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Tourism as a way of mobilising hope against neoliberal logic: tourist-activism in Rural Inland Destinations of the Global North

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Abstract: Faced with crises that have led to a decrease in tourism and weakened the narrative with respect to its benefits, tourim is now being proposed by neoliberals as a solution to rural problems. This commodification of new peripheries of pleasure opens up a new range of types of tourism, ostensibly more sustainable and responsible, but still tending to ignore idiosyncrasies of place and ways of life as well as any conflicts associated with the neocolonising process. The objective of the present paper is to identify platforms, organisations, and social movements mobilised against "touristification" of rural contexts, also highlighting (whenever appropriate) alternative forms of tourism that have arisen to produce significant change in defiance of the demands of capital. We examine and link these movements through the notion of tourism--activism, applying Protest Event Analysis (PEA) as a research method. We argue that collective actions in rural destinations in the 'developed' or 'Western' world can trigger the rise of true social movements, channeled through tourism, that transform tourist destinations into places of hope.

Keywords: Social change; Rural social movements; Framing; Rural space; Spain.

El turismo como movilizador de esperanza frente a la lógica neoliberal: activismo turístico en destinos rurales de interior del Norte Global

Resumen: Ante las crisis que abocan al decrecimiento turístico y debilitan el relato sobre sus bondades, la demagogia neoliberal presenta la actividad turística como solución a los problemas del medio rural. Esta mercantilización de las nuevas periferias del placer invita a otras formas de turismo, más sostenibles y responsables, aunque por lo general se siga omitiendo la idiosincrasia del lugar, formas de vida y conflictos asociados a este proceso neocolonizador. El objetivo planteado es identificar plataformas, organizaciones o movimientos sociales contrarios a la turistificación en contextos rurales, así como, en su caso, formas de turismo alternativo que surjan con voluntad de generar un cambio profundo frente a las exigencias del capital. Todo ello gira en torno a la idea de activismo turístico, aplicando el análisis de eventos de protesta (AEP) como método de investigación. Consideramos que la acción colectiva en destinos rurales del llamado mundo desarrollado u occidental puede desencadenar verdaderos movimientos sociales canalizados turísticamente para transformar espacios turísticos en espacios de esperanza.

Palabras clave: Cambio social; Movimientos sociales rurales; Enmarcado; Espacio rural; España.

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1. Introduction and the present state of inquiry

Tourism is often presented as a lifeline for operational territories (such as forgotten corners far from metropolises and touristed coastlines– particularly in rural spaces of the Global North. Despite such spaces being affected by depopulation, social movements can emerge within them that advocate for 'tourism dignity' to escape from the logics of capital, in some cases offering alternatives for supportive and responsible development of touristic offer. At times, tourism is employed as a justification to hinder mining, energy, or agricultural projects that wield a considerable territorial impact in rural and inland regions. This scenario materializes in particular when urban capitals seek to alleviate (through relocation beyond the city) the mobilization of a critical mass opposing the expansion and/or intensification of such activities within urban domains, which have been the most common geographical context for conflicts and social movements.

Specifically, from the 1960s to the present, studies on urban social movements (USMs) have closely examined class movements and class struggles within cities. Cruz (2019) notes that *classical perspectives* taking a "mass society approach" accentuated the irrational nature of early 20th-century mobilizations. Later, *resource mobilization theory* came to consider group movements as gathering and investing resources in view of some logical or rational end –feminism, environmentalism, pacifism, human rights, etc. (Melucci, 1999, p. 34). The subsequent *theory of new social movements* postulated a transition from working-class movements to other mobilizations not necessarily articulated from traditional class consciousness (Keucheyan, 2013), where commitments acquired at the individual level (through access to one type of information or another) promote affiliation to movements with liquid or flexible identities. Here would be framed the notion of tourist-activism as relates to the touristification of social movements (Milano & Mansilla, 2019) or, put otherwise, to the mobilization of an inter-class social base that rationally aspires to alternative formulas for tourism, in opposition to the conventional model.

At the end of the 20th century, Priestley proposed that "the essential question is not whether alternative tourism exists or not, but rather how an alternative approach to the general development of tourism can be adopted to make it more sustainable" (1997, p. 264). This question suggests that the problem intrinsic to tourism is not one of form but of the rationales by which certain practices that feed injustice and inequality are unquestioningly reproduced in each destination. Tourism itself entails an oppression within *microspaces*, an order of violence on a small scale, sustained by capital and by the power of States (Bianchi, 2009). This situation coincides with the crisis of legitimacy of a system from which social movements arise that tend toward fragmentation, localism, and unidirectionality, whether entrenched in their own internal frameworks or ephemerally expanded through media. And all of this relies (at least in part) on the demotivation of people who increasingly interpret their excitement not by what they do, but by what they are or believe they are (Castells, 2010).

Consciously or unconsciously, the identity of the tourist –and what being a tourist means for him/herself and for society at large– is prone to accentuating a "process of 'selective accumulation' through which one identifies and recounts not what remains from the past so much as what has been updated to the present" (Rabinow, 1989, quoted in Dematteis & Governa, 2005, p. 38). The true nucleus of this idea continually disguises itself as formulas that are supposedly alternative but in no case transformative, and the alternative furthest from tourist orthodoxy is associated with social movements. This is a sort of counter-tourism that paradoxically employs the material, human, and social structures of tourist activity as well as the logic that motivates the touristic voyage in order to differentiate itself, less through form than through the essence and sense or reason of the ultimate practice.

