



Cinema and the automobile: Driving factors of new tourism models in the early years of the Golden Age



Joan Carles Cirer-Costa

C. Múrcia, 1 3° C, Eivissa, Illes Balears, 07800, Spain

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 19 March 2016

Received in revised form 7 April 2016

Accepted 16 April 2016

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Golden age

Movie tourism

Cars

Destination image

Incipient industry

Costa Brava

ABSTRACT

It is very unusual for a tourist destination to appear out of nowhere and turn itself in just ten years into a true world leader, but that is precisely what happened on the Costa Brava in the 1950s. The region's dramatic expansion began with the shooting of the film Pandora and the Flying Dutchman on local beaches, spreading its image round Europe and leading fans to undertake the pilgrimage to its shores. The arrival of these new tourists was quite unexpected, but occurring as it did in an environment especially open to business opportunities, it led to the creation of a whole new tourist industry. This quickly took full advantage of certain innovations that marked the beginning of what is sometimes called the 'Golden Age': paid holidays and the rising use of cars, above all, contributed to creating a tourist model which had little to do with traditional Mediterranean destinations.

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1. Introduction

The Industrial Revolution heralded a change in the way that goods and services are produced. At first, this had little effect on the daily lives of the vast majority of human beings. Over the years, however, the accumulation of increases in productivity gradually imposed its law, the working day grew shorter and, finally, as a corollary to the implementation of new relations between production and human labour in the fields, factories and households, the middle and working classes of Western Europe began to enjoy the prospect of leisure (Fine, 1999). As a result of this process, the first half of the twentieth century was to witness the emergence of a broad and entirely new economic sector dedicated to entertainment, featuring innovations such as theme parks, radio and the cinema (Jones, 1985, 1986).

One of the last elements to be added to the new leisure sector targeting the middle and working classes was holiday travel. In its earliest, markedly elitist version, holiday travel developed thanks to the revolution that railway and maritime travel underwent in the last third of the nineteenth century. From that time onward, the growth in leisure travel proved constant, but in the years immediately after the Second World War, it would see rapid acceleration with the introduction of buses and, above all, with the spread of the automobile, whose widespread adoption expanded the options for family mobility to the vast majority of Europeans. Soon afterwards, air travel took the place

of trains and buses and the current model of European holidaymaking was definitively established.

This paper analyses the crucial moment at which tourism permanently shed its aura as an exclusive luxury product and emerged as a product for mass consumption accessible to most citizens as a result of the employment benefits included in the new social contract on which the Golden Age was based (Toniolo, 1998). The social and geographic expansion of tourism was one of many changes occurring in those years that would ultimately result in a substantial shift in the daily behaviour of all Europeans and, therefore, in the very essence of Western societies. These changes were so considerable that they could not unfold in a linear, sequential manner, but rather spread erratically and unevenly, not only among the societies of the northern Europe that gradually became tourist-sending countries but also among host destinations in the more backwards Mediterranean basin.

What occurred in Europe from 1945 onwards was not without immediate precedent. Though it had its own nuances, it followed a path taken years earlier in the United States (Owen, 1971). Throughout the first half of the nineteen-twenties, the U.S. had already enjoyed a period of economic growth with similar effects: a shorter working day, a boom in the leisure industry and the widespread adoption of private vehicles. For this reason, when the new situation took hold across Europe, the changes did not appear solely as the outcome of a natural evolution of local relations of production, but also as the importing of a new way of life developed on the other side of the Atlantic, a process that came to be called 'Americanization'.

So far, we have only spoken of the appearance of a new demand: Europe's new middle classes wanted to go to the cinema, have a car

E-mail address: jccirer@gmail.com.

and enjoy a holiday. These desires, however, would have gone unsatisfied if not for the birth of an enormous industry able to satisfy the potential new markets. Hollywood became the major factory of canned dreams, of mass leisure that could be consumed on Friday evenings and Saturday afternoons too. Car production took off around the world with enormous speed and the Mediterranean became packed with hotels, apartments and campsites ready to receive northern European workers keen to enjoy a holiday break under the sun.

But the development of the holiday leisure industry on the Mediterranean did not by any means have a broad geographical distribution. It was concentrated in only a few spots. Some of these, such as the French Riviera, had a long track record in tourism, but others lacked any history in the industry. In a few places where there was no previous tradition of tourism, the combination of a capacity for innovation, an entrepreneurial spirit and an eagerness for economic betterment crystallized in the emergence of a broad business base that proved both competitive and able to achieve self-sustaining growth. To do so, it was necessary to develop complex business networks capable of providing tourists with transportation, accommodation and food and, above all, of satisfying their desire to have fun and enjoy themselves.

This paper focuses on one of these new destinations: the Costa Brava. On the Costa Brava, tourism came out of nowhere and it increased exponentially in a few short years. The process of economic growth that occurred there proves to be especially interesting because it unites in a single case practically all of the elements that we have indicated above. It began as an unexpected by-product of the success of a Hollywood movie and, in a second phase, it based its capacity for growth on the spread of the automobile throughout Western Europe. Later on, once Costa Brava had consolidated its position as a tourist destination, it was able to reinvent itself and adapt to the next stage in the development of postwar European tourism, which was characterized by mass transportation on charter flights. We will underscore that this broad business development did not appear in a blank or virgin economic space, but grew on the solid foundations of an exceptionally dynamic and resilient region and its economic history. At every step, these origins would mark the adaptation of local businesspeople to the new business as well as their ability to meet demands entirely outside their previous experience.

