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Is human mobility in times of pandemic going local?

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# Pandemic Mobility/(Im)mobility in the Canary Islands: irregular migrants becoming hotel guests

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## Introduction

### Mobility and tourism in island spaces

- 1 The history of the islands has been linked to mobility insofar as they were originally populated thanks to waves of immigration and have been subsequently affected by flows of different kinds. Circumscribed to a limited territory and a relatively closed framework of social relations, these spaces generated, over time, intense relations with the outside world, which have been expanding in the context of a globalized world (Fonseca, 2010). Therefore, from the point of view of human mobility, island spaces can be considered nodal spaces (King, 1999), which act as a nexus between population flows, meeting places, places of transition and points of support on international routes for the movement of people. Consequently, from a spatial perspective, islands are an exceptional laboratory for analysing mobility (King, 2009).

- 2 In addition to this link between the islands and mobility, there is also the fact that they are important tourist destinations. This circumstance derives from the attractiveness of the islands as a place of rest and relaxation in the collective imagination. As Sharpley (2012, p. 167) pointed out, “associated with notions of remoteness, separateness, difference, and the exotic, [islands] are the stuff of romance and adventure, of fantasy and escape, of ‘otherness’”. Although this idea of islands as “earthly paradises” spread through a thriving European wealthy class in the late nineteenth century, the tourist development of island spaces has coincided, in most of them, with the growth of mass tourism.
- 3 Therefore, islands have represented and still represent the materialization of the idea of wellbeing that many of the potential tourists have in mind (Martín de la Rosa, 2003), an idea underpinned by the appeal and the characteristics of ‘islandness’ (Butler, 1993; Cave, Brown, 2012; Conkling, 2007). In consequence, these spaces have been visited by hundreds of millions of tourists who spend their holidays here, with the result that they have collectively become the world’s second most visited category of destinations after historic cities (Marín, 2000) and, “consequently, tourism has become widely adopted as an integral element of development policy on islands” (Jóhannesson, 2010, p. 280).
- 4 The studies of island destinations have approached, either directly or indirectly, the interrelation between mobility and tourism development, either from the perspective of the MIRAB and SITE models, in the case of small islands (Oberts, McElroy, 2007), or from the perspective of the changes in the production systems (Dehoorne, 2002; Sheller, Urry, 2004; Domínguez-Mujica *et al.*, 2011). Thus, tourism may also engender migration flows through the demand generated for labour and, at the same time, many forms of migration generate tourism flows (Domínguez-Mujica, Parreño Castellano, 2018). Similarly, migrants themselves behave as tourists and sometimes tourists become migrants. All these intersections, which add to the symbiotic relationship between migration and tourism, are clearer when viewed from the point of view of life courses, as in the case of lifestyle migrants who retire in the place they had migrated to (Parreño-Castellano, Domínguez-Mujica, 2016).
- 5 These examples show that island spaces allow us to go more deeply into the meaning of the relationships between migration and tourism, as a necessary debate, in correspondence with the so-called “new mobilities paradigm”. We refer to the paradigm which has conceptualised mobility “as a complex system of movement of various material and virtual objects – such as humans, information, goods – that are rooted in technological infrastructures and are situated at various scales, from local to global” (Kharlamov 2016, p. 1), and in which transient mobility arises as a pivotal aspect of the contemporary world that includes seasonal movement of people across borders (Marcu, 2020).

## The theoretical framework on immobility

- 6 In the field of social sciences, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have led to a profound revision of the mobility paradigm in light of immobility and the mobility-immobility nexus.
- 7 In times prior to the pandemic, some reflections on this nexus had already been developed, to the extent that Adey stated that “the wonderful complexity of the world

is built upon dialectical relationships between mobilities and relative immobilities” (2006, p. 86). However, the largest number of theorizations on immobility were formulated from the perspective of the right to mobility. Thus, Wood & Graham (2006) focused their attention on the role acquired by technologies in border control since, according to them, technologies heightened the immobility of people, when they tried to cross borders. In this same line of thought, Hannam, Sheller and Urry (2006, p. 11) argued that “places, technologies and ‘gates’ that enhance the mobilities of some while reinforcing the immobilities, or demobilization, of others” have proliferated, and that, as J. Urry himself points out, “the mobilities of some are always at the expense of others [...] because of power relations” (Adey, Bisell, 2010, p. 7).

