

GIS and Tourist Consumer Research

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The Spatial Profile of German Low-Cost Carrier Passengers in Mallorca

Abstract for the UNIGIS Amsterdam Newsletter

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Space is an elementary part of tourism. Although this spatial relevance makes the field of GIS an ideal environment to analyse tourist phenomena I did not encounter GIS during my first student life in Germany when I studied the geography of tourism in Trier. So I came back to the topic of tourism when I was looking for a topic for my UNIGIS master thesis. The resulting thesis is named: "GIS and Tourist Consumer Research – The Spatial Profile of German Low-Cost Carrier Passengers in Mallorca".

GIS is already applied in different parts of tourism business and research. The examples of applications range from site assessment over virtual tourism in 3-dimensional web space to the simulation of tourists' spatial activity patterns in time and space. Only the market research appears to be poorly represented in the list of applications of GIS development and analysis in tourism science and research.

Especially within a destination the knowledge about the distribution of different tourist consumer groups are valuable for destination management and tourist development planning. Therefore, this study develops a framework for spatially enhanced tourist consumer research. This framework has been deployed in order to analyse the spatial profile of German low-cost carrier passengers (LCCP) on the Spanish island of Mallorca. The necessity is evident because Mallorca – being willing to transform away from a low-budget and low-quality mass tourism destination - currently faces a growing number of tourists in general and a growing number of visitors arriving by low-cost carriers in special. The data for this case study came from a big-scaled research project on the Balearic Islands lead by Prof. Dr. Wachowiak from the University of Applied Science Bad Honnef/Bonn.

The main research questions have been which tourism spaces the German LCCP occupy, how do they differentiate from other tourists and what might be the influencing factors. Since working with spatial data in tourist social science is an unattended field questions regarding the geospatial analysis have been answered concerning topics like the sampling, the spatial scale of analysis, the data requirements and the risks and pitfalls of working with spatial data.

