

# American Tourism to Spain during the Late Francoism: a Socio-economic Analysis

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The consolidation of Spain as one of the world's top tourist destinations explains the recent academic interest on the topic under many different approaches. Thus, since the last decade, the number of researchers that study the origins and evolution of the tourism industry in the country had increased significantly (Moreno, 2007; Faraldo & Rodríguez-López, 2013; Vallejo, 2015a; Larrinaga & Vallejo, 2015). Against this backdrop, it has been mass tourism (Fernández Fuster, 1991) which has received the most attention from current Spanish historiography. It is a model whose takeoff in Spain is intimately linked to the so-called second Francoism being, in fact, one of the basis of the economic growth of the country during the sixties Pack, 2009a).

All of the works concur on the importance of mass tourism not only because of its purely economic aspect but as a crucial element for social dynamics. Sometimes the changes are simply associated with superficial issues such as new trends and fashion. A clear example in this regard may be the popularization of the bikini on the Spanish beaches during the sixties due to the arrival of French, German or Swedish tourists in search of the sun (Pavlovic, 2014). However, the mere presence of foreign visitors meant for the Spanish population an opportunity to be contact with other ways of thinking, of seeing the world, and, even more important, to interact with people who lived in democracy. In other words, there is little doubt about the active role played by tourism as a powerful channel for all kinds of cultural transfers and as an asset that contributed to shape the Spanish society during the Francoist regime (Pack, 2009b).

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The dictatorship had, therefore, to reconcile their desire to make Spain a preferred tourist destination for Europeans and Americans with their doubts about the moral degradation that could involve the massive arrival of foreign travelers. Nevertheless, the new generation of politicians, who began to take governmental responsibilities after 1957's cabinet reshuffle, soon realized that tourism could end up becoming a perfect resource towards the external legitimation of the regime, just as were the measures issued to attract foreign investors. Actually, the so-called Spanish economic miracle primarily rely on the inflows of foreign currency that arrived to Spain through the expanding tourist industry, the remittances from Spanish emigrants working abroad and foreign direct investment (Balfour, 2000). We have to bear in mind that, during the sixties and until the 1973 oil crisis, the fast growth of the Spanish tourism industry was essential to correct the rising trade balance deficit of the country, as shown in the following table.

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As many of the mentioned authors have pointed out, it is necessary to go beyond a mere re-count of the foreign currencies that reached the Spanish coasts in travelers' pockets. There are other economic effects that should be addressed in order to disclose a less favorable view of the tourist boom experienced by Franco's Spain (Vallejo, 2015b). In the first place, the distortions generated in the Spanish production model must be highlighted, leading to an excessive weight of an activity that is utterly dependent on exogenous factors. No less important was, in addition, the tremendous environmental impact derived from the need to rapidly convert small villages into tourist resorts with a high level of rotation. The excesses of this construction frenzy left a perpetual imprint in several areas of the Spanish geography, propitiating long-lasting inconveniences that go from inadequate urban planning to speculative practices that soon engendered corruption scandals. One of the most famous corruption cases of this period was the Sofico Scandal, a perfect example of the illicit practices linked to real estate frenzy and multi-property. As many Americans citizens were affected by this criminal ring the U.S. Embassy in Madrid was quick to inform the State Department about the consequences derived from the suspension of payments declared by four of the eleven companies of the Sofico group and the course to be followed by the investors: "Embassy will continue follow this situation closely and report any further information. Since

**TABLE 1**  
**The Contribution of Tourism to Spain's**  
**Balance of Payments, 1959-76**

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>TOURISTS (in thousands)</b>	<b>RECEIPTS OF FOREIGN CURRENCY FROM TOURISM (in US\$ millions)</b>	<b>BALANCE OF TRADE DEFICIT (in US\$ millions)</b>
1959	4.194	128,6	253
1960	6.113	297,0	57
1961	7.455	384,6	279
1962	8.668	512,6	634
1963	10.931	679,3	1.004
1964	14.102	918,6	1.056
1965	14.250	1.156,9	1.737
1966	17.251	1.292,5	1.964
1967	17.858	1.209,8	1.745
1968	19.183	1.212,7	1.548
1969	21.682	1.310,7	2.333
1970	24.105	1.680,8	2.360
1971	26.758	2.054,4	2.025
1972	32.506	2.486,3	2.911
1973	34.559	3.091,2	4.405
1974	30.343	3.187,9	8.340
1975	30.122	3.404,3	8.516
1976	30.014	3.083,3	8.723