- 8 All these reflections have acquired a new meaning with COVID19, as the rapid propagation of the coronavirus has destroyed mobility and has profoundly disturbed the daily life of millions of people around the world (Dzankic, Piccoli, 2020). In the words of Sheller, “the pandemic disrupted mobilities and drastically reorganized others into new material assemblages and temporal patterns” (2020). For this reason, the experience of almost deserted streets, of closed shop shutters, of postponed travel and of tourists absent from historic cities and traditional tourism destinations will remain within us over time, as immobility gains ground and mobility stays on pause.
- 9 The effects of the pandemic have been noticeable, too, in the adoption of policies such as the evacuation of certain affected areas, travel restrictions and confinement in quarantine, to which should be added the repatriation of seasonal workers, students, etc. and the cessation or reduction of tourist activity. From the point of view of migrations, by early April 2020 more than 130 countries introduced entry restrictions at borders and crossing an international border to a country of safety and filing an asylum claim was no longer possible in many places. “The COVID-19 pandemic created a worldwide crisis of immobility as international borders closed. All over the world, migrants have been sent home, prevented from taking up opportunities to work in another country, or compelled to return to their countries of origin” (Newland, 2020, p. 1).
- 10 However, in the case study at hand, the pandemic has contributed to the revitalization of irregular immigration by sea. Many African migrants have put their lives at risk, on long crossings, venturing on precarious boats, in the hope of finding a better future in Europe. Thus, the crisis of immobility in times of the pandemic has acted as a spur to new movement, forcing us to rethink the paradigm of mobility.

## The Canary Islands and mobilities/immobilities in pandemic times

- 11 It is well known that, in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to stop the spread of the virus, authorities forced the population to remain indoors for periods of time of variable length, and social events, parties and mass gatherings have been identified as dangerous and hence forbidden. This fact has had important consequences both in relation to migratory plans, many of which have been cancelled or postponed, and in relation to tourism, whose decline has been extraordinary. One of the first sectors of the global economy to be severely disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic of 2020 was tourism. In January 2021, the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) warned that last year, at the height of the pandemic, 174 million global Travel & Tourism jobs were at risk. And in February 2021, the International Air Transport Association (IATA)

announced full-year global passenger traffic results for 2020 showing that demand fell by 65.9% compared to the full year of 2019, by far the sharpest traffic decline in aviation history. This, in turn, has led to a significant reduction in consumption, which has meant that those areas with the greatest specialization in tourism have been the most affected (Campos-Vázquez, Esquivel, 2020).

- 12 One would expect that an archipelago which bases its *raison d'être* on mobility would be affected by a significant reduction in the flow of tourists and migrants in times of pandemic, and so it has happened with the flow of tourists, which plunged by 71.19% in 2020, when only 3.78 million international visitors came to the archipelago, a figure that represented a drop in spending of 71.43%, i.e., takings of only 4,816 million Euros (NSI). In the framework of the global tourism system, the Canary Islands moved from excess tourism to non-tourism (Gössling *et al.*, 2020). This has had an extraordinary impact on the island economy and has had serious consequences for the welfare of the population. The losses for hotel, restaurant and trade entrepreneurs have been enormous, unemployment has reached record levels, and revenues to public coffers have been considerably reduced.
- 13 However, against all odds, irregular immigration flows have been acquiring an unusual intensity since mid-2020, as the immobility has been exploited by the gangs that traffic in the lives of human beings in order to profit from the business of irregular migration by sea, moving men and women, young people and children from the African coast to this border region in the southwest of the European Union.
- 14 From the date that the state of alarm was decreed in Spain, on March 14, 2020, until the end of the year, 23,023 immigrants reached the coasts of the archipelago in small boats and “cayucos”, to which must be added 3,436 who arrived between January 1 and March 31, 2021 (Ministry of the Interior, 2021). The flight from situations of conflict, in the case of those of Malian origin, as well as the deterioration of the economy, as a result of the decrease in tourist activity in Morocco, Gambia and Senegal, in times of pandemic, have led to a significant increase in unemployment, these becoming some of the push factors that have contributed to this emigration. This is confirmed by the fact that many of the immigrants were employed in the tourism sector in their countries of origin as guides and street vendors. In addition, increased surveillance on the central and western Mediterranean routes has diverted migratory flows towards the Atlantic, as well as the fact that the repatriation of migrants has been cancelled or reduced to a minimum because of border closures.
- 15 This surge in irregular immigration caught the central state administration unawares, which lacked the services to attend to the number of immigrants who disembarked and disembark every day at three or four points in the Archipelago. The administration found it necessary to solve the problem of the accumulation of immigrants on the open areas of the arrival ports, especially in Arguineguín, in Gran Canaria, where more than 2,600 people were crammed together, when its maximum capacity was only 400. In this context, the authorities directed their attention to the unoccupied tourist facilities. For their part, the businesspeople in the tourist industry thought of the possibility of obtaining income and maintaining their workers at those critical moments, so that some of them offered their hotels and apartment complexes to accommodate, for three or four months, the immigrants who had arrived irregularly to the Canary Islands by sea.

