

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

MICROCLUSTERS: TOURISM TOOLS TO STRUCTURE TERRITORIES?

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This work focuses on music festivals as generators of microclusters of actors (Gallelli, 2016) to understand their potential as territorial structuring tools and their contribution to reinforcing resilience at three scales: the territory, the tourism destination and the product. As Prentice and Andersen already pointed out (2003), the celebration of festivals promotes the development of tourism destinations (Nagy and Nagy, 2013). In some contexts, it is a local development tool (Mahon and Hyyryläinen, 2019), an opportunity to preserve and enhance both cultural and natural heritage, attract visitors and transmit a dynamic image of the territories (Diaz-Soria *et al.*, 2014).

The impacts of festivals are well documented, including social (Brennan-Horley *et al.*, 2007; Sharpe, 2008) and economic impacts (Herrero *et al.*, 2011; Rinaldi and Sergio, 2018). Specifically, we focus on the case of music festivals in the Alt Empordà region, on the Costa Brava (Catalonia, Spain). Our hypothesis states that tourism and cultural products such as music festivals have a potential structuring effect on the territories where they are organized, especially when they take place outside large cities. We understand by structuring effect that they favor the creation of poles of activity that contribute to the economic, social and/or cultural revitalization of a territory, which is especially relevant in rural and inland territories. Under this perspective, they can potentially contribute to adequate tourism development processes. By adequate tourism development we understand that tourism is strictly designed for a particular territorial context, based on the specific combination of its resources and characteristics, adapted to this specificity, and based on management strategies respectful of that ecosocial metabolism. Cultural tourism and related clusters of actors are presented here as the basis for endogenous development and for the establishment of this adequate tourism (Blanco-Romero and Blázquez-Salom, 2021). Our hypothesis is tested here through a theoretical bibliographical review and a longitudinal investigation that analyzes the period 2010-2020. The methodological approach combines quantitative and qualitative methodology and analyzes various examples of

festivals that take place in the Costa Brava territory. With the aim of defining what territorial structuring tools mean and to measure the structuring effect of these events (Tobelem and Thuriot, 2019), a holistic perspective has been applied and 76 indicators have been considered (Vecco and Srakar, 2017) at three analytical scales: territory, destination, and product.

Our case study, the Alt Empordà, is located in the northern coastal area of the province of Girona (Catalonia, Spain). It is part of a consolidated sun and beach tourism destination known as the Costa Brava, although it also includes inland areas, in which other tourism typologies, like rural and cultural tourism, can be differentiated from the offer developed on the coast (Blanco-Romero *et al.*, 2020). Since the 1960s, numerous music concerts have been organized in the region, especially in summer, structured in a wide range of festivals. This consolidation of the ‘music festivals’ product in Costa Brava’s tourism offer, and the characteristics of Alt Empordà as a territory that combines highly touristic areas located mainly on the coast with less touristic areas inland justify the choice of this territory as case study in this research.

To analyze the networks of actors (Yubero, 2019), we have used the concept of ‘microcluster’, defined as a functional group of actors generated around a specific product (festivals) in which relations of cooperation and complicity are configured (Novelli *et al.*, 2006). Festivals are events located in a territory and their celebration is not innocuous, it generates benefits and negative impacts. In order for the benefits to be properly redistributed throughout the territory and generate positive effects, not only economic but above all sociocultural, planning tools must exist to exploit this potential (O’Sullivan and Jackson, 2002) and manage negative externalities.

From a sustainable territorial development perspective, each sector of a community is called upon to participate and be involved in the decision-making process and in the distribution of responsibilities (Butler, 2012). To reduce the environmental footprint and improve social equity, localization processes must be promoted. That is, enhancing local economies and responsible consumption (Cooper *et al.*, 2008; Amat, 2013; ICSU, 2017). The idealized concept of sustainability, understood as a balanced system of environmental, social and economic dimensions, is thus replaced by a flexible paradigm adapted to the idiosyncrasy of each territory (Hunter, 2002). Following this idea, an adequate tourism model could be part of a multifunctional territory (Vir Singh *et al.*, 1989).

Music festivals in this context are analyzed through the perspective of the actors. We focus on the organization of a diversity of actors as members of a microcluster linked to the ‘music festivals’ product and on their contribution to the resilience of the territory, the product and the destination. This way, the tourism destination can be understood as a system, made up of a wide range of elements of a diverse nature: physical and static elements (resources, tourism attractions and support infrastructures), and dynamic and relational features, among which we find the actors and their connections (Muñoz, 2021). Within the dynamic features, a tourism destination can be analyzed as a ‘cluster’, ‘network’ or ‘social construct’ (Porter, 2000). In the case of inland territories, because of the sizes of these networks compare to urban or industrial contexts, ‘microcluster’ seems more adapted. Defined as the geographical concentration of a small number of establishments related to a tourism product in a certain space (Cánoves *et al.*, 2017), the complemen-

tary interactions generated contribute to the development of that product thanks to the combination of services that provide a unique tourism experience. Consistent with some of the previously developed values of a cluster, microclusters benefit from economies of scale, broaden the market base, and diversify the range of possibilities for economic activities in the territory. Its interest lies in its potential as an opportunity framework for small businesses so that they can operate locally with certain guarantees of success in the medium term (Sáez, 2009).