Source: Harrison (1978, p. 156)

Although the number of American tourists arriving to Spain during Franco's years was always lower than the amount of travelers that entered into the country with passports from the main countries of Western Europe, U.S. citizens were one of the groups that contributed the most to the annual total figures. In fact, during the sixties the United States, in close competence with Portugal since 1964, occupied the fourth place behind France, United Kingdom and West Germany in the international visitors arrival to Spain ranking

there are number of American investors in Sofico resident in Western Europe, embassy giving wide distribution to information [...]” (Department of State, 1974). At least seven more telegrams were issued during the following year on the same matter.

The picture depicted above emphasizes the need to explore the tourist activity during the Late Francoism under new approaches. For example an analysis based on the From Algeciras that night, we nationality of the tourists and the bilateral relations of the dictatorship with the respective governments would help to improve the overall image we already have about this phenomenon. In this paper we will then examine the American tourism to Spain between 1969 and 1976 taking into account official sources along with press clippings of the time. A review that shall lead to a better understanding of the topic and would allow us to think beyond the clichés that often surround the period.

**The beneficial effects of the currencies provided by the American tourists –within the framework of an, in other terms, unbalanced economic relation between both nations– were always mentioned by U.S. official analysts in their reports.**

## **2. AMERICAN MASS TOURISM TO SPAIN DURING THE *DESARROLLISMO* YEARS: ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS**

Although the number of American tourists arriving to Spain during Franco’s years was always lower than the amount of travelers that entered into the country with passports from the main countries of Western Europe, U.S. citizens were one of the groups that contributed the most to the annual total figures. In fact, during the sixties the United States, in close competence with Portugal since 1964, occupied the fourth place behind France, United Kingdom and West Germany in the international visitors arrival to Spain ranking (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 1970).

Authors as Neal M. Rosendorf (2006) have revealed the interest shown by Franco after World War II to portray Spain as a tourist destination highly attractive to Americans, as well as Washington’s actions to support the private initiative in their quest to expand its business in the Iberian country. An *avant la lettre* version of the U.S. public diplomacy that, for the Spanish case, came hand in hand with the bilateral agreements signed in Madrid in 1953. To give an example, for the years prior to the tourist boom, Sasha Pack (2009a) has documented a notable increase in American tourists, going from 31.579 travelers in 1951 to 115.778 in 1956, a circumstance that is unsurprisingly linked to the signing of those U.S.-Spain executive agreements.

If we move towards the sixties, we found that the U.S.-Spain relations produced a positive balance from the American point of view by the end of the decade:

Spain is also important to the U.S. as an economic partner. The U.S. is the largest supplier of goods to Spain (\$590 million in 1968, largely agricultural products and capital goods) and is the largest market for Spain's exports (\$270 million in 1968). U.S. investments in Spain total \$500 to \$600 million, about 40 percent of total foreign investments in the country. These represent significant contributions to the industrial modernization of Spain. Spain attracts some 800.000 U.S. tourists annually and is considered by U.S. business to have a favorable investment climate. (Department of State, 1969)

As we mentioned before, the income derived from receptive tourism was vital for the Spanish balance of payments, a constant that is equally verified for the economic relations between Spain and the United States as shown in table 2. The beneficial effects of the currencies provided by the American tourists –within the framework of an, in other terms, unbalanced economic relation between both nations– were always mentioned by U.S. official analysts in their reports. A

**The number of tourists visiting Spain now totals 18 million annually and is still growing. Receipts from tourism totaled \$1.2 billion in 1968 – almost a third of Spain's total foreign exchange earnings on current account" (National Security Council, 1969).**

perfect example are the materials gathered to elaborate the National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) 46, a document aimed to assess the future of the U.S.-Spain bilateral relation in the short, medium and long term at a time when the main obstacle was the lack of agreement for the renewal of the military bases deal. A renewal that was finally signed in August of 1970 in the form of an Agreement of Friendship and Cooperation (Convenio de Amistad y Cooperación entre España y los Estados Unidos de América, 1970).

Besides the macroeconomic figures of the country, is especially revealing the positive image given about Spain's tourist potential in the paper drafted by the Interdepartmental Group for Europe of the National Security Council: "A magnificent climate, a long coastline, a rich history and proximity to industrialized Europe have now made Spain one of the major tourist countries of the world. The number of tourists visiting Spain now totals 18 million annually and is still growing. Receipts from tourism totaled \$1.2 billion in 1968 – almost a third of Spain's total foreign exchange earnings on current account" (National Security Council, 1969).