## Objectives, hypothesis and structure

- 16 The objectives of this paper focus, on the one hand, on characterizing the irregular immigration by sea that has reached the coasts of the archipelago and, on the other, on analysing the reception strategies that have been implemented in times of pandemic.
- 17 These two objectives allow us to reflect on two hypotheses under construction. The first is that, just as mobility in non-pandemic times is at the expense of the immobility of others, in the current situation of health crisis, the right to assisted immobility of the generally mobile leads to the forced mobility of those who cannot afford to be immobile. Irregular migration from northwest Africa, which we analyse here, is a clear example of this situation. The second is that we must further broaden the approach to the relationship between migration and tourism in island frontier spaces, conceiving business sector strategies as a further manifestation of this interconnection and as a resilient response of the tourism sector to situations of immobility.
- 18 In relation to the latter, although what we are studying here has certain precedents in Greece, France or England, countries in which some groups of immigrants have been temporarily housed in low category hotels, the dimension acquired in the Canary Islands by the lodging of immigrants in tourist establishments has been so extensive that it deserves a reflection beyond the anecdotal.
- 19 In correspondence with the stated objectives, the article is structured as follows. After the introduction on the theoretical framework of the study and the hypothesis, objectives and structure, we present the characteristics of the sources and methods developed in a second section; the third addresses the irregular maritime migrations on the afore-mentioned West African route; the fourth inquiries into the case study of the irregular immigrants lodged in tourism accommodation; and, finally, the conclusions emphasize the need to integrate the interpretation of the described case study as a new dimension of the nexus between mobility and tourism, as a resilient response to immobility in island spaces whose *raison d'être* is grounded on mobility.

## Sources and methods of research

- 20 The study of irregular immigration and the actions of the State in terms of its control and management encounters great difficulties because accurate data are not provided by governments, which hinders the work of researchers, as Lindberg and Borrelli pointed out when they described the efforts they made to gain access to migration control agencies across eight European countries, in order to conduct ethnographic fieldwork. The conclusion they reached is that those difficulties are derived from “the fragmented nature of the state agencies, which contrasts with the order-making functions they claim to perform within the field of border and migration control” (2019, p. 17). In the case of Spain, not only the participation of public agencies at different levels and private actors in the “market of migration control” but also the actions of the state itself contribute to the opacity of irregular migration management, preventing access to immigration detention centres and hiding the monitoring of detention conditions or of the expulsion procedures, among others (López-Sala, Godenau, 2020).

- 21 Consequently, it has been impossible for us to carry out fieldwork to study the steps taken by the Spanish Government in relation to the accommodation of migrants in tourist establishments and we have had to rely on the scarce official information provided by the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration and the Ombudsman and, above all, on the numerous press reports published, thanks to the fact that many of the reporters have been stationed for several days in the places of arrival of migrants and in front of the hotels. With this information we have been able to track the arrival of migrants by sea in times of pandemic, and their accommodation in hotel and non-hotel establishments, these last classified by the government as accommodation of an emergency nature. However, according to the media, “the constant lack of access to information about the migrants’ accommodation and to the facilities themselves is making it difficult to report on facts” (INFOMIGRANTS, 2020).
- 22 We have systematically collected and classified news in the press through the web sites of the most widely read newspapers in the Canary Islands and in Spain as a whole. We refer to the local newspapers: La Provincia, Canarias7 (which are published in paper and digital format) and Canarias Ahora (only in digital format). As for the national press, El País and El Confidencial are particularly worth mentioning (Table 1).
- 23 The information referring to the accommodation of the immigrants in those buildings, their subsequent transfer and the public controversy surrounding these acts represents approximately 30 percent of the total information relating to the process of irregular immigration that has affected the Canary Islands in times of the pandemic. And we proceeded by “following” these media, scraping, archiving, and debugging qualitative empirical open data (Leurs, Prabhakar, 2018), but being conscious of its limits because of the above-mentioned opacity of the irregular migration management.

