

## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

### **TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE GREEN ISLANDS OF THE CANARY ISLANDS (SPAIN): THE CASE OF THE ISLAND OF LA PALMA (2000-2019)**

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The unequal implementation of tourist activity in the Canary Islands derived from the particularities of geographical, social and economic conditions of each island, has motivated a different economic development between the islands considered tourist: Tenerife, Gran Canaria, Lanzarote and Fuerteventura, and the others: El Hierro, La Gomera and La Palma, also called Green Islands. Within the latter, La Palma by territorial, population and economic dimension, is the one that presents a more advanced position.

La Palma has historically been far from the coastal tourism model characteristic of the Archipelago, considering tourism as a complementary activity to what is its main source of income, the production and export of bananas. The situation began to change in the mid-1990s, when the agricultural-based economic model began to show signs of crisis, due to the uncertainty surrounding aid to the primary sector. At that time, in an institutional way, tourism projects contained in their urban plans that had not materialized due to the predominant nature of the banana economy were rescued. This commitment clashes head-on with a regional policy to contain the growth of tourism, which has become the main contradiction that has characterized almost two decades of specific laws, reforms of these, plans and rulings, in an attempt to join a general framework of economic tertiarization, which had come not only late but at the most inopportune time.

In an alarming situation, in which the growth in the supply of accommodation had been constant and lacking in the slightest prudence, the Canary Islands Government began a continuous regulatory development in an attempt to reorient the regional tourism model towards more economically sustainable positions.

In this context, the Green Islands will be given preferential treatment. Decree 4/2001, on the grounds of a lower level of income on the Green Islands compared to the Tourist Islands, acts flexibly by only affecting projects for a period. Decree 126/2001, maintains the specialties, considering that on these islands there was a limited growth in tourism

This particular treatment did not prevent the authorities and economic sectors of the island of La Palma from strongly opposing these legal measures restricting their tourism growth and only accepted the legal terms when the regional government promised the establishment of a special regime in these Islands through special tourist territorial plans,

in addition to committing to establish exceptions and legal contents that would allow the establishment in the Green Islands a model of its own sustainable development and a specific tourism development, with the possibility of installing, on rustic land isolated units of tourist exploitation integrated in the environment and respectful with the agricultural landscape. Everything was finalized in a Special Law for La Palma, Gomera and El Hierro, also known as “Green Islands Law” (Law6/2002), which modulated in these three “non-touristic” islands the restrictive general rules applied in the rest of the Archipelago.

The implementation of this law required the island authorities to draft the mandatory Special Tourist Territorial Plan of La Palma (PTETLP), a document that will be essential throughout the subsequent process. Economic pressure turned the wording of this document into a major socio-political problem. The PTETLP had to reconcile in its content, the interests, desires and wills, as regards the number of places, the municipalities on the one hand and the island economic operators on the other. Most municipalities demanded the realization of their projects, many of them with a long waiting time. Contenting everyone meant expanding over the cap imposed on the island of 20,000 beds by 2020. The consideration that would be given to the extraordinary illegal offer and the controversial construction of five golf courses with accommodation facilities, added even more inconvenience to the problematic process.

The document went ahead, and the problem of municipal distribution of tourist accommodations was contemplated by creating five zones that were assigned a tourist burden based on parameters such as: population, environment and natural areas.

The planned actions responded to three different typologies. The specific actions (AEP) were isolated actions on rustic soil that were required to adapt the roads, the ground-floor channeling of electrical, telephone and supply networks, the purification of water with its own installation, environmental criteria in the treatment of free spaces, walls and landscape, as well as architectural criteria, prioritising the forms and volumes that best suited the characteristics of the place. As an urban duty with the environment, linked to its existence as a tourist exploitation, it was obliged to recover the traditional and characteristic agricultural space and its respective uses and uses.

The Conventional Actions (ACP), were projects designed on different types of land, in which some sectors of unexecuted Partial Plans will be integrated (Finca Amado and Los Dragos), together with new actions on urbanized land, annexed to residential areas, but also in an isolated way. This typology should reserve land for public open spaces, preferably use existing service infrastructures or bury new ones, treat the water with its own installations and respect the landscape of the area.

The last of the typologies were the Singular Strategic Actions (SDO), founded for the execution of golf courses and accommodation facilities attached on rustic soil. An adequate territorial articulation with the general road was required for this typology, preferably using existing pathways. The accommodation facilities had to have a compact typology in the likeness of the traditional ones, use the infrastructures of services present and bury those networks that are demanded, all in perfect adaptation with the landscape.

In 2004 and 2006, the institutional problems of PTETLP on the island are resolved with great difficulties and submitted for approval to regional institutions. At the regional level, the Comisión de Ordenación del Territorio y Medio Ambiente de Canarias (COT-

MAC)), issued several reports requiring approval by parts of the document, delayed until 2010 the final approval of the PTETLP.

The projects included in the PTETLP were not carried out, expiring for different reasons their files. Speculation, fruitless paralysis in search of more beds and judicial and urban problems, were some of the reasons for their failure to run in time. The five authorized spaces for golf courses were also not executed on date, as the beds associated with them were lower than those initially provided by the promoters, because in some cases they affected protected natural areas or because their location was not included in the corresponding general plans, instruments that in many cases were delayed in their adaptation. In this way, not only were positive results obtained for several years, but many of the actions contemplated in the Plan expired.

During this time, the opponents of the PTETLP presented different appeals that were resolved with partial declarations of nullity and a definitive annulment of the entire document. Its revocation was a hard blow to the expectations of tourism growth on the island.

The elimination of the PTETLP did not annul the political and economic pretensions of incorporating La Palma into the tourism sector. From this moment on, a strategy was designed that sought administrative solutions to end the paralysis that had produced the annulment ruling. The authorities then focused on modifying the specific law for the Green Islands or incorporating exceptional measures into the general laws. Economically, the authorities have supported the growth of tourism through public budgets that have paid for the costs of some emblematic infrastructures, with the intention that they should serve as a drag on other private investments. A process that is underway for the time being but has not yet yielded the expected results.

Finally, the example of La Palma is a magnificent model of the role of the legal system in economic development. In this period studied, the palm tourist activity is and has been contingent on laws and instruments that have designed and projected a certain way of conceiving its economic development, a historical and tortuous construction that starts from Parliament and the legal system transforming the economic conditions that it generates, in order to realize a certain economic system, which in certain phases has clashed with local interests.