It should be stressed that for the American tourist the attractiveness of Spain was not only based on the aforementioned elements, but also on the affordable prices. Thus, in an eminently tourist area like Torremolinos, a room in the Hotel Pez Espada –one of the most famous lodgings of


**TABLE 2**  
**Balance of Payments between Spain & United States, 1964-75 (in US\$ Millions)**

	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970
Exports, FOB	101	122	153	207	293	299	299
Imports, FOB	324	483	561	538	545	665	823
Trade Balance	-223	-361	-408	-331	-252	-366	-473
Tourism	89	98	101	86	81	97	130
US Army	37	34	37	38	31	35	36
Other services	-16	-21	-35	-41	-39	-43	-43
Net services	110	111	103	83	73	89	123
Net Transfers	8	6	7	16	13	13	19
Current Account Balance	-105	-244	-298	-232	-166	-264	-331
Direct Investment	35	54	109	70	106	20	118
Portfolio Investment	22	18	19	18	13	3	-4
Real Estate	4	6	5	5	9	11	14
Exim Bank Loans	17	20	27	61	57	36	3
Other Long Term Capital	23	24	32	57	46	53	142
Long Term Capital	101	122	192	211	231	123	273
Balance	-4	-122	-106	-21	65	-141	-58


Source: Own elaboration from Memorandum, Spanish Balance of Payment, June 1976; S 30 Domestic Money Capital Markets, Banking, Box 2, Records Relating to Portugal, Italy and Spain (RRPIS) 1976-1981, Office of the Assistant Secretary for International Affairs (OASIA), Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Monetary Affairs (ODASIMA), Office of Industrial Nations and Global Analyses, General Record Group 56, Records of the Department of the Treasury, 1789-1990 (RG 56), National Archives at College Park (NACP); y Memorandum, Terms of trade Between Spain and US, May 14, 1974; FT Foreign Trade -General 74, Box 15, ELF: BEA, OWEA, Records Relating to Spain, 1949-76, RG 59, NACP.

Commentary: Current Account Balance = Trade Balance + Net Services + Net Transfers; Balance; Balance





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the town– cost 720 pesetas per night in 1970. Taking into account the exchange rate of the peseta for that year (Martín Aceña, P. & Pons, M.A., 2005), 69.61 pesetas per dollar, and that the average annual income in the United States was then 6,186.24 dollars (U.S. Social Security Administration, 2010), we find that the room had a daily cost of 10,33 dollars, a quite reasonable price for one of the most luxurious hotels on the Andalusian coast.

Curiously, the case of Torremolinos –a paradigm of the uncontrolled growth during the tourist housing construction frenzy– was mentioned in 1970 by the U.S. ambassador to Spain, Robert C. Hill, in his intervention before the Spanish-American Chamber of Commerce in New York, as an argument to exemplify to what extent the country had overcome underdevelopment by then:

Eight months ago on the tenth of June, I arrived at the Mediterranean port of Algeciras [...]. From Algeciras that night, we drove part way to Madrid, stopping over in Torremolinos, a bustling and prosperous sea-side resort for literally tens of thousands of tourists from all over the world each year. Only fifteen years ago, Torremolinos was a sleepy fishing village, with only a small enclave for tourists. In those far-off days for Torremolinos and the rest of Spain, some 750,000 tourists visited Spain yearly. In 1969, [...] a total of 21,678,494 foreign tourists visited Spain, the highest number in Spanish History and 13% above that of 1968. (Hill, 1970)

### 3. THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATIONS OF SPAIN ASSOCIATED WITH THE TOURIST DEVELOPMENT

Those words of Ambassador Hill, who in another passage refers to the tourism dollars as the fuel that nourished this “industry without chimneys”, are a perfect sample of the socio-economic changes associated with the massive arrival of tourists. To further explore the topic we can resort to another primary source: *The New York Times*. The newspaper paid special attention to all the events related with the Late Francoism crisis and its correspondents made an outstanding job in their attempt to provide the readers with a complete view of the internal contradictions that characterized the period (López Zapico, 2010). But even one of the world’s great newspapers could not avoid that these high quality chronicles also shared space with other kind of articles where the American clichés about Spain were clearly present.