Table 1. Information on irregular immigration according to the media consulted.

Area	Media consulted (01-07-2020/31-03-2021)	Total days with news on irregular migration	Amount of news on	
			Accommodation	Social response
Local	La Provincia	397	66	118
	Canarias 7	325	54	104
	Canarias Ahora	196	38	54
National	El País	83	14	32
	El Confidencial	27	6	14

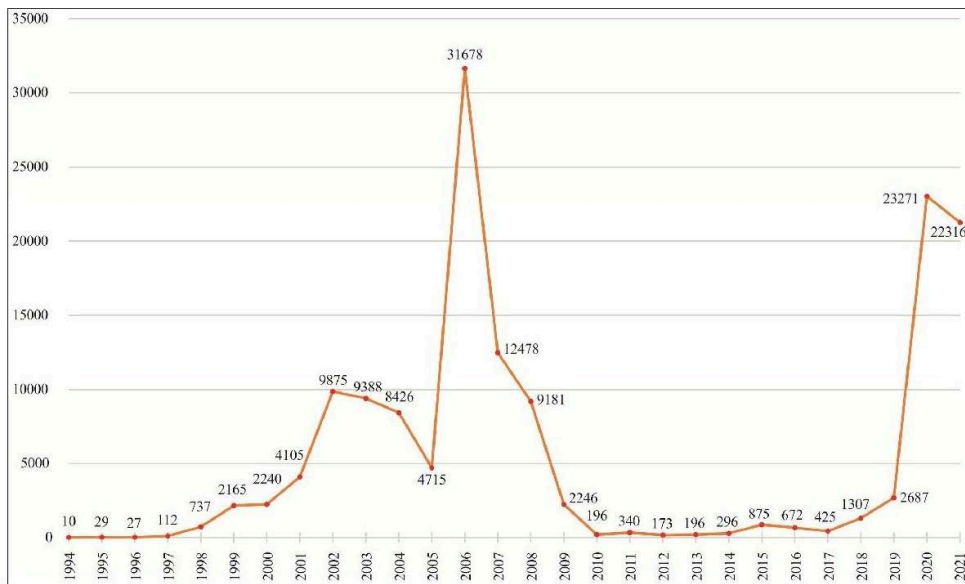
Source: Elaborated by authors

## The irregular maritime migrations on the West African route

- 24 Irregular immigration by sea to the Canary Islands, in precarious vessels, as it is known today, began in 1994, when the first “patera” arrived on the coasts of Fuerteventura. The sequence of these arrivals is shown in Figure 1, which shows that the moment of maximum immigration was recorded in 2006, a year that has been identified as the “cayuco crisis”, due to the type of boat used by the migrants. After this, the migratory pressure decreased considerably, until the notable upturn in 2020, which has continued in the first few months of 2021, the point at which we close our study of this fact.
- 25 The intensity of immigration in the years 2001-2007 was undoubtedly influenced by the processes of regularization of the status of immigrants in an irregular situation, which the Spanish government carried out in 2000, 2001 and 2005, and the country’s own economic prosperity, which acted as a lure. In subsequent years there was a contraction of flow, a process influenced by the deep economic crisis of 2008 and onwards and by the multiple measures and initiatives undertaken at all levels in the fields of diplomacy and policing by the European Union, Spain and the countries of origin (Domínguez-Mujica *et al.*, 2018; Parreño-Castellano *et al.*, 2021).
- 26 Since 2019, the reactivation of immigration has been noticeable, and especially since July-August 2020, which has been interpreted (i) as a sign of a further sealing of the Western and Central Mediterranean routes between Africa and Europe since 2019; (ii) as an effect of the relaxation in cooperation efforts in the control of the West African coast; (iii) as a consequence of increased political and economic instability in certain countries of origin of sub-Saharan emigration; (iv) because of difficulties in repatriating irregular migrants to countries of origin in times of pandemic (Godenau *et al.*, 2020) and (v) as a result of the international mobility crisis brought about by the pandemic itself, which has repercussions on the economy of their countries, exacerbating the poverty of certain social groups, especially young people who are unemployed or in insecure employment.



