**Tourism Maturity: Mediterranean Spain**

**What is a mature destination?**

Mature tourist destinations in Spain are those resorts where mass tourism occurred primarily on the Mediterranean coastline in the 1950's and 60's. At the end of the 1980's they had become saturated with tourists and no longer offered new attractions. Quality of tourist services had diminished with the rise of competition and income was decreasing. This is an unsustainable process, and will lead to economic, environmental and social problems.

**The processes leading to tourism maturity**

The beaches of the Mediterranean continue to be the world's principal focus of tourism, in spite of the competition presented since the late 1980's by new destinations (the Caribbean, the Pacific, the Indian Ocean, etc.) and the development of new forms of tourism (increase in rural tourism, urban tourism, etc.), which offer new and different activities from the sun and beach of the traditional destinations.

The mass model of sun and beach tourism which is characteristic of the Mediterranean coastline has caused both the spectacular urban, demographic and economic growth of small coastal towns once inhabited by farming and fishing families who eventually came to make their living from tourism, and the increasing degradation of their natural setting.

This degradation is due, on one hand, to the enormous proliferation of tourism infrastructures and facilities, both of accommodation (hotels, apartments, second-home estates, campsites) and of complementary services for tourists (bars, restaurants, discotheques, golf courses, water parks, etc.), and on the other hand to the effects deriving from the presence of thousands of visitors year after year (contamination, overexploitation of resources, etc..) These impacts, together with the obvious ones caused by the local population, have resulted in the modification over the years of the coastal scenery of the Mediterranean, with grey concrete gradually replacing green trees.

All of the mature tourist destinations present the same general characteristic features. These are towns with a double identity: in winter they are peaceful places with little population, and in summer they are filled with people and frenetic activity

**Causes of the decline of coastal tourism in Catalonia**

The main causes can be summarised as follows:

1. The new trends in tourism demand in recent years, with a preference for:

individually-planned holidays rather than package tours. People want to decide for themselves what to do and not to be limited to the plans made by tour operators;

experiencing the 'real' Spain, rather than the artificial mass tourist experience;

visiting areas that have not been environmentally damaged;

activity-based holidays. Many tourists no longer seek just sunbathing and nightlife but want complementary activities (excursions, cultural visits, sports, etc..)

2. The increasing degradation of the natural environment and of the quality of tourist services of the traditional or mature destinations.

3. The appearance of new emerging destinations, with a newer offer, of quality, and at competitive prices.

**Solutions**

In the face of this situation the mature destinations can opt for various solutions:

1. Continued decline.

2. Stagnation, due to the application of piecemeal measures which do not attack the root of the problems but only the most evident effects.

3. A radical approach, leading to the adoption of measures which even entail a new tourism model, based on sustainability and the integration of tourism with the environment, the economy and the local population.

Mature tourist destinations correspond to the 'stagnation' stage of the Tourism Product Life Cycle Model.