As regards the current state of this inquiry, a multitude of studies revolve around the idea of tourism motivated by an emancipatory will. Examples include references to "responsible tourism as a social movement" (Gascón & Cañada, 2005; Cañada & Gascón, 2006); or to "solidarity tourism" (López-Guzmán, Millán & Melián, 2007) led by social movement organizations and non-governmental organizations; or tourism undertaken by individual commitment, without intermediation (Knafou, 2007); or "volunteer tourism" as a way of traveling outside the sphere of formal activity, dedicating time and income to help others in need (Gard, 2012); or "community-based tourism", to discover and experience ways of life that range beyond the hegemonic logic of the market society (Cioce, 2007; Pérez, Cruz & Zizumbo, 2014; Sánchez & Domínguez, 2017); as well as "collaborative tourism" (Echarri, Lois & Pérez, 2016) and "cooperation tourism" based on popular movements, with Latin America serving as the most fruitful research laboratory (Gascón, Morales & Tresserras, 2013; Nello et al., 2015).

As regards the present inquiry and the content to be examined, our objective is to identify and frame emancipatory tourist activities in rural areas, here classified as "tourist-activism". In order to characterize such practices, we start from a theoretical approach to social movements rooted in the rural-urban dichotomy, then advance to the definition of symbolic frameworks that make possible these mobilizations around specific realities and problems. Thus we commence from the hypothesis that tourism, which so often involves a globalized society in otherwise unjustifiable actions (unbridled urbanism, unsustainable exploitation of natural and human resources, hypermobility, environmental pollution, etc.), might just as easily serve to engage and introduce into the political agenda certain issues that tend to remain hidden or go unnoticed, insofar as the weight of their negative impacts falls directly –and solely– at the local level, on geographically localized communities.

Employing the method of Protest Event Analysis (PEA), we attempt to corroborate the incipient emergence of collective actions close to the idea of tourist-activism in rural spaces of the Global North, and more concretely in the non-coastal interiors of Spain. Some of these are coordinated via social platforms in collaboration with public entities, others by public-private associations seeking to have real impacts on a given territory under the framework of mobilizations channeled through tourism. The lack of prior bibliographical and empirical references emphasizes both the thematic novelty of this research and the difficulty in identifying and characterizing such activities. Without a doubt, "social movements have tended to gloss over tourism development in rural and coastal regions" (Milano, Novelli & Cheer, 2019, p. 1862). Nevertheless, our results lead us to affirm the emergence and growth of social mobilization in rural destinations of the Global North, taking as our laboratory the inland interior of Spain, where we observe not only opposition to the development of traditional tourist projects but attempts at making travel a form of expression and collective protest.

2. Research method and sources

In order to better understand the process of mobilizing resources and the emergence of social movements around the phenomenon of tourism, we conducted a literature review which addressed the subject through its double-meaning: through specialized literature in the general field of social movements, and by delimiting studies that specifically deal with the relationship between social movements and tourism. Based on our readings we then reflected (from the rural-urban dialectic) on the possibilities of framing social movements in relation to the idea of tourist-activism in non-coastal rural destinations.

In order to transcend the theoretical foundations and understand the reality of this practice, we applied Protest Event Analysis, a methodology used to identify, interpret, and characterize situations of criticism, denunciation, and social mobilization around an idea or conflict based on analysis of their content. PEA has in recent decades become a key method for research on social movements, refined by successive generations of scholars in terms of its coding procedures, source selection, identification of biases, and expansion of the unit of analysis to cover a larger group of actions (Hutter, 2019).

The sources examined through this method are usually journalistic articles available from repositories and press archives; these are subjected first to automatic preselection using descriptors, then to a process of manual coding, yielding a high-quality data set within a reasonable amount of time. One advantage of this approach is that anyone can corroborate the information and then validate or refute the interpretations and conclusions derived. For this research, we have considered six digital newspapers of national scope in Spain, to increase the probability of encountering cases related to our territorial reference: areas that have come to be considered "sacrificed", being subject to the expansionist imperative of tourist capital in rural inland spaces. In this specific case, we concentrate on the non-coastal interior of Spain, known for low population density, scant urban development, and sensitivity to what is known as "accumulation by extinction" – commodification of the periphery of the growth nexus, where civil society and even academic discourses are frequently excluded from political and planning processes (Milano, Novelli & Cheer, 2019; Bianchi & Milano, 2024).

The selection of sources includes three conservative newspapers (*El Mundo, El Confidencial, La Razón*) as well as three from the media 'countersphere' – that is, alternative newspapers with a clear left-wing affiliation. (*Diario* Público, La Marea, El Salto). An initial exploration, using the descriptors "solidarity tourism", "responsible tourism", and "alternative tourism" proved unsatisfactory, as the relationship between the selected terms and tourist-activism was not conclusive, and because these

terms are not usually associated with the geographical frame of reference adopted in this research. None of the sources consulted were found to have included the term "tourist activism" in their archives. Such an obstacle is not uncommon when employing the PEA method using automated tools. Studies have considered the potentially problematic contextualization of events to be identified, which makes it difficult to evaluate the procedures used to select content and thus to avoid possible biases (Lorenzini et al., 2022).

The results obtained from the 'countersphere' periodicals tend to be closer to the idea of tourist--activism than those encountered in conservative media, which were very distant from the critical view of tourism that accompanies the phenomenon under review.[1] Unfortunately, the search engines offered by the three alternative media outlets –digital repositories with profiles of marked denunciation and aligned with significant frameworks of action and struggle from environmentalism to feminism, including anti-capitalism– presented greater limitations. In the case of *La Marea*, for example, it was not possible to associate two distinct terms in a single search, requiring slow and thorough exploration by way of non-automated coding to identify content that might require further interpretation.