Figure 1. Number of irregular immigrants arriving by sea to the Canary Islands (1994-2021).

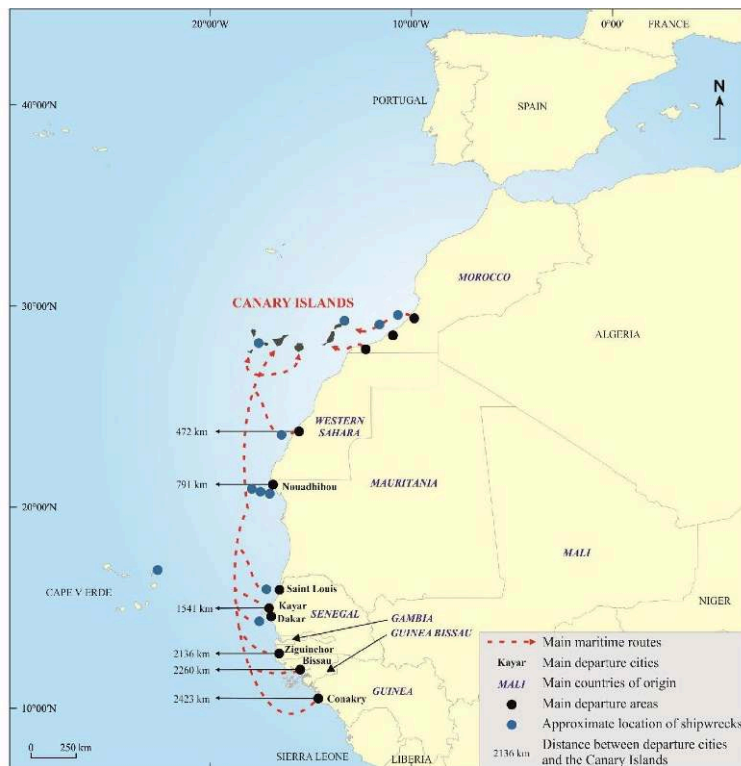


Source: Ministry of the Interior. Elaborated by authors

27 In this upturn in immigration, up to the date of writing this article, the following characteristics can be appreciated. From the point of view of the profile of the immigrants:

- Predominance of young immigrants from Morocco, Western Sahara, Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia, Mali, Guinea Bissau and Guinea Conakry, having embarked mostly from the western coasts of Morocco, Western Sahara, Mauritania and Senegal, as shown in the map in Figure 2.
- Increase in the number of unaccompanied minors. Estimates speak of 15% of irregular arrivals, with 2,666 being looked after by the Government of the Canary Islands and the Cabildos, as of February 12, 2021 (Ombudsman, 2021) but, according to the statements of the President of the Government of the Canary Islands himself, there were about 6,000 in mid-December 2020.
- Frequency of the arrival of women, pregnant women and women with children, especially of sub-Saharan origin, which in the first quarter of 2021 alone increased from five to thirteen percent, with total arrivals of 3,000 people.
- The fact that some of them have relatives in Europe, with whom they want to be reunited.
- Low number of COVID-19 infections among them.

Figure 2. Places of origin of recent irregular immigration to the Canary Islands.



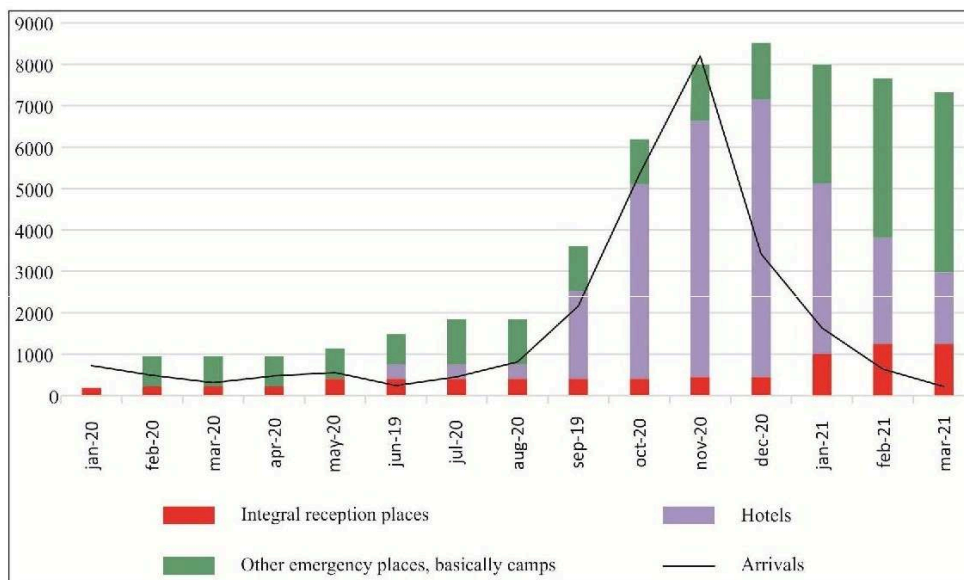
Source: media consulted. Elaborated by authors