In this way, by 1973 some of the elements that Americans considered typical of the Spanish idiosyncrasy, bullfighting and sangria –which had become a fashionable drink in the United States at that time– usually appeared in the pages of *The New York Times* (Ferret, 1973; Prial, 1973). Although these kinds of articles may be categorized as trivial, they include useful information for a better understanding of the period. For example, a journalist stated that Television, El Cordobés and tourism had changed bullfighting for good. Some Spaniards said that the invasion of foreign travelers in the bull rings had turned thereby an art into a mere tourist attraction. A sign of this decline would be the existence of an American bullfighter, Joseph Robert Stephens, a military officer stationed at the base of Rota that delighted both tourists and U.S. soldiers (Gonzalez Jr., 1973).

At the beginning of the seventies, the habits and products of the country were still very attractive for the thousands of American tourists who wanted to choose Spain as their holiday destination. In fact, it had become one of the few countries in Europe that continued to be cheap for Americans due the oil crisis (Lindsey, 1973). By August 1973, Henry Giniger –who was *The New York Times* correspondent in Madrid at that time– wrote a detailed article in which he tried to address the impact of tourism for the country and its hidden costs. The text began reviewing the stratospheric figures reached by the tourist phenomenon:


By the end of this year, it is estimated, relatively cheap prices and reliable weather will have brought some 32 million foreigners to Spain, a figure close to that of the native population. Last year some 29,5 million were counted. [...] José Ramón Alonso, chairman of the National Association of Hotels and Tourist proudly announced recently that tourism had earned \$20-billion in foreign currency in 20 years, covering the persistent trade deficit and paying for the import of capital equipment that has permitted rapid industrialization. «In the last few years the profit from tourism has financed the launching of Spain's development», he said. Another industry leader said proudly, “we are the economic base of Spain.” (Giniger, 1973, p. 25)

But there were some clouds that never appear in the shining and triumphalist discourses of the Francoist government and the tourism sector authorities. On this sense, the ecological costs derived of the out of control constructions on the Mediterranean coast was never publicized. From the pages of *The New York Times*, Giniger (1973) denounced the speculation in tourist areas like Benidorm, which had passed in a few years of being calm seaside towns to authentic jungles of hotels and leisure resorts. The journalist reports how the mayors of the municipalities of the Costa del Sol and the Costa Brava complained bitterly of the little attention paid to speculation by the central Government. It was not a problem that only affected the natives and, in fact, foreign investors soon consider Spain as an ideal destination to do quickly profitable business based on, not very exemplary, speculative practices. What is more, these kinds of practices were encouraged, or at least tolerated, by the Spanish authorities, providing a proper framework for corruption in connection with the real estate bubble as was documented by the American newspapers:

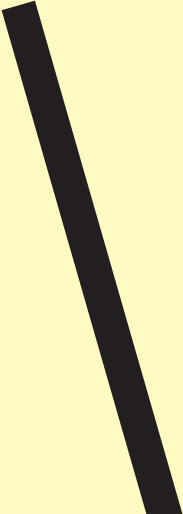
Mr. Peroff [a former middleman in stolen securities] has also told Senate investigators that a large amount of «hot stocks» from this country [United States] also have been used to finance the recent building construction boom in southern Spain [...] “I would say 80 per cent of the whole Costa del Sol and Majorca – in fact the whole south of Spain and the islands – were built on American stock” he said [Mr. Peroff]. (Jensen, 1973, p. 65)

Nevertheless, behind those kind of complaints there was not just an ecological or environmental concern, but also certain feelings linked to the distrust of foreigners expressed by many Spaniards. A xenophobic approach that we can't ascribe to the editorial board of the Times, which seemed fully aware of the problems that came with the construction frenzy. This is evident in the fierce criticism contained in an editorial entitled “Costa Concreto” (1973), where they point out the irony that involves for a dictatorial government such as the Franco regime, which was not permissive

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in almost anything, to be so permissive in these matters. The complaints did not stop during the following years and, in 1975, we may find new critics to the excessive price that the Spanish coast was paying for its adaptation to the requests of the powerful tourist industry. On this occasion, the complaint referred to the inconveniences generated as a result of the construction of a toll road in the Alicante area (Welles, 1975).

