

Planning (beyond) tourism. The case of Barcelona ‘In Common’

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A coalition of leftfield political groups, civic movements, and grassroots organizations led by social activist Ada Colau has won the Barcelona municipal elections of 2015 and though from a position of minority, is now governing the Catalan capital. Commentators believe that the key issue that determined this success has been the positioning of this coalition in relation to city tourism. Only a few years ago considered a ‘best practice’ in urban regeneration and transformation into an iconic urban tourism capital, prized in 2014 with the title of ‘sustainable tourism capital of the world’, Barcelona has lived in the last two years a veritable revolution in the public perception on tourism, from ‘manna from heaven’ to serious issue which is compromising the quality of life of its citizens. This paper looks into the factors which have determined this shift, from the objective growth of tourism beyond what could be considered a ‘social-economic carrying capacity’ threshold for an urban system, to the more subtle issue of the diversification of the forms of ‘being a tourist’ and their blurring with the quotidian livelihoods of resident populations. It then follows the steps of ‘Barcelona in Common’ candidature and of the negotiation of a programme to redress the balance of tourism in favour of citizens, something which is remarkably removed from mainstream tourism planning and management approaches and goes deeply into the debate on and progressive urbanism: the state of health of cities in the age of mobilities, the reclamation of the right to the city and public goods, and the role of redistributive institutions face to the global pressure of capital.