28 From the point of view of management:

1. Multiplication of maritime rescue actions to assist the vessels detected, both in the vicinity of the coast and also many miles away. In the latter case, when the boats have difficulty in approaching due to engine or hull failures, fuel exhaustion, or because they were carrying pregnant women, children or sick people, who required rapid transfer.
2. Deployment of additional health control resources at the time of arrival of immigrants at the coast, since, as a result of the pandemic, all immigrants have to be tested for COVID-19 and specific places of isolation have been set up for those who have arrived infected or who subsequently became infected.
3. The multiplication of “managers” of irregular immigration, since the formal reception of immigrants has become the responsibility of several NGOs, which have signed contracts with the government to make themselves responsible for it, either in tourist establishments or in camps: the Spanish Red Cross, CEAR (Spanish Commission for Refugee Aid) and the White Cross. In addition to these bodies, there are other NGOs and other volunteers, who carry out complementary support actions, such as ACCEM (Spanish Catholic Migration Commission Association), Mujeres, Solidaridad y Cooperación (Women, Solidarity and Cooperation), Federación de Asociaciones Africanas en Canarias (Federation of African Associations in the Canary Islands) and Patio de las Culturas (Patio of Cultures).
4. Difficulties in providing these immigrants with the necessary legal services because of the scarce means of legal assistance available and the additional circumstance that some arrive without passports or other identification documents. Some who have been classified as people seeking international protection or asylum have been moved to mainland Spain.
5. In general, referrals to mainland Spain have been limited in comparison with the number of people who have arrived. The Government has authorized the transfer of vulnerable groups, such as mothers with children and, conversely, repatriations have been very few.

6. The paralysis or low number of repatriations and referrals has made the management of reception difficult, given the insufficient accommodation available. In the first few days of the upturn in immigration, the overcrowding of immigrants on the open areas of the arrival docks was the object of all kinds of criticism.
7. Finally, shelter has been resolved through the creation of accommodation infrastructure for adult men in two types of establishment. On the one hand, hotels and tourist apartments, classified by the Government as emergency accommodation and, on the other, camps, created specifically in former recreational areas, in disused industrial buildings or inoperative public constructions, as a substitute for accommodation in hotels and tourist apartments. As can be seen in Figure 3, tourist accommodation housed most of the immigrants in the first few months, until reception camps were set up.

Figure 3. Places available to cover accommodation requirements.



Source: Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration and media consulted. Elaborated by authors

- 29 In addition, the immigrants demand that they be allowed to go to mainland Spain or to other European Union countries. All of them state that they do not want to stay in the Canary Islands and, in fact, some of them try to continue their journey using relatives or irregular means of travel. They make clear their total rejection of repatriation and, as an act of protest, some of them live in the street after leaving the camps, since those who are repatriated are taken from the camps on the few return flights.
- 30 Beyond the efforts of the Spanish Government with the European Union and with the governments of the immigrants' countries of origin, the reaction of the Government of the Canary Islands and the Ombudsman has been to denounce the overcrowding on the docks, as well as the conditions in certain camps (Las Raíces, on Tenerife). In addition, the Island Authorities (Cabildos), the Canarian parliamentarians in the national Congress and in the Senate, as well as the President of the Canary Islands himself have insistently demanded that the immigrants be allowed to leave the Canary Islands. "The Canary Islands are not a prison", "The Canary Islands cannot become a prison for immigrants" have been the mottos expressed with insistence.

- 31 As for civil society, the management of immigration has been the subject of some controversy. However, there is no doubt that repatriations, referrals, and the management of the reception of unaccompanied minors are carried out with great secrecy, which makes it difficult to describe more accurately what happens to immigrants after a period in the Canary Islands.