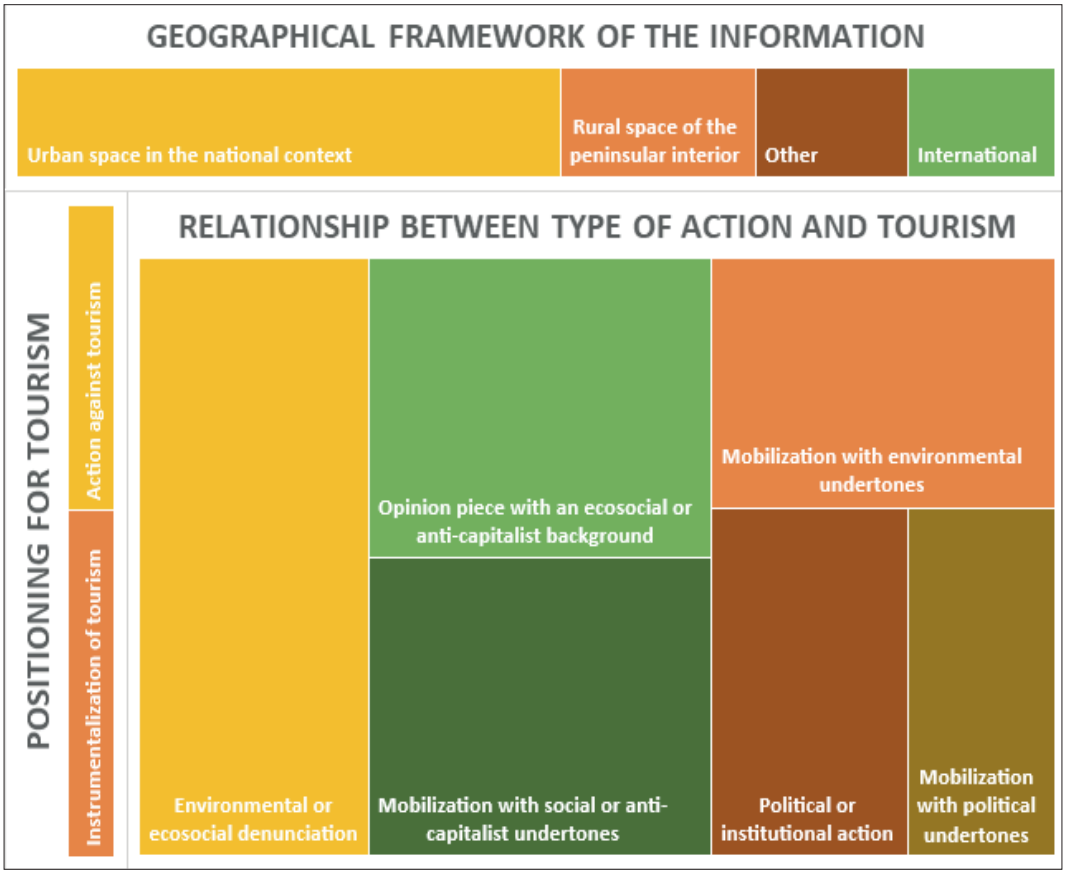
Ultimately, research was developed through in-depth analysis of the three newspapers categorized here as alternative media: *Diario* Público (público.es), *La Marea* (lamarea.com) and *El Salto* (elsaltodiario.com). The first is an independent news venue founded in 2007 and published in a digital version since 2012, which through its search engine offers information on its own publications as well as those of other media organizations. Numerous journalists specialized in topics related to our object of study are employed there, among them Alejandro Tena, Andrea Domínguez, David Rodríguez, Raúl Bocanegra, and Silvia Pato. The second, published by a cooperative founded in 2012, has among its principles the defense of the public, sovereignty of the people, fair economic practice, regeneration of democracy, and respect for environment. From this platform we highlight contributions from writers such as Olivia Carballar, Brais Benítez, and Alba Mareca. The third is an autonomous, horizontal, and assembly-based media outlet launched in 2016 as a radically distinct journalistic project supported by other local media projects, journalists, and activists in a monthly edition. Here, contributions from Nerea Arregi, Pedro Eizaguirre, and Bani Amor deal in some way with tourist-activism, although (as in the other digital media consulted) whenever such activity is addressed, the framework tends toward crowded destinations or those suffering from problems derived from overtourism.

The method of Protest Event Analysis applied to media specialized in covering political and other events outside the orthodoxy of State journalism was in this case undertaken in three phases. In the first phase, 2,638 documents were obtained from archives that (as of 31 December 2023) contained the term "tourism". In the second phase, 170 documents were identified with a critical, precautionary, or non-apologetic perspective, 32 of which take rural spaces of the peninsular interior as their geographical framework (18.8%), as opposed to those clearly predominant news or opinion pieces and interviews that take the urban context as reference (52%). In the third phase, the contents were differentiated by characterizing the relationship of tourism with one or another form of action, mobilization, or social denunciation, as well as the position adopted toward practice of tourism (Figure 1). Regarding these, a certain balance is observed between opportunistic and rejectionist positions: the former present tourism as a means rather than an end, conceived an opportune factor for advancing toward some goal; the latter actively reject the implementation of tourist activities and capital in rural areas. In one sense or another, denunciatory content and opinion articles of varied background predominate (43.7%), while other instances include political or institutional actions associated with one position or another (12.5%). Finally, there were found certain social and environmentalist movements that share a political background promoted by these platforms and organizations and which support our particular object of study and our purpose of identifying cases of tourist-activism, real or potential, in rural spaces.

3. From mobile elite tourism to tourist-activism as a social movement

The continuing expansion of tourism is accepted as fact by the scientific community, little debated in public opinion fora, and typically exercised without resistance, given a widespread belief that *global touristification* was inevitable and would bring desirable results (Fernández-Arroyo, 2020). This notion of tourism has been justified through cultural references in tales narrated by and for the

Figure 1: Classification of content according to geographical framework, related form of action, and positioning vis-à-vis tourism.



