



Research Paper

Length of stay for tourists' inland trips

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Caminito del Rey
Málaga
Inland tourism
Length of stay
Negative binomial model
Slow tourism

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the problems of scant research on the Province of Málaga's interior and heterogeneous results of research on length of stay. Based on a negative binomial regression model and data from 675 surveys, the results suggest that two different patterns coexist simultaneously regarding variables' impacts on the length of stay of national versus foreign tourists. For domestic tourists, their reasons for travelling condition length of stay, whereas, for international tourists, satisfaction has the most significant impact on length of stay. In addition, this paper confirms a negative relationship between income and length of stay. Implications for the tourism industry at the destination in question and possible future research are discussed.

1. Introduction

Length of stay (LOS) is a core factor for tourism research and both destination (Barros & Machado, 2010; Barros, Butler, & Correia, 2010; Martínez-García & Raya, 2008; Prebensen, Altin, & Uysal, 2015) and hospitality management (Barros & Machado, 2010; Peypoch, Randriamboarison, Rasoamananjara, & Solonandrasana, 2012). The importance of this factor in tourism research is merited since LOS is one of the most significant variables in visitors' decision-making processes (Decrop & Snelders, 2004). It can have important repercussions for tourism destinations' occupancy rates and economic incomes (Alegre & Pou, 2006), affecting total and daily expenditure (Cannon & Ford, 2002; Downward & Lumsdon, 2000; Kastenholz, 2005) and post-consumption variables such as satisfaction and loyalty (Pérez-Cabañero, Cervera-Taulet, & Schlesinger, 2017). In the case of hotels, LOS can also affect to revenue and thereby Weatherford (1995) among other scholars recommends its incorporation into a revenue management system. Consequently, LOS is a key aspect of destination planning (Alegre & Pou, 2006; Salmasi, Celidoni, & Procidano, 2012): so much so that LOS can alter the structure and design of destinations, businesses and policies (Prebensen et al., 2015).

As a result of this importance, LOS research has focused on different destinations, such as Virginia Beach (Silberman, 1985), the Balearic Islands (Alegre & Pou, 2006; Alegre, Mateo, & Pou, 2011), the Azores (Menezes, Moniz, & Vieira, 2008), Madeira (Barros & Machado, 2010; Machado, 2010), Norway (Prebensen et al., 2015; Thrane & Farstad, 2012) and Madagascar (Peypoch et al., 2012). Researchers have also concentrated on different customer groups, including senior tourists

(Alén, Nicolau, Losada, & Domínguez, 2014), student tourists (Thrane, 2016), golf tourists in the Algarve (Barros, Butler, & Correia, 2010), low-cost tourism in the Spanish region of Girona (Martínez-García & Raya, 2008; Raya-Vilchez & Martínez-García, 2011), cross-country skiing trips in the United States (Uysal, McDonald, & O'Leary, 1988) and Portuguese tourists in Latin America (Barros, Correia, & Crouch, 2008). However, as Alén et al. (2014) suggest, different destinations may reveal different behaviour in terms of LOS. One of the most obvious differences occurs in the case of tourist spending, where some researchers, such as Mules (1998) in Australia and Spotts and Mahoney (1991) in rural region of Michiga, found a positive relationship between LOS and tourists' expenditures while Mok and Iverson (2000) found the opposite relationship for Taiwanese tourists on the island of Guam. Thus, some destinations that are making important decisions based on research conducted in other destinations may be making the wrong choices, leading destination managers to implement policies that, in the best case scenario, are not efficient. This may be the case for inland tourism, in particular.

Inland tourism focuses on a different market segment than coastal tourism. Moreover, different kinds of tourists may even present variations in consumer preferences for each destination in regard to the same attributes (Hernández, Suárez-Vega, & Santana-Jiménez, 2016).

Although inland tourism and rural tourism are sometimes confused with each other, Nicolau and Más (2008) found that inland tourism is on a scale well above nested, non-independent destinations in travel choice processes. However, these two subtypes of tourism appear to be related since, according to Hernández et al. (2016), inland tourism provides economic opportunities for rural tourism development. These,

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in turn, are associated with a reduction of seasonality and a decrease in pressures from the degradation of coastal areas.

The success of inland destinations is particularly important in Spain due to the strong seasonality of tourism in this country (Guzman-Parra, Quintana-García, Benavides-Velasco, & Vila-Oblitas, 2015). In addition, these destinations help satisfy the need to change Spain's Fordist-tourism model, solve the country's environmental problems and revive older tourism destinations (García, 2014). Finally, given that tourism trends are moving away from standardised tourism products, including those offered within cities, inland destinations are increasingly valuable as they can more easily offer individualised tourist experiences (Pawlusiński & Kubal, 2017).

Some researchers have already focused on inland destinations, as in the study by Backer and Barry (2013) carried out in the Australian inland city of Ballarat, the research of Jackson (2006) in inland China and the study by Mei (2014) of inland Norway. Relevant research was also conducted in Spain by Burns and Sancho (2003), who evaluated local perceptions of plans to boost tourism in the inland village of Cuéllar. A study carried out by Sarrión-Gavilán, Benítez-Márquez, and Mora-Rangel (2015) analysed tourism flows and their impact on Andalusia, including differentiating between coastal, inland urban and rural interior destinations. These authors concluded that policy-makers' efforts to promote sustainable development of inland destinations seek to correct the intense and unplanned development in coastal areas. This inland development has stimulated a large increase in tourist flows to both of the aforementioned inland areas, although coastal areas still remain the most important.

