

Policy Brief

#3 — 2024



Proposals for the design of public policies on popular tourism

The main subject of tourism policies has not been the local population and, even less so, the most popular sectors.

In the context of multiple crises and increasing inequalities, this document presents proposals to promote a public policy on popular tourism.

These suggestions are articulated under different formulas linked to social tourism or the facilitation of infrastructures for public use and can take place under public, private, community, or individual initiatives. This *policy brief* mainly addresses the public administrations responsible for elaborating on these policies.

Introduction

Around 33% of the Spanish population cannot afford a week's holiday a year away from their usual residence, according to the 2023 Living Conditions Survey produced by the National Statistics Institute. In Latin America, the figures are even higher, with more than half of the population unable to take a holiday away from home. Alba Sud is concerned about the **difficulties of accessing these popular sectors of leisure and tourism spaces**. In the context of increasing inequalities, the dismantling of public services, and a tendency towards the elitisation of tourism, we **demand that the working classes are the main subject of tourism policy ahead of business interests**. For this reason, we put forward a series of proposals to promote popular tourism that take into account the needs of most of the population.

When we speak of **popular tourism**, we refer in a broad sense to the set of tourism activities developed by popular sectors, whether they are self-organized, public, or linked to the Social and Solidarity Economy, but in which the role of big capital is marginal. In the current context, we demand that being **at the center of tourism policies**.

All these ways in which the popular classes organise and enjoy their free time on their own have historically been charged with **negative connotations**: come huevos, farofeiros, domingueros, gatear... are some of the expressions used to refer to the autonomous recreational or tourist activities of the popular classes. There is also confusion in its definition, as it is linked to mass tourism and the visit of 'popular' tourist sites, or it is mixed with other concepts such as touristification or over-tourism, which, in reality, are completely distant from the proposal we defend.

Turistification: the process of socio-spatial transformation as a consequence of such a growth of tourist activities, under the hegemony of capital, that all economic and social life is subordinated to them, displacing other needs and uses.

Source: Cañada, Ernest; Murray, Ivan & Marie dit Chiot, Clément (2023). *El malestar en la turistificación. Pensamiento crítico para una transformación del turismo*. Barcelona: Icaria Editorial.

Overtourism: excessive visitor growth leads to overcrowding in areas where residents suffer the consequences of temporary and seasonal tourist peaks, which have forced permanent changes in their lifestyle, access to services and general well-being.

Source: Milano, Claudio; Cheer, Joseph M & Novelli, Marina (2018). Overtourism a growing global problem. *The Conversation*.

Know more...

Popular tourism can take different forms, such as social tourism or diaspora tourism (also known as nostalgic tourism). It can also manifest as a public, private, community or self-organised individual or collective initiative.

Cañada, Ernest; Gascón, Jordi; Milano, Claudio (Ed.) (2023). [Turismo popular: propuestas y debates](#). Barcelona: Alba Sud Editorial, Informes en contraste, núm. 8, 2a edición.

Cañada, Ernest y Schenkel, Érica (2023). [Políticas públicas en turismo en América Latina y el Caribe: análisis comparado](#). Barcelona: Alba Sud Editorial, Informes en Contraste, 28.

Pinassi, Andrés (2024). [Turismo doméstico de diáspora y \(re\)valorización del patrimonio rural. Experiencias comunitarias en pequeñas localidades de la provincia de Buenos Aires](#). Barcelona: Alba Sud Editorial, Informes en contraste, núm. 30.

Methodology

Alba Sud is an independent center for research in tourism from critical perspectives. We have more than fifteen years of experience in the commitment to transform tourism. After systematising various experiences and proposals for tourism policies both in Spain and in Latin America, we have detected a

deficit of policies that favour tourism for the popular sectors.

This *policy brief* brings together different proposals based on our previous research to encourage the promotion of grassroots tourism public policies.

Some of the Alba Sud publications on which we rely:

- Cañada, Ernest (2020). [*Sesc Bertioga, donde el turismo social construye esperanza*](#). Barcelona: Alba Sud Editorial, Informes en contraste, 11. 2a. edición.
- Cañada, Ernest; Izcara, Carla; Valls, Raül (2023). [*Turismes de proximitat: demanda d'una política pública*](#). Barcelona: Alba Sud Editorial, col·lecció Informes en Contrast, núm. 23.
- Cañada, Ernest & Schenkel, Erica (2023). [*Recomendaciones para el diseño de políticas turísticas en América Latina y El Caribe*](#). Barcelona: Alba Sud Editorial, Policy Brief, 2.
- Fletcher, Robert; Blanco-Romero, Asunción; Blázquez-Salom, Macià, Cañada, Ernest; Murray Mas, Iván & Sekuloba, Filka. (2021). [*Caminos hacia un turismo post-capitalista*](#). Barcelona: Alba Sud Editorial, Informes en Contraste, núm. 18.
- Schenkel, Érica (2019). [*Turismo social en América Latina. Aprendizajes de las experiencias regionales*](#). Barcelona: Alba Sud Editorial, colección Informes en Contraste, núm. 10. Prólogo de Ernest Cañada.
- Schenkel, Érica (2024). [*Turismo social en Argentina: desarticulación de una política pública con voluntad democratizadora*](#). Barcelona: Alba Sud Editorial, colección Informes en Contraste, 33.