Source: Authors' elaboration.

most privileged –the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie, the upper-middle class– with an ability to sculpt history and to decisively direct production of the tourist space, obscuring the disconnect between what is represented and what is real life: "When the resources of a territory run out, it is enough to change direction and search for more resources elsewhere. It is not necessary to change our way of conceiving reality, or to adjust to it or to recognize its limits..." (Font, 2022, p. 29). This perception motivates the constant expansion of tourism, always moving beyond and colonizing anew.

Contrary to this capitalist tourism would be to achieve interdependence between the act of travel and the commitment to platforms and social movements in different territorial frameworks. In this regard, Cruz (2019) establishes the dialectic between tourism and two forms of social mobilization: "tourism as a driver of activism and participation in social movements" and "social organizations as promoters of alternative [tourism] development models". Both these concepts need to be contextualized in a geographical framework. In the first case, in an urban context of tourist-crowded cities, social mobilization can be seen to arise in reaction to tourism; in the second, social platforms promote activism through alternative formulas for tourism, and rural spaces are favorable to such collective action for their supposed lack of exposure to neoliberal contagion, which by dismissing dissent seeks to foster tacit social consensus in support of increased tourism (Bianchi & Milano, 2024).

This geographical and historical framework presents a scenario distinct from that of tourism in coastal regions, notable in both the Mediterranean ("Balearicization") and the Caribbean ("Caribbeanization") and developed from the 1970s through successive stages of globalization of tourism. One may speak of

ecological, popular, and indigenous mobilizations against the development of tourism (and therefore point to job insecurity, loss of native rights, or real estate speculation), but the window of opportunity for those movements is limited by repression and by a range of security measures covering such concerns as "accumulation by dispossession" across "semiperipheral regions" of the Global South (Murray, 2014; Milano, Novelli & Cheer, 2019). Our intention, however, is to approach the theory of social movements from center-periphery and urban-rural dialectics, to understand how mobilizing actions are currently framed in relation to tourism, and to appreciate through case studies the actual dynamics and potential of the rural space as a framework for social mobilizations in relation to tourist-activism in the Global North.

3.1. Theoretical approach to social movements from the rural-urban perspective

Social conflicts have always marked the rhythm of the city, where the possibility of encounter is heightened and where (sooner or later) clashes are inevitable between entities, instances, groups, or individuals who cannot always share or occupy the same places –or at least cannot do so under equal conditions of presence and access. This is why Benach and Delgado (2022) assert that to speak of "space" is to speak of "conflict". Consequently, talking of urban spaces can lead to thoughts of high-intensity conflict, while in references to rural spaces, that intensity is apparently reduced.

As regards conflict, both the early works of Castells (1977; 1983; 2010) and works of Lefebvre (1972; 1978a; 1978b; 2013) –inspired by Marxist philosophy– dealt with the idea of the social movement as a political practice in opposition to the imperialist monopoly of capital in production of the city. Based on these precepts, an entire theoretical-analytical current has developed that, regardless of the social base of mobilization (popular, inter-class, dominant classes), somehow excludes the possibility of a territorial framework other than the urban (Borja, 1974; Pickvance, 1974; Geralt et al., 2005; Della Porta & Diani, 2006). The reasons are obvious: the lack of a critical mass in rural areas to articulate a social movement that can gain visibility and strength within public opinion.

The concept of urban social movements (USMs) originally referred to citizen actions driving transformation across many areas of the Global North; beginning in the 1970s and intensifying in the 1990s, such actions were countered through the reinforcement of municipal neoliberal agendas that mobilized the urban space as a scenario that fostered the growth of authoritarian, unequal, and unjust logics related to an increasingly "neoliberalized" global economy. Several studies on this aspect have since identified the emergence of new movements and coalitions that see as a threat the "structural push" of neoliberal urban and economic policies that promote mutliple social and environmental injustices. Indeed, tourism (or rather the localization of its repercussions) can serve to crystalize the latent discontent with this economic model that progressively spurs popular rejection (Novy & Colomb, 2016).

In this way, contemporary conflicts, modes of resistance, and USMs in the touristic city cease to be structured around notions of "class movements" or "class struggle", giving way to the perspective of "new social movements" (NSMs) more interested in the "how" of collective action across diverse scenarios than the "why" that seeks to explain the mobilizing effect (Milano & Mansilla, 2019). Here, conflicts sparked by urban tourism tend not to pertain exclusively to the tension between "hosts" and "guests" but instead refer to broader struggles around urban restructuring and socio-spatial transformation. For various reasons, such movements can at times be characterized as "micropractices" of resistance or instrumentalization of tourist flows without taking the form of social mobilization *per se*. Still, these may be capable of opening "new spaces" for awareness and political action from which "alternatives" based on other social and ecological relations can be considered; new coalitions or mobilizations can unite the "disadvantaged" with those "dissatisfied" by the inequalities that tourism entails from a social and spatial perspective (Novy & Colomb, 2016).

In this case, neoliberal policies which protect corporate interests in the hoarding of land and resources came to be identified as the casus belli of marginality and of rural problems (Rosset & Martínez, 2012). That is to say, while the nucleus of 20th-century protest was located in cities, or revolved around an urban perspective (civil rights, social rights, rejection of war, opposition to racism, feminist and collective LGTB+ demands, etc.), the trigger for major revolt in the 21st century has moved to the margins, with a focus on the ecosocial crisis as a "master framework" for widespread application. This gives ideological coherence to actions in response to climate change and related conflicts, which have emerged as a new class struggle in which humans and non-human organisms have begun to share purposes and strategies (Almeida, 2020; Font, 2023).