## **Irregular immigrants becoming tourist guests, a controversy**

- 32 In the context described above, it is worth looking more closely at the relationship that has been established between migration and tourism in this frontier island space, which the Canary Islands represent, as a result of the combination of the desire and need to migrate of people arriving from northwest Africa, on the one hand, and the commitment of entrepreneurs to a type of business whose success rests on the capacity to welcome and attend to mobile people, specifically tourists.
- 33 The first news about the leasing of the tourist establishments by the Government was published in July 2020, although contracts increased significantly in the months of October, November and December, when it was adopted as a solution to solve the problem of overcrowding of immigrants on the open area of the Arguineguín dock (Figure 4A).
- 34 The first few contracts involved the leasing of a few establishments on Gran Canaria, and shortly thereafter others were added on four of the Canary Islands, bringing the total to 17. These properties, three- and four-star hotels and non-hotel establishments, leased by the Spanish Government, are located in the tourist areas of Playa del Inglés, Maspalomas, Puerto Rico and Amadores on Gran Canaria (12) (Figures 4B and 4C), in Corralejo, on Fuerteventura (1), in Puerto del Carmen, on Lanzarote (1), and in Puerto de la Cruz and Adeje, on Tenerife (3).
- 35 The immigrants housed in them, some 7,000, have been attended to by NGO managers and have been able to move freely inside these enclosures, although the swimming pools have remained closed since the confinement. The immigrants could also leave these buildings, although they had to follow the instructions regarding mealtimes and overnight stays. In addition, some spaces were reserved in the hotels to care for those who might be infected with COVID-19, in order to facilitate their isolation and thus prevent the spread of the disease. Other spaces were also set aside for unaccompanied minors (some 600).
- 36 As for the reaction of the public, the Association of Hotel and Catering Businessmen defended this measure. It was also defended by the NGOs and most of the citizens, however, as time went by, attitudes changed. The mayor of one of the tourist municipalities where these immigrants were staying (Mogán) wanted to put an end to this practice, demanding that the contracts be terminated at the beginning of 2021, the year in which she anticipated that these establishments would be penalised by the city council, for not complying with their status as tourist facilities. This statement was supported by several business associations on Gran Canaria and some groups of citizens of the tourist municipalities, who demonstrated on several occasions with the slogan “Let’s save tourism in Mogán”, demanding that the hotels and apartment complexes of the municipality recover their use for tourism, statements answered by the Minister of

Justice of the Government of the Canary Islands and by the Regional Representative of the Central Government, who considered them to be very unfortunate. In fact, the Town Hall itself, when it saw that the demonstrations were becoming xenophobic, issued a communiqué calling for calm and condemning the use of any kind of violence and incitement to hatred.

- 37 On the other hand, as camps and new reception facilities were set up (Figure 4D), there were protests in the hotels by the immigrants, who did not want to be moved to the camps and demanded to be allowed to continue their journey to mainland Spain. When the transfers began, information circulated among them that they were going to be deported from the camps. They knew that if they wanted to, they could leave and move freely, so many took that option, being forced to live on the street or in open spaces near the camps. In the words of one of them (El País, February 25, 2021), “In the hotel I did nothing but sleep and eat. And in the camp, it was going to be worse and from there they were going to send us back to Senegal”.
- 38 The freedom they are pursuing with an uncertain journey, which had taken them to the Canary Islands, is interrupted when a new obstacle is placed in their way, that of leaving an island space, at a considerable distance from the rest of Europe. For this reason, the stays in hotels, as “guests”, do not resolve their desires to follow the migratory itinerary they had set for themselves.

Figure 4. Places for immigrants' accommodations.



A. Puerto de Arguineguín, Mogán, Gran Canaria  
Fuente: El Confidencial, 17 de noviembre de 2020 (EFE)

C. Apartamentos Vistaflor, Maspalomas, Gran Canaria  
Fuente: El País, 20 de septiembre de 2020 (Quique Curbelo)

B. Hotel Waikiki Servatur, 4 estrellas, Playa del Inglés, Gran Canaria  
Fuente: <https://www.servatur.com/waikiki/> (Consultada el 05 de abril de 2021)

D. Actuaciones de Emergencia: Barranco Seco, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria  
Fuente: Elaboración propia, 03 de abril de 2021

A Arguineguín Port, Mogán, Gran Canaria  
B Waikiki Servatur Hotel (four stars), Playa del Inglés, Gran Canaria  
C Vistaflor Apartments, Maspalomas, Gran Canaria  
D Emergency Actions Camp, Barranco Seco, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.

