

The resident's perceptions of tourism in a mature destination. The determinant factor in Gran Canaria (Spain)

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The residents of the Spanish island of Gran Canaria (a mature sun-and-beach destination) can be considered a paradigmatic example of a population quite conscious of the positive and negative externalities of its main economic sector, the tourism. Tourism represents one-third of the regional GDP and the direct jobs. We analyze the main determinants of the opinions and attitudes of the island residents on tourism, tourists and their impacts, distinguishing social, economic and cultural effects. The consciousness of the residents makes that the percentage of unanswered responses has been statistically not significant, illustrating that the residents do have a formed opinion regarding this phenomenon.

A survey is administered to a representative sample of 504 residents fulfilling quotas according to gender and municipality of tourist or non-tourist geographical areas. A logit-ordinal model is used to analyze the main explanatory variables (the determinant factors), the varied nuances and other third variables involved in residents' perceptions. Thus, a better understanding of the residents' perception on such a complex, variable, multicausal and diverse phenomenon is presented. The results of the study show that the most determinant factors are mainly related to: (1) the creation of new jobs; (2) the creation of wealth; and (3) the economic growth. It should also be emphasized that opinions are very favorable in assessing the influence of tourism on the improvement of infrastructures. The vast majority of respondents believe that tourism is very important for the economy of the municipality of residence, demonstrating the multiplier effect of the sector on the entire island. In relation to the perceptions on tourists themselves, residents consider: (1) a "medium" level of purchasing power; (2) a pleasant overall behavior; and (3) an adequate respect for the environment. The results are aligned with the idea that conflicts between both social groups, residents and tourists, are negligible.

The contribution of the study provides important insights of the residents' perception on tourism in a mature sun-and-beach mass tourist destination. A future research agenda should also contemplate other methodologies, tourism products and destinations that could obtain robust ideas that contribute to a better understanding of this complex phenomenon.

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