These 21st-century collective actions circulate around three discursive contributions of international relevance: "the political rationalities of green governmentality, ecological modernization, and civic environmentalism" (Svenson & Wahlström, 2023). From the most progressive approach, led by left-wing environmentalism, measures are demanded that go straight to the root of the problem; "green capitalism" and "greenwashing" activities are questioned through prisms of sustainability and responsibility, which have been usurped by transnational (tourist) capital to the point of reducing them to nihilistic notions. One notable manifestation of this current is the *Fridays for Future* student movement begun in August 2018 and inspired by activist Greta Thunberg, focused on denouncing political inaction in the face of the climate crisis.

Alongside activism fueled by a social base comprised mostly of young students, another new international movement known as *Scientist Rebellion* emerged in 2020, when over 500 scientists and academics including members of the IPCC aligned with the *Extinction Rebellion* movement. This movement's campaign of non-violent civil disobedience around political inaction –subtly repressed by State powers– has become the most visible face of activism in the Global North.

In the Global South, the situation is hardly more hopeful. The report entitled *Decade of Defiance: Ten years of reporting land and environmental activism worldwide* revealed that "a total of 200 land and environmental defenders were killed in 2021, more than three-quarters of them in Latin American countries." Of these attacks, 40% were directed against indigenous peoples, and 25% of victims were small farmers, the main defenders of land against mining and other extractive industries, hydroelectric power, agro-industries and logging, the construction of roads and infrastructures, and illegal fishing or hunting –the principal reasons behind violent attacks on mobilizations in rural or peripheral areas (VV.AA., 2022).

This duality between movements of the Global North and South, and between the urban and the rural, reveals a disconnection despite a fine thread that links the origins of oppression and the reasons for mobilization by the oppressed. Reality hardly concurs with the hypothesis of a networked society that is always expanding and reconfiguring itself, where social movements might supposedly globalize and share strategies and frameworks for action in opposition to a prevailing global force, even as the institutions inherited from modern society gradually lose their ability to regulate and control flows of information and power (Castells, 2010).

3.2. The framing of social movements in relation to tourism

A framework of collective action is an interpretive scheme that simplifies and condenses the causes for mobilization, evoking shared experiences and struggles while rejecting power structures and groups identified as targets for opposition (Snow & Benford, 1992, cited in Almeida, 2020). This is rather alien to the field of tourism, where the interpretive framework for activism is imposed from above –by institutions and companies, and by mobile economic and cultural elites– through the discrete selection of elements to be known and valued by all, rendering the rest invisible. For this reason, McCannell (2017) states that the meaning of "marker" in a tourist scenario is restricted to that information which refers or is attached to a particular "view", so that marked views or elements constitute the sense of place that is acquired or that integrates into a logic of destination.

This process of symbolic association between attractions that are not always inherently worthy of attention and the tourist destination itself reveals a dialectic by which these images are successively exchanged, one for the other, to the benefit of both. The world is plagued by such relationships that (in addition to reflecting an empirical reality) demonstrate the thought structure of the groups and classes that produce them. In this way, the forces that signify what should or should not have touristic meaning serve to influence (to a greater or lesser degree, through the frequenting of what is framed) possible or recommendable behaviors and practices on one side of the line or the other. Of course, the way the world works is intuitively obvious to anyone occupying a "stable position" –regardless of whether the meaning attached to an observation is correct in scientific terms, or from the perspective of another social class or culture. One representative example would be the symbolic relationship between the idea of "freedom" and "the Statue of Liberty" (Almeida, 2020). Through framing, an attempt is made to impose a narrative in a language associated with ideas that evoke other ideas which, once assumed and embraced, constitute the worldview of certain groups involved in the construction of that world, with an objective encouraged and sustained by the movement in which they participate (Lakoff, 2004).

From here, one must inevitably consider the potential of tourism to guide common sense around particular problems via markers or stories that act on the identified problem or vista. Since a movement cannot be powerful in the absence of viable interpretive frameworks capable of delivering naked views to a general audience, shared injustices and experiences of oppression will have greater effect if expressed in a manner congruent with that audience's cultural beliefs. In this sense, tourism, through consumption –of experiences, of stories, of a territorial framework– constitutes an instrument with enormous potential to promote "knowledge-regulation" or to utter an emerging thought that questions what is internalized (Fernández-Arroyo, 2020): a tourist will conceive of her/himself as soon as s/he becomes aware that s/he perceives the environment as such; and an activist will do likewise.

According to this consideration, Castells (1974) would advocate for signifying consumption as a social practice and a general ideological expression to which meaning can be attributed according to a "*mode de consommation*" [mode of consumption]. This entails rejecting old theories whereby consumption is equated with "need"; that is, the mode of consumption is not the starting point but the result or expression of a social will. To use an illustrative simile, even as we understand that there exists a capitalist mode of production, we become able to distinguish capitalist consumption from among alternative forms of consumption. Upon this question rests the possibility of an alternative tourism arising from social movements that can advance social justice to higher levels (McGehee, 2002; 2012; Cordero, 2006; Estrada, 2013; McGehee, Kline & Knollenberg, 2014; Monterrubio, 2017; Higgins, 2018; Ramos, 2023).

From this angle, it is worth highlighting that the most dynamic framework in the early decades of the current century (on which many social movements have been based) is that of anti-capitalism: "a reaction to a crisis created by an economically determined structural logic" (Castells, 1983, p. xv, cited in Milano, Novelli & Cheer, 2019, p. 1861). According to Erik Olin Wright (2019), anti-capitalist movements –very present in Latin America, and in southern parts of Europe in relation with tourism's effects on cities, including through gentrification and the privatization of public spaces (Moreno & Pardo, 2020; Mendes, 2020)– have been emerging with demands of "another possible world" in concert with a strategic concept that combines two types of initiative: bottom-up, where civil society mounts resistance and seeks to escape capitalism; and top-down or State-centered strategies for taming and dismantling capitalism. Thus, alternative economic activities are gradually decapitalized as they grow over time, whether spontaneously from below, or as the fruit of a deliberate strategy applied from above.

