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Research Paper

## Host community perceptions of cruise tourism in a homeport: A cluster analysis

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## ABSTRACT

This study applies a factor-cluster analysis to a sample of 321 residents in the city of Valencia based on their perceptions of the impacts of cruises on their city. Three clusters of residents were identified, namely 'pessimists', 'cautious supporters' and 'optimists'. Overall, the findings reveal that most respondents doubt the magnitude of positive impact in terms of welfare, social, economic and heritage aspects. Furthermore, there are significant differences between the three clusters, based on age and geographical proximity to the tourist area and port. No significant differences were found based on gender, level of education, numbers of members in household, occupation, length of residency and economic reliance on cruise tourism. This provides contradictory insights when compared to previous studies and sheds light on the fact that studies applying the community-based tourism approach in the context of cruise activity are highly site-specific and hardly generalizable. Hence, contributions to the body of knowledge and managerial implications are discussed and suggestions for further research are given.

## 1. Introduction

In the last two decades, the cruise industry has experienced significant expansion (Bonilla-Priego, Font, & del Rosario Pacheco-Olivares, 2014; Ozturk & Gogtas, 2016; Satta, Parola, Penco, & Persico, 2015). According to the 2012/2013 report released by the European Cruise Council (2014), the number of people choosing a cruise holiday in Europe has more than doubled in the last decade, reaching more than 5.6 million passengers. This highlights the magnitude of the development of cruise tourism and its potential impact on the economic health of many European tourism destinations; in 2011 alone, passengers and crew spent €3.5 billion during their visits to European cruise destinations (European Cruise Council, 2014).

Prior to 2000, academic research on cruise tourism was limited to a few publications (Wild & Dearing, 2000). Over the last few years, the numbers of researchers and papers devoted to this topic have both increased significantly in several disciplines with a predominance of the social sciences, such as business and management, sociology, psychology, economics, etc (see the literature review in Papathanassis & Beckman, 2011). A significant number of studies have aimed to analyse the several impacts (both positive and negative) that cruise activity can

have on the host destination from an economic, environmental, political and socio-cultural point of view (e.g. Brida & Zapata, 2010; Dwyer & Forsyth, 1998; Eijgelaar, Thaper, & Peeters, 2010; Klein, 2009, 2010; Scherrer, Smith, & Dowling, 2011; Stewart & Draper, 2006). During the last few years, several studies have supported the idea that the economic benefits of cruise tourism are overstated and do not account for the negative impacts (e.g. Bonilla-Priego et al., 2014; Klein, 2011; Wilkinson, 1999). Furthermore, little regulation of the cruise ship industry at the local level for sustainable growth has been planned or implemented (Hritz & Cecil, 2008). Hence, cruising activity is increasingly being subjected to scrutiny and academic research has started to analyse the extent to which stakeholders interested in supporting the growth of this activity have adopted sustainability policies (e.g. Bonilla-Priego et al., 2014; Font, Guix, & Bonilla-Priego, 2016).

Despite this, cruise tourism can still be considered a somewhat underinvestigated research area in tourism (Papathanassis & Beckman, 2011); further research is needed to consider the interactions between cruise passengers' and the hosting communities in depth (e.g. Klein, 2011) and to evaluate the impacts that cruise visitors generate on the destination, both objectively (i.e. as actually generated by the cruise activity in terms of the economic expenditure of

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passengers and crew, job opportunities, etc.) and subjectively (i.e. as perceived by residents).

Evaluating the perceptions of residents – as key local stakeholders (Vernon, Essex, Pinder, & Curry, 2005) – is a key step before investing in any given type of tourism (Dyer, Gursoy, Sharma, & Carter, 2007; Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004). Furthermore, a planning process which is sensitive to a community's needs and attitudes towards tourism development is understood to be one of the integral components of sustainability and is needed to ensure that residents support tourism projects (Fredline & Faulkner, 2000).

In their literature review on cruise tourism research, Papathanassis and Beckman (2011) highlighted five main relevant research domains (cruise passengers, cruise staff, destinations, cruise operators and cruise vessels); however, the host community was either not or only implicitly considered. This may explain why recent studies have also been devoted to the perceptions and attitudes of residents towards the development of cruise tourism (e.g. Brida, Del Chiappa, Meleddu, & Pulina, 2012b, 2012a; Brida, Riaño, & Zapata-Aguirre, 2011; Del Chiappa & Abbate, 2013; Diedrich, 2010; Gatewood & Cameron, 2009; Hritz & Cecil, 2008), thus contributing to the recent development of a cruise-tourism-related research domain.

Geographically, the community-based approach to cruise activity has focused on several types of geographical area (Brida et al., 2012b), such as the Caribbean, with research on Florida (e.g. Hritz & Cecil, 2008) and Belize (e.g. Diedrich, 2010), the tropical islands of the Antilles (e.g. Gatewood & Cameron, 2009), Canada (Stewart, Howell, Draper, Yackel, & Tivy, 2007), Africa (Jugmohan & Giampiccoli, 2015) and the Arctic area (e.g. Stewart, Dawson, & Draper, 2011). In the last decade, the Mediterranean area has also gained attention from academics, who have studied destinations such as Croatia (e.g. Marušić, Horak, & Tomljenović, 2008) and the Italian islands of Sicily and Sardinia (e.g. Brida et al., 2012a, 2012b; Pulina, Meleddu, & Del Chiappa, 2013). However, this latter research has mostly focused on port-of-call cruise destinations (i.e. where passengers make an intermediate and short stop) rather than on home ports (i.e. where the cruise trip starts and ends). That said, also according to Brida et al. (2012b), it could be argued that knowledge on this topic for the Mediterranean area and for homeport cruise destinations still needs to be expanded further.