## 4. CONCLUSIONS: THE LASTING IMPRINTS OF TOURISM IN SPAIN

The last months of General Franco's life were marked by repression, a clear indicator that the dictatorship was losing popularity as the opposition was gaining momentum. It is true that the Spanish transition to democracy was a process full of uncertainties and critical moments, but *The New York Times* was quite confident on the prospects for a peaceful democratization process. A review of what was published about Spain during 1976 is useful not only to verify that statement but to find out a polyphonic narrative that perfectly depicts the economic and socio-cultural changes that took place in the country since the sixties. An account where the effects of tourism have great prominence.

Flora Lewis, excellent columnist and expert in international politics, moved to Marbella at the beginning of 1976 to personally collect the opinion of the wealthy inhabitants of this gentle tourist town. They conveyed calm to the journalist, reassuring that after the death of Franco things would more or less remain the same. However, as Lewis noted, some things had already changed. For example fast rising prices were harmful for the pockets of the foreign pensioners who visited the town, as they were losing purchasing power:

The price of everything has gone up. It is still cheerful and hospitable and relaxing, but it is not cheap any more. "What has got to change", a talkative, helpful driver said, "is that the Government has to crack down on the gougers. They ought to have the heads of some of the hotelkeepers. Some of them jack up prices shamelessly. Of course the tourists find out they have been overcharged for their drinks or their car, and they tell each other afterward: 'Don't go to the Costa del Sol - you will be cheated'. It is natural". (Lewis, 1976, p. 2)

This kind of bad practices, which had become widespread as a result of the tourist boom, did not begin to be really annoying for foreign travelers until the outbreak of the oil crisis and the growing inflation that characterized both Late Francoism and the transition to democracy. The economic crisis dramatically hit coastal and seaside areas such as Marbella, which had abandoned other productive activities to focus almost exclusively on the services sector: "Tourism is the area's only industry. Ripe oranges burden the trees the way figs do in summer: they are being left to rot, for it costs too much to pick and ship them. Tourist fever, building fever and supermarket fever have turned most local minds away from agriculture" (Lewis, 1976, p. 2).

The massive construction of buildings on the Spanish seaside, most of them without respecting any architectural criteria, appears again in the newspaper. David M. Alpern, general editor of *Newsweek* magazine, described in his own words the features of one of the most popular tourist destination in Spain:

The Costa Brava has a totally different atmosphere and style: slow-paced and unsophisticated on one and, marked by madcap overdevelopment on the other. The Costa Concrete. [...] Driving farther north, around the town of Llansá, we found the sprawl of concrete along the coast even more depressing- all that construction may well be a testimonial to Franco's striving for economic development, but counting condominiums is not our favorite pastime. (Alpern, 1976)

Along with the above-mentioned construction boom, infrastructures designed to improve communications also underwent a remarkable development during the period. A good example was the construction of the highway between the Costa Brava and the French border that, by mid-1976, was scheduled to reach Alicante. Benjamin Welles, former correspondent of *The New York Times* to Madrid, share his impressions with the readers after using that route:

The *autopista* was first conceived in 1962 following a World Bank study. In 1965 a pilot project was begun near Barcelona, and in 1966 the Spanish Government authorized a system of toll roads to be built by Spanish consortiums, largely with American equipment, and financed both internationally and domestically. More than \$1 billion has been raised to date. The consortiums have the toll rights for 23 years, after which the rights revert to the Government. The road, which has cost between \$2 million and \$50 million per mile so far, combines the best in United States engineering with the finest in Spanish scenery. (Welles, 1976, p. 27)

Beyond the capital invested, and its obvious positive effects for the local economy, Welles (1976) also accounted its human cost: "Some 23,000 acres of agricultural land have been taken in a region where every almond, olive or orange tree, every square meter of rich earth, has been planted, irrigated, terraced and passed down through families for generations".

Therefore, we can conclude that through the American sources we can have a better understanding of the impact that tourism had on Spain in the sixties and seventies and, at the same time, shed some light on several topics still needed to be addressed. One is the role played by U.S. capital in the development of the modern tourist industry during Franco's dictatorship. The other is the ability of the U.S. media to witness the end of an era. The quotes selected reveal that somehow those journalists were worried not only about the social costs of the tourist activity but because they mean the death of the primitive Spain. Thus, it may be very interesting to continue with this kind of analysis in order to reflect to what extend the view the American people had of Spain was real or just a construction. It seems that perceptions and misperceptions were equally important for the assessments of the socio-economic balance generated by the tourist boom in Spain.

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