Borrowed from English, the term represents a neologism resulting from the combination of the words ‘over’ (above, excess) and ‘tourism’, and conveys, from its etymology, the idea of ‘excessive tourism’ or, as commonly translated by Brazilian authors, ‘tourist saturation’.

In the academic literature of the Tourism field, it is noticeable that this term has gained hegemony, being frequently used in event titles, as well as extensively referenced in scientific works. It appears in documents issued by international organizations, such as the World Tourism Organization (OMT, 2018; 2019), and even in narratives produced by representatives of both the business sector and social movements.

11 Word generally used in the field of Tourism to address the maximum volume of visitors that could access certain attractions or tourist locations without compromising their ‘sustainability’.

12 Term usually adopted in Tourism to refer to seasonal flows of visitors, which oscillate between the so-called ‘high, medium and low season’.

Using the definition provided by Milano (2018) as a reference, it would be possible to employ 'over-tourism' as an assessment parameter for cities not yet affected by high numbers of visitors and tourist services, preventing them from suffering the same woes as cities like Barcelona. In the accounts of the agents, some meanings attributed to the term can be discerned:

a) 'over-tourism' as the central cause of the conflict: understanding the excess of visitors and the high concentration of tourist facilities and services in certain areas of the city, causing damage to the quality of life of residents, as well as to the quality of the tourist experience itself for visitors;

b) the use of the term in the sense of recognizing the legitimacy of the demands of dissatisfied sectors of the resident population, admitting the possibility of another model for the exploitation of tourism;

c) 'over-tourism' as a result of the inefficiency of tourism management by the local government. For most of its formulators, the public authorities could adopt more effective techniques of tourism planning combined with urban planning instruments, establishing differentiated rules for enjoying attractions through the evaluation of each neighborhood/locality/attraction based on indicators of tourist pressure.

For the representative of the social organization Alba Sud, the term 'over-tourism' was used superficially and in selected situations, aiming to reach 'a distinct audience', particularly within the academic community. The interviewee criticized the term, which, in their opinion, suggests a quest for neutrality in the perspective of conflicts driven by tourism, and emphasized that the more appropriate term to designate them is 'touristization', which will be addressed in the next section.

When asked about it, the representative of the World Tourism Organization referred to 'over-tourism' as a "buzzword that emerged in recent years" to explain what she called "significant challenges" affecting cities with a high concentration of visitors, requiring "planning, management, and collaboration among all stakeholders". This interviewee endorsed the thesis that the issues at hand would not have a direct relationship with the tourism model itself but would reflect a 'deficient tourism management' that should focus on technological improvements, as well as managerial strategies similar to those adopted in the corporate environment.

In the same vein, the representative of the Barcelona City Council agreed that the solution to conflicts generated by local tourism would involve improving management tools. Furthermore, she pointed out that, "if necessary," using the specific term 'overtourism' would be the most appropriate.

Compared to the previous terms - 'tourist phobia' and 'anti-tourism' - the term 'over-tourism' seemed to face less resistance. It was also noted that instead of attributing behavioral/emotional motivations to the generation of conflicts, the statements attempted to downplay the problem, limiting it to 'certain areas of the city' and 'in some cases/situations', requiring interventions from the public authorities to address specific 'disorders' and 'overloads'.

It is worth highlighting that the perception of ‘over-tourism’ as a metric that transcends the bounds of appropriateness entailed, as a counterpart, bringing tourism planning closer to urban planning, as well as the advocacy for ‘tourism reduction’, a fiercely debated and consensual cause that ultimately gives its name to one of the most active organizations in the movement: the Association of Neighborhoods for Tourism Reduction (ABDT).

Touristization

The use of the term ‘touristization’ was limited to representatives of social movements.

Despite its phonetic similarity to the term ‘touristification’, used by authors such as Knafou (2001) and Coll (2017), ‘touristization’ would distinguish itself by not being limited to the process of aesthetic and urban transformation of a locality to convert it into a ‘tourist-receiving nucleus’ under suitable conditions for marketing in expanded tourist circuits. In the founding manifesto of the South European Network Against Touristization (SET Network) (ALBA SUD, 2018) and in the work of Jover *et al.* (2018), the central concept of the term privileges the gradual process of restructuring urban spatial economy with the aim of meeting the preferences of the ‘new profile of users’ – the tourists – to the detriment of the right to housing and the right to the city for the resident population. This process tends to lead to consequences such as the encouragement of the substitution of ‘residential apartments’ with ‘tourist apartments’ negotiated on virtual platforms for seasonal rentals, the replacement of traditional ‘neighborhood commerce’ with one that better serves the conveniences of the ‘new users’; the transformation of public spaces into private tourist attractions, among other modifications of urban space usage directed towards sector demands.