Key results

Our reflections stem from a key question: who should be the subject of tourism policy? Consequently, we also question the hegemonic orientation of public policies, which have not had the majority of the population as their main subject. In our proposal to reclaim and strengthen popular tourism, we focus on the leisure, recreation, and tourism needs of the majority in a context in which tourism management seems to be oriented towards its elitisation and the privatisation of public space. Currently, several public administrations are promoting this luxury tourism that expels and excludes the local population.

On the other hand, the ecological crisis demands that we rethink the way we consume and curb the imperial ways of life of a small percentage of the world's population. For example, in 2018, 50% of

all emissions from aviation were caused by [1% of the world's population](#).

In this context of urgent socio-ecological transition, tourism must also be transformed and, for the most part, relocated to the immediate environment. This proximity will be the priority, but not exclusive, space where we organise holidays and recreational and tourism activities. But proximity, in itself, cannot be seen as an alternative, but rather as a disputed terrain where most people will have to develop this type of activity and where different and opposing interests will be intertwined. It is, therefore, necessary to have public policies and infrastructures so that these tourist expressions can take place and the needs of the broad strata of the population are not left behind without resources or adequate conditions.

Proposal

Intervening with public policies in favour of the interests of the popular sectors in the field of tourism implies, in the first place, dismantling the logic of the processes of touristification and elitisation that currently make up the majority of tourism policies. But, at the same time, it requires intervening in a transversal way with proposals that favour the needs, rights, and desires of the bulk of the population and, in particular, of the segments that cannot go on holiday, which are increasingly in the majority. In this sense, we note some ideas and suggestions that may serve to implement other orientations in tourism policies:

Public space

It is necessary to turn streets, squares, and urban parks into safe, pleasant spaces with infrastructure (public toilets, benches, accessible pavements, etc.). Places where people can do sport, but also socialise, organise, and enjoy their free time, without any regulatory mechanisms that punish the most popular practices. We must avoid excessive regulation of the use of public space, as well as confront the logic of privatisation in touristification processes. Likewise, a naturalisation of urban public spaces must be considered.

Public transport

Administrations should ensure a safe, efficient, and accessible public transport network, both for people with reduced mobility or with any disability, and for those with economic difficulties. This network should respond to and prioritise everyday mobility needs, especially in rural areas and new housing developments where a significant public transport deficit happens. At the same time, this network will have to respond to the mobilities derived from local leisure and tourism, facilitating more sustainable travel and reducing the use of private vehicles.

Environmental awareness and education measures

Reconnecting with nature and learning to live with it is essential for a more sustainable future. For this reason, we need to invest more public resources to expand and improve the range of environmental education.

Democratic access mechanisms

We propose to create mechanisms to access cultural and natural attractions that do not involve paying an entrance fee but rather establishing lottery systems. Likewise, priority should be given to visits by the local population.

Cultural transformation

We must revalue all popular tourism practices as a desirable and attractive option for most people. We need to break with the imagination that in order to enjoy holidays we have to travel far and consume more.

Transformation of work

It is important to guarantee time off and paid holidays for the working classes. This won right has to be accompanied by facilities to organise holidays and long weekends in order to achieve a better balance between personal and professional life.

Public policies for social tourism

In many places, social tourism initiatives are not coordinated. Social tourism policies need to be strengthened and given institutional coherence. Only with a coherent and connected offer can we provide a satisfactory response to the leisure and tourism needs of most people.

Key agents for transformation

Recognise, strengthen, and support the relevant role of trade unions and Social and Solidarity Economy organisations as articulators of these policies. The State and public policies must recognise this strategic role and promote these actors.

Care infrastructures

The gender division of labour means that most women have to take care of domestic tasks, which are undervalued and made invisible. In a context where the majority of the population organises their holiday time in their place of residence, we need to consider a more egalitarian reorganisation of these tasks, not only in the private sphere but also in the public and community spheres. It is therefore necessary to provide care infrastructures to free up time and tasks for caring for people.

Gap policy

We need to consider that it is more difficult for lower-income sectors to allocate time and resources to tourism. Therefore, when designing social tourism policies, we must take this bias into account and incorporate measures in the design of proposals to help overcome it.



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