Sources: A: El Confidencial, November 17, 2020 (EFE); B: <https://www.servatur.com/waikiki/>; C: El País, September 20, 2020 (Quique Curbelo); D: Photo by authors, April 3, 2021

## Conclusions: a new dimension of the nexus between mobility and tourism

- 39 Research on the upsurge and management of irregular immigration by sea via the West African route has revealed the complex relationship between mobility and insularity, between mobility and tourist specialization, and between mobility and immobility in times of the pandemic.
- 40 The Canary Islands, as an island space that acts as a nexus between population flows of different types, as a tourist destination of the first order, and as a place of transition on the international routes of movement of people has become, in times of pandemic, a place of attraction of irregular immigration flows. These have increased significantly, favoured by the relative immobility that the closure of borders represents. Moreover, as transit spaces to continental lands, they have become a new barrier to mobility for those people who have ventured on a journey in precarious boats from the African continent, crossing a distance of hundreds or thousands of kilometres, putting their lives, or those of their children, at risk.
- 41 For its part, the paralysis of tourism has caused the accommodation facilities, which welcomed 13.1 million international tourists and a little more than two million domestic tourists in 2019, to close their facilities or reduce their activity to a minimum, which has caused the bankruptcy of the island economy. As a result, as an attitude of resilience, some entrepreneurs in the tourism sector signed contracts with the government of Spain to keep their establishments operating for several months of the winter, the high season in the Canary Islands, accommodating migrants until other places of reception were arranged. This turned the migrants into guests of the tourist accommodation. This transformation, which led many of them to send their families and friends photos of how they were enjoying these facilities, did not last long, because after a few months, both these hotels and the camps to which they were transferred became a “new prison” for them, because they were not allowed to continue their journey to other parts of Europe, the goal with which they had headed to the Canary Islands.
- 42 This confirms the importance of analysing these events from the point of view of the transformations introduced by the pandemic in the mobility paradigm, since the immobility of some – tourists visiting African countries – has led to the mobility of those who cannot afford to be immobile, the irregular migrants in search of a future. At the same time, hospitality entrepreneurs, whose economic activity is based on the mobility of tourists, try to find in other mobile subjects (irregular immigrants) the activity that will guarantee the survival of their businesses. Consequently, as Adey *et al.* have already pointed out, “in as much as we seem to be living through a concatenation of multiple crises (health, economy, international relations, sustainability, etc.), the new mobilities paradigm emerged precisely to address such complex systemic disruptions and emerging trajectories of change” (2021, p. 16).

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## ABSTRACTS

In a border archipelago whose socio-economic structure is based on the specialization of tourism, mobility takes on its full significance with international tourists, labour migrants, migrants fleeing violence and poverty, lifestyle migrants, digital nomads, etc. The boundaries between these flows often become blurred, as the presence of tourists attracts labour migrants; labour and lifestyle migrants exchange roles; and irregular migrants become labour migrants. However, it has been the immobility caused by the pandemic that has turned the migration-tourism nexus on its head, transforming irregular migrants into guests of tourist establishments. Consequently, the purpose of this article is to reflect on the impact of the immobility caused by the pandemic in a territory whose *raison d'être* is mobility.

Dans un archipel frontalier dont la structure socio-économique repose sur la spécialisation du tourisme, la mobilité prend tout son sens avec les touristes internationaux, les migrants de travail, les migrants fuyant la violence et la pauvreté, les migrants lifestyle, les nomades numériques, etc. Les frontières entre ces flux sont souvent estompées : la présence des touristes attire les travailleurs migrants ; les migrants de travail et de mode de vie échangent leurs rôles et les migrants en situation irrégulière deviennent des travailleurs migrants. Cependant, c'est l'immobilisme causé par la pandémie qui a bouleversé le lien migration-tourisme, transformant les migrants irréguliers en hôtes d'établissements touristiques. Par conséquent, l'objet de cet

article est de réfléchir sur l'impact de l'immobilisme engendré par la pandémie sur un territoire dont la raison d'être est la mobilité.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** Canary Islands, pandemic, immobility, island spaces, tourism, irregular migration

**Mots-clés:** îles Canaries, pandémie, immobilité, espaces insulaires, tourisme, migration irrégulière

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