The representative of the Association of Neighborhoods for Tourism Reduction described this terminology as follows:

O termo que usamos é ‘turistização’ [...] a ‘turistização’ da economia é um problema claro, porque basicamente está precarizando a vida, até mesmo das pessoas que deveriam ser beneficiadas. [...] Para além das pessoas que são expulsas diretamente por causa da sua habitação, todos aqueles fatores que acabam por dificultar a vida cotidiana, o aumento dos preços de consumo mais básicos, a dificuldade em encontrar determinados tipos de comércio, problemas de mobilidade, problemas de sono, e as pessoas que tiveram que sair [...] (ABDT, 2019, our translation)¹³.

13 The term we use is ‘touristization’ [...] the ‘touristization’ of the economy is a clear problem, because it’s basically making life more precarious, even for the people who should be benefiting. [...] Beyond the people who are directly displaced because of their housing, all those factors that end up making daily life more difficult, the increase in prices of even the most basic consumption, the difficulty in finding certain types of commerce, mobility issues, sleep problems, and the people who had to leave [...] (ABDT, 2019, our translation).

In other words, for the interviewee, ‘touristization’ is associated with the takeover of commerce, transportation, artistic, architectural, and cultural resources, housing, people themselves, and the city itself by a monolithic logic based on the tourism economy.

Agreeing with the spokesperson from ADBT, the representative from Alba Sud emphasized that the distinctive aspect of the term ‘touristization’ in comparison to others is that it holds the instigators of the advancing touristization process accountable - in other words, the tourism companies benefiting from the overexploitation of territories, transferring social well-being losses to the residents.

The central issue in the argumentation of those who analyzed the conflicts generated by tourism in Barcelona from the perspective of ‘touristization’ would revolve around the very nature of the tourism model, which, ultimately, could lead to the collapse of tourist destinations, the very ones driving the activity.

Final considerations

As observed throughout this research, there is a clear dispute of narratives, terminologies, and even theoretical formulations emerging to provide support for each of the different perspectives on the tourism conflict in Barcelona and other cities in Southern Europe.

Paraphrasing Castells (2009): “a comunicação influi decisivamente a forma de construir e desafiar as relações de poder em todos os campos das práticas sociais, incluindo a prática política” (*ibidem*, p. 24, tradução nossa)¹⁴. In this sense, the intended objective of the formulators of each highlighted term in this work is evident: to persuade the audience regarding the legitimacy of their interpretation of social reality, aiming to achieve the status of hegemonic discourse in the field of Tourism. This would enable its spread to other similar realities and other fields of knowledge, notably Urban Planning, given that the very nature of the conflict in question also impacts issues dear to city management, such as the right to the city, housing issues, and the land use and occupation process.

It is worth noting that in the current stage of the debate, the first two formulations discussed – ‘tourist phobia’ and ‘anti-tourism’ - are quite weakened, with the theoretical inconsistency of their arguments being recognized, anchored in subjective and generalistic perceptions, appealing to a strong emotional component, detrimental to a more objective and rigorous investigation.

On the other hand, the terms ‘overtourism’ and ‘touristization’, with legitimate distinctions, revealed a more consistent argumentative construction supported by historical investigations, data, and assessments of possible causes and impacts, allowing for the indication of potential measures to be adopted by the government to address and/or reduce the damages caused by the exacerbated promotion of tourism.

¹⁴ “Communication decisively influences the way in which power relations are constructed and challenged in all fields of social practices, including political practice” (*ibidem*, p. 24, our translation).

In this sense, in light of the elaborations carried out in the context of this research, it is understood that the terms ‘overtourism’ and ‘touristization’ have a theoretical foundation and arguments of greater density compared to the formulations ‘touristphobia’ and ‘anti-tourism’. However, in the face of the intense political and symbolic struggle surrounding the conflict, the dispute of narratives will likely continue to shape both the rhetoric and action of social agents directly or indirectly affected by the impacts resulting from the promoted tourism model in Barcelona and other locations in the so-called ‘South of Europe’.

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Felix, F. G.: investigation – conceptualization - data curation - writing – original writing; Souza, M. J. N.: supervision – conceptualization – methodology - formal analysis – reviewing and editing.

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