Cultural tourism, in which music festivals are included, is often presented as a resilient strategy, because it is understood that it involves local communities and collaborates in the preservation and enhancement of heritage and traditions (Cánoves, *et al.*, 2017) although, without adequate planning, the development of a tourism model based on cultural tourism is not without problems (Barrero and Jover, 2020). Cultural tourism has been defined from different perspectives (Du Cros and McKercher, 2014; Smith, 2015; Chhabra and Kim, 2018). In this work, it is understood as tourism including all the activities linked to the cultural expressions present in a territory and is analyzed as a tool for local development.

The methodology applied in this work is mixed, combining quantitative and qualitative methodology, analyzing various examples of festivals that take place in the Alt Empordà territory. In order to understand the phenomenon from a holistic perspective, 76 indicators have been considered (Vecco and Srakar, 2017) that are integrated into three analytical scales: territory, destination and product (Table 1).

Table 1
NUMBER OF INDICATORS BASED ON THE ANALYTICAL SCALE

Territory	Destination	Product
- Economic (1)	- Metabolic flows (16)	- Product Management (7)
- Sociocultural (2)	- Social dynamics (32)	- Tourism flow (2)
- Environmental*	- Built environment (12)	- Sociocultural impact (2)
		- Environmental impact (2)

Source: Own elaboration. *This category has not been included for this article.

Most indicators are statistical, collected from official agencies at provincial (XIFRA), regional (IDESCAT) and national (INE) scales. Some were collected through non-participant observation. 15 in-depth interviews were conducted to understand the positioning and role of different actors. The triangulation of this data has allowed us to locate the territory, the destination, and the product within the adaptive cycle (Holling and Gunderson, 2002; Lew, 2017). This methodological proposal seeks to provide a holistic understanding of the territory and the role of music festivals in it.

Our results have led to three basic conclusions:

1) Festivals, in their territorial dimension, are potential tools for local development. During the period of this research (2010-2020), the willingness of different actors on the Costa Brava to try to diversify the tourist offer by promoting inland areas, which for a long time have been left out of the main tourism development, has evolved positively. In

this strategy, the summer music festivals constitute indeed an opportunity since they take place both on the coast and in inland areas. We have been able to identify an evolution in the way in which the actors involved in music festivals in Costa Brava understand sustainability. That is particularly the case of festival promoters. These actors have gone from conceiving sustainability as a concern for the survival of their own festivals over time, to being aware of the importance of thinking about the destination as a whole, promoting through each festival the redistribution of benefits in terms of destination image and visitors flows among the largest possible number of actors.

2) Festivals facilitate sustainable cooperation between territorial actors, generating microclusters. The festivals analyzed in this case study are organized by three types of actors: public (regional and local administrations), private (cultural actors, tourism professionals and local producers) and associative (cultural associations, civil society). Therefore, the organization of these festivals involves directly and indirectly actors beyond the festivals themselves. The concentration of all these actors and their ability to interact allows us to analyze them as a microcluster. The relationships established between them are expressed at different levels and degrees of intensity. This analysis of the actors' microclusters around the music festivals 'product' show that there are factors that can potentially contribute to the structuring function of festivals on the territory: the ability to organize relationships, their drawing power, the ability to promote the participation of the local population, a proximity-based logic and the ability to decentralize, thus promoting a better distribution of services and opportunities outside the most densely populated areas.

3) The predominant tourism model in the analyzed region is not resilient, but the festivals contribute to strengthening the connections between actors and diversify the local economy, two factors that increase the resilience degree. Music festivals are currently perceived by the territorial actors in this case study as quality products in the destination's cultural tourism offer. They are also perceived as cultural resources rooted in the history of the territory. Although in some cases they continue to function as a complement to the predominant tourism model based on the sun and the beach, they are considered as important players in the transformation of the tourism model towards a more diversified one adapted to the specific characteristics of the territory and its local communities.

This study provides a holistic analysis, but it focuses on a very specific tourism and territorial context where music festivals are relevant. Other territories might focus on different products to analyze the same issues. Besides, the analysis of which actors are represented, and which actors are missing in the cluster, as well as conducting an inter-sectional analysis, surely constitute future lines of research to promote more diversified and resilient territories.

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