2. Cinema and automobiles, two key products of the new age

Our analysis must explore two driving forces, cars and films, which are entirely different: “for [cars], *uniformity is essential; for the motion picture, originality is important*” (Powdermaker, 1951; pg. 53). The car, by definition, is a standardized, global product, because its function as transportation can be fulfilled independently of the place where it is produced, while movies have strong cultural connotations that tie them to national markets and hamper their internationalization (Miskell & Li, 2014).

Clearly, the tourist use of the private car was not a postwar innovation. It had begun to spread across Europe in the interwar period, but at that time it still had a strongly elitist character because of the high cost involved (Badenoch, 2007; Cassamagnaghi, Moretto, & Wagner, 2010). After the end of the Second World War, however, intensive rebuilding programs quickly restored the main roadways of Europe, thanks above all to U.S. assistance provided through the Marshall Plan, which gave priority whenever possible to highways over railways. In addition, rapid agreement was reached to facilitate the vehicular traffic of passenger cars across the different countries of Western Europe. Thanks to all of these factors, it was already possible to traverse the continent from north to south by car or bus by the end of the nineteen-forties (Barton, 2005; Kaiserfeld, 2009; Schipper, 2007).

As regards the cinema, the early nineteen-fifties coincided with the financial high point of Hollywood’s major studios (Bakker, 2012). They had achieved a clearly dominant position during the years of the First World War by specializing in the production of big-budget feature

films and they succeeded in extending their leadership even farther after the close of the Second World War (Bakker, 2005; Pokorny & Sedgwick, 2010). The California-based industry’s ability to generate high profits, however, began to wane and it tried to respond to the demands of the market by expanding its audiences through the development of increasingly more global products. At the time, producers were testing new aesthetic formulas, introducing ever more sophisticated technological resources, and roaming the world for ideal locations for every scene in their films. This was how the cinema became a machine able to generate spectacular images that had an impact on the subconscious of many of its spectators, constructing dreams that now also became important for tourism, an unexpected power that is strongly confirmed by the particular case under study here.

The fad for shooting films in ever more inventive and evocative locales turned Hollywood movies into “pull” factors situated in “push” locations” (Riley & Van Doren, 1992, p. 270). This attractive side-effect of cinema turned out to be more effective wherever the setting was excitingly novel and unknown, as is the case with the Costa Brava in 1952 (Rittichainuwat & Rattanaphinanchai, 2015; p. 138). The absence of previous geographic reference points heightened the blend of real and imagined factors which ended up changing the new destination into a hyper-real dreamland, with complex expectations of possible happenings (Croy & Heitmann, 2010, p. 191; Heitmann, 2010, p. 35).

The setting for *Pandora* is, moreover, a sunny Mediterranean beach, a place then beginning to be associated with health and personal enjoyment, due to the introduction of new ideas and values in both medicine and aesthetics. At the outset of the twentieth century, the discovery of the therapeutic properties of sunlight and the confinement of workers in closed factories inverted the social status of tanning. A tanned skin ceased to be associated with manual labour and poverty and it became a sign of affluence and social standing (Albert & Ostheimer, 2002; Vannini & McCright, 2004). In 1929 Coco Chanel declared, ‘The 1929 girl must be tanned. A golden tan is the index of chic!’. This marked the beginning of a radical shift in the image of the Western woman that benefited coastal destinations like the Costa Brava (Vannini & McCright, 2004, pg. 311).

3. The Spanish context

Lastly, we must take into the account the political and economic context of Spain at the time. The appeal generated by the showing of *Pandora* from 1952 onwards was the trigger for the explosion of tourism on the Costa Brava, but the filming of the movie and the subsequent arrival of tourists would not have been possible without a number of prior events. First, by 1950 the ambassadors of the Western countries had returned, and in that very year the border between Spain and France was reopened, after having remained, in practice, closed since the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 (Ribot, 2014, pg. 45; Thomas, 1999). Second, we need to take into the account the profound appeal of Spain’s low prices to tourists paying for their vacations in other European currencies; from 1949 onwards, the Spanish state authorized especially advantageous exchange rates for tourists, who were also able to purchase pesetas at even lower prices on the rampant black market (Martínez, 2001; pg. 89).

It must be taken into account that the Franco regime, once the Second World War came to end, deliberately adopted a radically isolationist policy that sought to limit all contact with the outside world. The consequences of this approach were a serious fall in the welfare of the population and the imposition of every sort of impediment to tourism and commerce (Carrasco, 2012; Catalán, 1995). This policy was gradually scaled back starting in 1949 with the authorization of currency exchanges and, above all, moving forwards from 1951, when the ministries most committed to autarky were replaced and the first treaties with the United States and the Vatican were renegotiated and then signed in the following years (Catalán, 2003).

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