Nevertheless, the strong institutionalization of tourism –in defense of the public interest it represents, and toward global peace, and as a way of life for a majority dependent on the proper functioning of the capitalist market– limits the emergence of strategies as offshoots of institutional politics. Meanwhile the conquest of non-capitalist territories is relentlessly promoted through touristification, to satisfy the insatiable need for "primitive accumulation" that persists in contemporary capitalism, at the same time driving neoliberal tactics of redistribution that devastate the dignity and social well-being of many populations and territories, provoking logics of conflict. Writing from this perspective, Núria Benach recalls that:

> "For Lafont, the problem of regional underdevelopment 'was not a natural catastrophe' but rather the result of a capitalist disorder that considered not the interests of a population linked to a given place, but only competitive productivity. He found an explanation for this circumstance in the alliance between authoritarian centralism and expansionist capitalism, which could not be addressed by a paternalistic and reformist State but only at the regional level (hence, his book The Regionalist Revolution). He also affirmed that the expression 'internal colonialism' used by Occitan activists and writers in the early 1960s was the best expression to define regional underdevelopment, even when the comparison between such developed and colonized regions 'offends French prejudice'" (Benach & Delgado, 2022, p. 23-24).

As to the specific mobilization of tourist-activism in rural inland spaces: this is a framework that can help bring positions closer and unify feelings, amplifying its purpose and extending the problematic to possible allies by (re)framing meanings or beliefs according to a shared geographical-social context. An instructive simile in line with the social consideration carried by tourism as a doctrine can be found in religion. As a result of the Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council in the 20th century, Church doctrine shifted its focus onto the poor across dozens of countries, modifying certain elitist religious

practices to permit participation by the laity in the organization of rituals. Almeida (2020, p. 151) writes of this reframing in Latin America:

> "The Second Vatican Council was radicalized and transformed into a framework known as 'liberation theology' whereby local parishes in the late 1960s and 1970s organized a wide range of social movements, guided by the idea that God demands from the Church preferential treatment for the region's poor."

The framing of conflicts in rural areas can be strategically considered under a similar purpose of reorienting tourism toward a sense of service to territory, and not service to capital. This would entail a tourism characterized by distinct habitual behaviors, meanwhile avoiding the error of equating all its manifestations (whether as solemn or friendly designations) in what has been described as "à la carte tourism" (Cánoves, Herrera & Blanco, 2005; Cioce, 2007). The challenge is to make globalized society aware of its ability to provide solutions to localized problems, committing itself both socially and politically to those who suffer oppression, but without overlooking the serious ecosocial crises generated. Consider the ways in which tourist capital can always relocalize its purpose of extraction and production for unbridled consumption, under the argument of obsolescence: first from depletion of the material base of common goods transformed into resources; then through obsolescence of the narrative, making us believe that a product or an objectively valid territory is no longer valid (Font, 2022).

3.3. Spaces of hope: the rural territory as a framework for tourist-activism

For the tourist trip to be considered an exercise in protest, the resulting spatial practice must permit action that responds to specific social and political problems and demands. This call must be public, promoted by agents, organizations, or social platforms aimed at inspiring action around a local or domestic conflict through the practice of tourism, which is thereby transformed into political action. In reality, most calls for mobilization ultimately point to capitalism as the target of struggle, denouncing oppressive activities exerted upon nature, people, and life itself. In terms of tourist-activism, displays of disagreement with a hegemonic system positions the tourist against the injustices propagated by neoliberal thought, and this is intrinsic to the act of tourism and can extend into new spaces for mobilizing hope. This requires a perspective of long revolution that implicates the tourist class against that with which it had previously identified, considering that society as a whole does not welcome sudden changes in direction where expectations are less than guaranteed (Harvey, 2003).

As regards the identification of spaces of hope –a product of tourist-activism in rural environments– a question arises from the Global North, shared and answered by Perogil: "Is it only possible to speak of responsibility and solidarity in countries on a path of development? It would seem overly simplistic to limit these concepts to disadvantaged territories, insofar as the principles established by responsibility as applied to tourism allow more favorable management of the territory" (2018, p. 45). While the empirical verification of results is more likely in underdeveloped countries –"*Africa is the privileged terrain of these initiatives aimed at creating more solidarity between populations from rich and poor countries*" (Knafou, 2007, p. 251)– we think it opportune to extend this type of collective action into marginal and rural spaces of the privileged or "Western" world.

Based on the results obtained through analysis of protest events, we have discovered cases of tourist--activism in which –going beyond the mere rejection of touristification– tourism is instrumentalized or at least presents a certain potential for mobilizing collective action into a vector of change against the oppression suffered by the peoples and territories considered in this research.

In the first place, we have found that collective actions which mount a struggle against the arrival and intrusion of tourism into rural areas constitute a minority, unlike in urban areas of Spain (both coastal and interior) or in island territories where the rejection of tourism has become a driving factor for activism, with notable reverberations in the media. Here, the only citizen mobilization discovered in the press archives analyzed derives from the platform *Salvemos El Cabriel*, which in collaboration with the ACEM *Association Ecologistas de La Manchuela* denounces tourist massification in the Cabriel river valley (Figure 2), which was in 2019 declared a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO (García, 2021, July 07).

Figure 2: Tourists kayaking down the Cabriel river (Cuenca)

Source: Peñarroja, 2018, July 22.