Among Mediterranean countries, the Spanish cruise market has grown since 2008 and has outperformed the rest of the travel sector, thus contributing to the country coping with the effects that the 2008–2009 global financial crisis generated for the Spanish economy (European Cruise Council, 2014). According to CLIA (2015), in 2014 cruise activity favoured the Spanish economy, generating €1208 million in direct economic expenditure and 25,483 jobs. The growth of cruise activity can be explained by the fact that the cruise tourism destinations in Spain (e.g. Barcelona and Valencia) are characterized by a high level of accessibility of the built environment, accessibility of information and itineraries for visitors and an accessible public transport system and adapted services for visitors with access needs.

Given the positive contribution that the cruise sector has made to the recovery of the Spanish economy, it might be expected that residents would express positive perceptions and attitudes towards the development of cruise tourism. To investigate this latter idea, this research was carried out on the Spanish context (namely Valencia), which, to the authors' best knowledge, has not been addressed in recent research. Indeed, previous studies have focused solely on the analysis of the perceptions held by Spanish tourism managers regarding cruise impacts (Castillo-Manzano, Lopez-Valpuesta, & Alanis, 2014). This makes Spain an interesting setting for contextualizing cruise-related research by adopting a community-based perspective. Specifically, this study aims to deepen the scientific debate on this strand of research by applying cluster analysis to a stratified sample of 321 residents living in Valencia, one of the main homeport destinations in the Mediterranean area. Specifically, this study aims to establish a typology of residents

based on their perceptions of the economic, social and environmental impacts of cruise tourism in Valencia and thus providing more knowledge concerning a possible community-based approach to develop cruise tourism further in this geographical area.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Research on host communities and tourism development

The interface between host communities and tourism development has been a major topic of research since the beginning of tourism-related scholarly literature, with seminal works from the 1970s and early 1980s (e.g. Belisle & Hoy, 1980; Brougham & Butler, 1981; Murphy, 1983; Pizam, 1978; Rothman, 1978). The relevance of understanding host communities' interest in any tourism development was stated and further refinements of these pioneering assumptions came in the following decades. In the early years, classic models as explanations of the resident/tourist interfaces were proposed and tested (e.g. Butler, 1980; Doxey, 1976), later applying more sophisticated methodologies, such as causal models (e.g. Chen & Chen, 2010; Dyer et al., 2007; Gursoy, Jurovski, & Uysal, 2002; Rivera, Croes, & Lee, 2015) and cluster analysis (e.g. Aguiló & Roselló, 2005; Brida, Osti, & Barquet, 2010; Sinclair-Maragh, Gursoy, & Vieregge, 2014). Among these methodologies and approaches, cluster analysis is a very common statistical technique in which a set of objects (e.g. events, people, etc) is subdivided into groups (clusters) in such a way that objects in the same group are more similar (based on certain variables) to each other than to those belonging to other groups (e.g. Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). The reason for the popularity of this technique is that profiling residents based on their perceptions and attitudes towards tourism development might provide more useful information for policymakers and destination marketers compared to those that can be obtained using other approaches measuring residents' overall perceptions (Fredline & Faulkner, 2000). Indeed, grouping residents based on their perceptions of cruise tourism development and studying each group separately might enable those responsible for planning and managing cruise activities to target actions aimed at avoiding/counteracting negative perceptions and/or increasing positive perceptions with greater effectiveness.

Based on Faulkner and Tideswell (1997), factors affecting residents' perceptions of tourism can be grouped into extrinsic and intrinsic categories. Extrinsic factors refer to the characteristics of the location, while intrinsic factors refer to the characteristics of the host community. Among the former, the literature considers the following: the degree or stage of both the economic activity developed in the host area (e.g. Johnson, Snepenger, & Akis, 1994) and the tourism activity undertaken (e.g. Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004), as well as the level of tourism seasonality (e.g. Fredline & Faulkner, 2000) and the nature of visitors (e.g. Nyaupane, Morais, & Dowler, 2006). Among the intrinsic factors, it is important to consider the perceived balance between positive and negative impacts (Dyer et al., 2007; Gursoy et al., 2002; Lindberg & Johnson, 1997). According to social exchange theory (Ap, 1992), residents will be more inclined to support further tourism development when they perceive that the benefits of development are greater than the related costs. Other intrinsic factors are: geographical proximity to activity concentrations, length of residence, proximity to tourist zone, level of contact with tourists, economic reliance and tourism dependence and socio-demographic characteristics (e.g. Ap, 1992; Belisle & Hoy, 1980; Besculides, Lee, & McCormick, 2002; Gursoy et al., 2002; Vareiro, Rompaldo, & Cadima-Ribeiro, 2012).

### 2.2. Residents' perceptions of and attitudes towards cruise tourism development: an emerging stream of research

Research into the cruise tourism/host community interface can be considered to be still in its infancy (Del Chiappa & Abbate, 2013;

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