An analysis of these younger inland destinations, in which tourism patterns and offers have not yet been clearly defined, could provide more information about the formation of LOS, including how it conditions newer destinations' structures and offers as these destinations progress towards maturity or consolidation. However, as noted above, with the exception of Yi, Day, and Cai (2011), who carried out an analysis of the LOS in rural areas of the United States, research on LOS has usually focused on top-tier, well-established destinations. As a result, little research has been done on second tier destinations, including on the Province of Malaga's inland areas. Located in the south of Spain, the Province of Malaga includes one of the three major tourism destinations available in Andalusia (Consejería de Turismo y Comercio, 2014) (see Fig. 1).

Malaga's coast, the Costa del Sol, is an extremely important tourist destination (Fernández-Morales & Mayorga-Toledano, 2008). It has thus been the focus of extensive tourism research, while studies of tourism in the rest of this province are practically non-existent, with the single exception, in so far as we know, of research carried out by Soler and Gemar (2017). The Province of Malaga's inland comprises the regions of Antequera, Axarquía, Guadalteba, Nororma, Serranía de Ronda, Sierra de las Nieves and the Valle del Guadalhorce (Diputación de Málaga, 2016) (see Fig. 2).

Tourism is growing in this destination, whose offer now surpasses the amount of accommodation in other Andalusian provinces, with 12.86% of the total tourism offer in the Province of Malaga (Diputación de Málaga, 2014). The region attracted more than a million tourists in 2016 (Diputación de Málaga, 2016). According to the latter source, the core tourist profile is national visitors, especially Andalusian residents. However, national tourism is decreasing compared to international flows, in which the British stand out, followed by French, German and Dutch tourists.

These tourists' most representative age range is between 40 and 49 years old, with an average age of 45.2 years old. According to the Diputación de Málaga (2016), 88.70% of tourists confirm that they are travelling with others, while 61.80% report having no children with them. The average LOS is 7.45 days. In addition, this inland destination is most likely favoured by the comparative advantage of its proximity to a coastal tourism destination, as Hernández et al. (2016) found was the case for inland Catalonia.

The inland of the Province of Malaga's main attractions are the climate and cultural and natural heritage, but a large number of tourists visiting cities along the coast, such as Malaga or Nerja, come for a city break (Diputación de Málaga, 2016). Among the inland regions' most visited tourism attractions are the city of Ronda and the Caminito del Rey. The latter walkway has received numerous national and international awards, including the Europa Nostra, Bienal España de Arquitectura y Urbanism and Andalucía de Turismo (Celiento, 2017; El Mundo, 2016).

In addition to the above characteristics, Soler and Gemar (2017) found that the private sector has been a driver of the general increase in quality of the destination's offer. However, the authors point out that the destination still has much room for improvement. Given the success and growth of its tourism industry, this destination's managers could focus on short-term goals and bet on 'hard growth' or redirect tourism away from these conventional maxims, thereby contributing to more sustainable tourism offers (Timms & Conway, 2012). As suggested by Soler and Gemar (2017), the primary strategy could be maintaining the sustainability of the destination, as well as its future profitability, namely, a commitment to slow tourism.

Some researchers, such as Conway and Timms (2012), have argued for a distinction between slow travel and slow tourism. However, many experts do not differentiate between these terms, using them relatively interchangeably (Lumsdon & McGrath, 2011). Slow tourism can facilitate a more eco-friendly form of tourism, while simultaneously keeping economic benefits within local communities and providing meaningful, satisfying experiences to tourists (Caffyn, 2012). This movement seeks to foster tourists' attachment to particular places by giving them time to explore and experience local cultures (Yurtseven & Kaya, 2011) and take in the sights, plunging visitors deeply into local landscapes (Meng & Choi, 2016). This approach naturally encourages longer stays (Ceron & Dubois, 2007).

The present study, therefore, sought to analyse the LOS factors for this destination that could provide guidelines for further sustainable destination planning. A fuller understanding of these factors, according to de Oliveira Santos, Ramos, and Rey-Maqueira (2015), lets destination managers develop more efficient marketing strategies that improve the average LOS. Simultaneously, this research sought to delve into the question of how two visions of destinations, for example, fast growth and slow tourism, deal with prevalent LOS patterns. Another related question addressed was how two sub-destinations can coexist within the same destination – one for national tourists and another for foreign tourists – each shaping the destination through LOS.

This paper is organised as follows. After this introduction the following section provides a review of the literature about LOS, showing the main variables used in the literature and proposing the hypotheses. In Section 3, the database and the choice of method applied are presented. Section 4, shows the results of the empirical analysis. The implications of these results are discussed in Section 5, while Section 6 summarises the main conclusions.

2. LOS

The literature on LOS reports four types of variables at destinations (Alén et al., 2014). These are tourists' sociodemographic variables, which can largely explain LOS (Barros & Machado, 2010; Salmasi et al., 2012), lifecycle stage characteristics (Grigolon, Borgeers, Kemperman, & Timmermans, 2014), travel motivations (de Oliveira Santos et al., 2015; Yang, Wong, & Zhang, 2011) and travel characteristics (Ferrer-Rosell, Martínez-García, & Coenders, 2014; Salmasi et al., 2012).

2.1. Socio-demographic variables

Sociodemographic variables may produce different patterns in LOS that depend on tourism nationality (Gokovali, Bahar, & Kozak, 2007; Thrane & Farstad, 2012). This variation is usually associated with

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