On the other hand, we have found a greater number of cases of activism in which tourism is being used as a social movement to generate change both within and from rural areas. For example, Las Arcillas Natural Park (Teruel) has been a sporadic scene of action for participants in the *Nationale-Nederlanden Plogging Tour*, organized by the *Plogging Tour Foundation* (figure 3). With the purpose of raising awareness through the removal of garbage from the natural environment, a sort of active or sports tourism has been used to extend a symbolic framework which warns of the environmental impacts of a model of capitalist production and consumption that generates vast quantities of waste. In this case, the action resulted in the collection of 680 kg of garbage in a natural environment near the city of Teruel, while its impact in terms of public opinion has gone further (Agencia Atlas, 2020, February 07).

Sharing the same target, the City Council of Suances (Cantabria) joined the *Libera Project*, an initiative of the *SEO BirdLife Association*, with the aim of enhancing local towns and their environment while encouraging responsible behavior. This collective action involved citizens, tourist organizations, and educational centers in the removal of waste through an annual event against "basuraleza" –an amalgam of the Spanish words for "garbage" and "nature" (Editorial Diario Cantabria, 2020, August 08). Also in Cantabria, the Cabárceno Nature Park was used as a framework for action chosen by the *Windows of the World Solidarity Tourism Network*, with the purpose of raising visitor awareness around the situation of underprivileged minors, denouncing through tourism the perversity of a system that omits the most vulnerable and urging visitors to make a donation, in order to offer these minors an opportunity to travel (Editorial Diario Cantabria, 2021, April 01).

Figure 3: Participants in the Nationale-Nederlanden Plogging Tour (Teruel)

Source: Plogging Tour (Teruel). Retrieved from: https://www.ploggingtour.com/tour-2021-2022/teruel-2022/#

Elsewhere, with another purpose, tourism has served as a channel for raising awareness around the need to recover historical memory related to the effects of Spain's Civil War and subsequent repression by the Franco regime. Museums, memorials, and routes within the rural environment seek to recall what has been silenced (and about which many remain unaware) by way of the *Marcats pel 38* project to publicize through "war tourism" the effects of that conflict on rural heritage in the Poble Vell de Corbera (Tarragona), referred to as the "Catalan Gernika" and contextualized in the Terra Alta de Catalunya (Castaño, 2022, October 15). Meanwhile, in rural Valencia and Andalucía, certain "places of memory" are promoted by organizations such as the CGT-A group *Recuperando la Memoria de la Historia Social de Andalucía*; these sites are visited despite the fact that tourist-activism is not well regarded by administrations or associations which see tourism only as a vehicle for obtaining profit (Carballar, 2017, July 18; Ramos, 2017, August 02).

Detected cases of rural tourism instrumentalized for subversive purposes were certainly anecdotal, but also exemplary for any territory-based movement seeking to expand its symbolic framework and to engage more people in its struggle against incursions by capital. In some cases, capital linked to tourism has been the clear target. In Trebujena (Cádiz), bordering the Doñana National Park, organizations including *WWF-Adena*, *Ecologistas en Acción*, *SEO Birdlife*, the Worker's Union of Andalucía, and the *Ateneo de Trebujena* led confrontations with a macroproject that sought to occupy a flood-prone area of the Guadalquivir River estuary (Reviejo, 2020, January 20). In the same vein, in the Canal Roya River valley (Huesca), associations including *Friends of the Earth*, *Ecologists in Action*, *Greenpeace*, *SEO BirdLife* and the *World Wildlife Fund* mounted protests to paralyze construction of a cable-car designed to link three ski resorts within an area slated for protection (Civieta, 2023, February 13). Finally, in the zone that is home to the Es Ports and Benifassá natural parks, the platform *No al Yellowstone Europeo* (No to European Yellowstone) ćomprised of some 30 entities and associations from eight local regions of Aragón, Cataluña, and the Valencian Communityćdenounced the negative effects of reintroducing wild species into a 550,000-hectare area for touristic exploitation by the Foundation headed by Swiss billionaire Hansjörg Wyss (Bayona, 2020, June, 29).

On some occasions, tourist-activism has served to counteract the power of capital deriving from the livestock, energy, and mining industries. In Cardenete and other towns of Cuenca and "emptied Spain" (Almendros, Mota del Cuervo, Villalba de la Sierra, Villar de Domingo García, Barajas of Melo, Quintanar del Rey), the organization known as Coordinadora Estatal Stop Ganadería Industrial (State Coordinator, Stop Industrial Livestock) opposes the mass exploitation of livestock at macrofarms that produce over 15 000 fattened pigs and some 60 000 piglets per year (Sevilla, 2021, July, 09). In rural territories of the mountains of Cantabria and the Turolense Maestrazgo region of Aragón, environmental and conservation groups including the Fondo para la Defensa Jurídica de la Cordillera Cantábrica (Legal Defense of the Cantabrian Mountains) and the Plataforma a favor de los Paisajes de Teruel (Platform in favor of the Landscapes of Teruel) have demanded a moratorium on new wind-energy projects and argued that wind turbines have direct consequences not only on biodiversity, but on land values and activities such as rural tourism (Tena, 2021, May 15). In the Sierra de Gata Mountain range (Cáceres), Ecologistas en Acción de Extremadura (Ecologists in Action of Extremadura) and the platform Sierra de Gata Viva have opposed the granting of a resource-seeking permit by the OSTROM ASC 21 mining company, supporting the Sierra de Gata Cultural Park project through the touristification of social movements (Eizaguirre, 2019, May 6).

These are just a few examples of tourist-activism, both real and potential, with the goals of calling out abuses, raising awareness, and changing current practices. Their philosophy could conceivably be extended to any social movements that arise in response to problems experienced in rural environments –or in urban environments– and that share a common purpose in their struggle against neoliberal capitalist logic. The research conducted for this study through the PEA method has revealed a variety of possible scenarios for tourist-activism, wherever platforms and social movements come together in political collective action; and this represents a formidable breeding ground in which to propose participation by new activists and to open myriad new routes and formulas for alternative tourism.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Most cases analyzed throughout this text refer to processes of social mobilization sustained by platforms and organizations that give shape to the idea of "touristic activism", defined by Milano and Mansilla as "collective responses that articulate dynamics of social antagonism in the face of certain tourism practices that increasingly affect the production of space and the commodification of the social life of certain enclaves" (2019, p. 367). According to these authors, the relation between tourism and activism is produced dialectically, where activism serves as both "the result" (triggered by a rejection of tourist activity) and "the cause" (derived from social mobilization through tourism). In other words: the activist can mobilize in opposition to tourism, as is more likely to occur in a context of urban conflict; or the activist can instrumentalize tourism to achieve a purpose, which is relatively common when the disputed space is framed in a rural area. Neither this affirmation nor our initial hypothesis can be fully corroborated, since the research results indicate that rural spaces in the peninsular interior can equally be the object of one or another type of relationship between tourism and activism, whether as a result or as a cause.

What becomes evident in this regard is the constant representation of rural heritage territories as artificial paradises or theme parks that omit the idiosyncrasy of place, the intangible/immaterial value of communities and their identities that come into conflict with extraterritorial dynamics (Barrado & Castiñeira, 1998; Barrado, 2014). The objective of tourist-activism is to use tourism to transform the logic of the production of space and to recover "places" that have been converted into "sites" –spaces framed by a neoliberal reasoning that annuls or perverts any non-commodified sense of place (Fernández-Arroyo, 2023). In no case can this purpose be branded utopian, since "fortunately, the concepts of culture and heritage, like tourism itself, are dynamic in nature" (Troitiño & Troitiño, 2018, p. 221).

As regards tourist-activism, social mobilization is consciously oriented in terms of co-responsibility (Pritchard, Morgan & Ateljevic, 2011), framing the destination as a "problem-territory" and correcting our limited capacity to perceive when seeking to highlight the conflictive side of a meeting between societies, cultures, and social classes. Hence the interest in instrumentalizing tourism, since "the process of travel is not only a spatial process but a communicative and social process through which information is exchanged" (Hall, 2009, p. 158). This consists of diverting the tourist practice away from the mercantilist axis, so that people no longer consume their vacations, buying goods and services in

a compulsory way (Canestrini, 2009); instead, the tourist can offer much more than what is expected under neoliberal economic logic.

The conclusion we reach (and which is always reached from a geographical-social perspective) is that "perhaps, the relationship between territorial heritage, tourism, and society must be considered in new terms" (Troitiño & Troitiño, 2018, p. 222). Within this altered interrelation, the tourist ćno longer a mere "user" or "consumer", serving as an indicator that the system is working properlyć acquires the status of activist, due to his/her ability to mobilize feelings and sympathies with both host and place. Strong social and cultural impacts are already evident: "from the clothes we wear to the food we eat, to the lifestyle and attitude we adopt, everything can be influenced by the places we visit […]. The true socio-cultural impact of tourism goes far beyond [the framed territory] and encompasses both direct and indirect effects" (Cooper et al., 2007, p. 282). The tourist-activist thereby acts as a social vehicle who can generate awareness and visibility around the need for change and for the emancipation of territories affected by neoliberal logic, both inside and outside the space framed for collective action.

In parallel with research into social mobilization and sociopolitical contestation in urban spaces (Bianchi & Milano, 2024), the findings obtained by connecting the frameworks of activism and social movements with tourism and its application in a rural environment can serve as a basis for future investigation. We find it necessary to delve deeper into the idea of tourist-activism from the logic of "rural social movements" as an emerging theoretical and conceptual framework. In fact, rural social movements related to tourism can be viewed as anticipatory of the saturation and alienating effects of tourism in urban or coastal spaces – conflicts addressed by the mass media due to the promotion of "networked social movements" (Milano, Novelli & Cheer, 2019).

Employment of the method of Protest Event Analysis exhibits both strengths and weaknesses, but it may well prove complementary with research methods that enable progress in the analysis and understanding of reality, such as in-depth case studies, interviews, or discussion groups. Furthering this line of inquiry will help generalize the idea of tourist-activism as practiced by the humanitarian and supportive tourist who aims to look and understand, and to become aware and act; and if our methods of leisure travel can make us more permeable, then our sense of tourism and use of leisure-time will change, as will our very lifestyle –which might just change the world.

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Notes

[1] Specifically, "solidarity tourism" yielded 13 results in the case of *El Mundo*, always related to underdeveloped geographic contexts in Latin America, Africa, or Asia. In the case of *El Confidencial*, the two results obtained referred to Latin American destinations, and the eight mentions found in *La Razón* were sometimes related to geographical areas like Bolivia, China, or Peru, while other mentions were attached to opinion, as in the following: "A few years ago 'solidarity tourism' became fashionable in Catalonia. Thanks to NGOs, posh progressives could vacation for a few days as aid workers to exotic countries" (Editorial, *La Razón*, 2011, November 06). Also in *La Razón*, a delegate of the Provincial Council of Zamora working in the area of Education, Culture, Sports, Tourism, and Promotion speaks of the potential of "solidarity tourism, which has sparked a greater influx of visitors to a forest fire area" in the Sierra de la Culebra (Madrigal, 2022, September 24), without further specificity. Use of the terms "responsible tourism" and "alternative tourism" returned more results (142 and 24 respective instances in *El Mundo*, 13 and three in *El Confidencial*, and 89 and nine in *La Razón*), but in no case was there clear correspondence with the notion of tourist-activism under study.

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