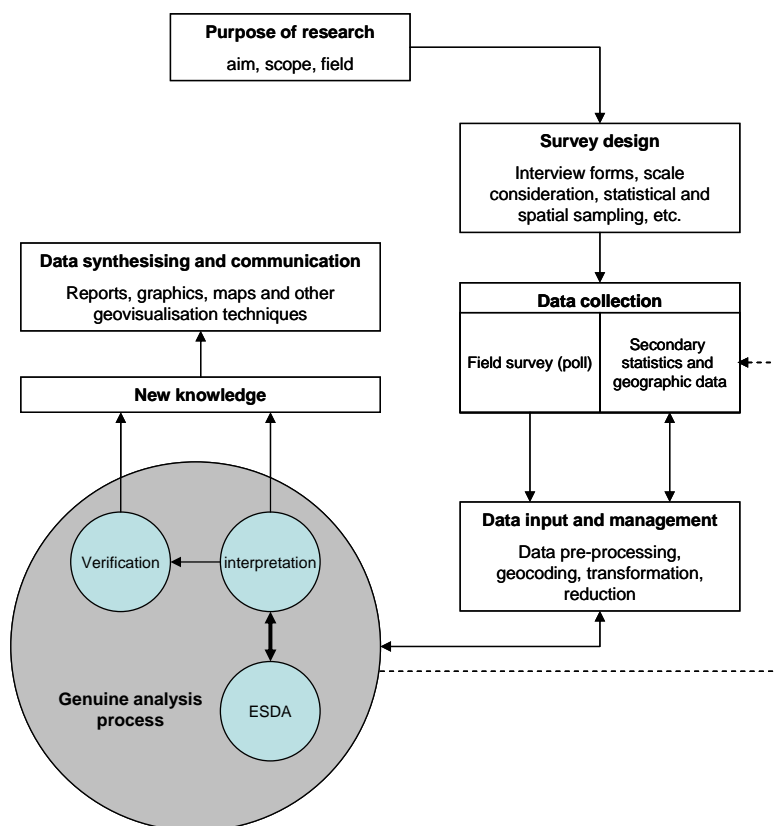
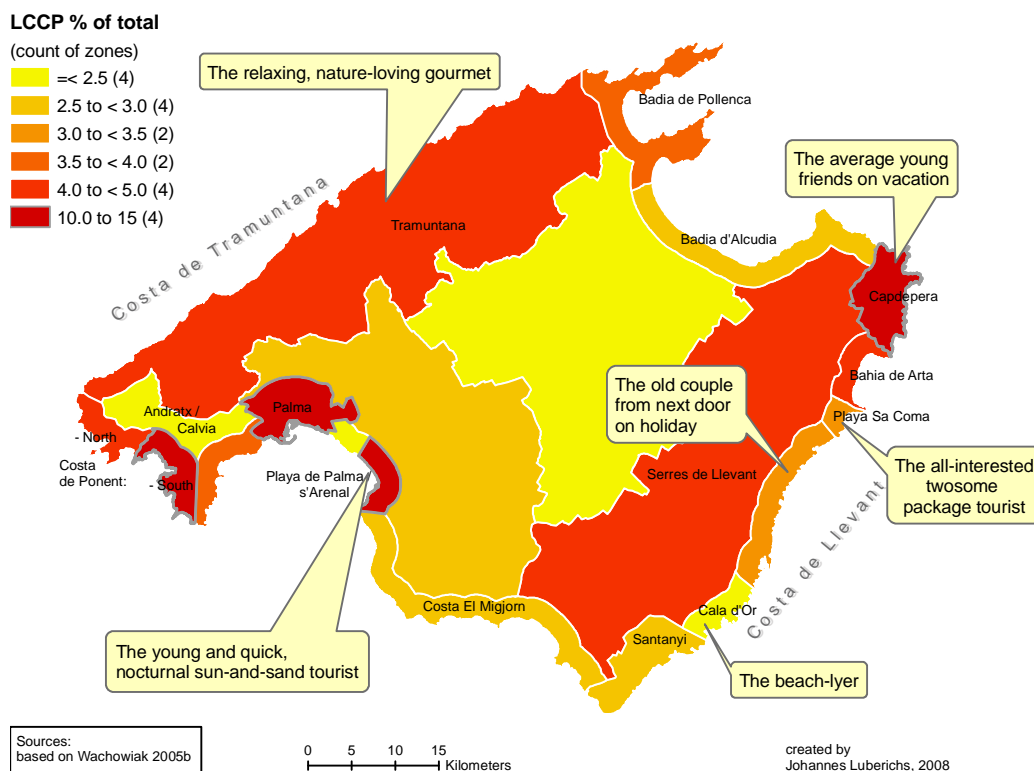


Figure 1: spatially enhanced tourist consumer research

In order to avoid common pitfalls like the MAUP and ecological fallacy and to cope with statistical data reported on different spatial scale the LCCP have been analysed on different spatial levels.

Lead by the picture and for this field spatial consumer research developed framework this study discovered the existence of very distinct consumer groups in the different tourism spaces of the island (see map below for details).

In general they concentrate at the coast. They favour the Costa de Llevant and the Playa de Palma. Thus they follow roughly the pattern of tourism in general.



Map 1: Distribution of German LCCP and some of their spatial profiles on Mallorca.

Nevertheless, the LCCP show strong distinctions to the German tourists in general. They are not only younger, stay shorter and book less hotel accommodation and package tours. They even show a distinct spatial distribution. Significantly less of them come from the famous area Playa de Palma around s'Arenal compared to all German visitors. Most significant is the difference in the north of Mallorca with its family friendly, package tourist adjusted supply. Only a few LCCP travel to the coast of the Badia d'Alcudia. Compared to the German tourists in general the LCCP prefer to visit the Costa de Ponent with its high numbers of secondary and holiday homes (this residential tourism has a strong position in the LCCP market in Mallorca) and especially the tourist zones along the Costa de Llevant with Capdepera as main spot.

Some of the factors influencing the overall distribution of the German LCCP are the tourism infrastructure in terms of accommodation and gastronomy, the road accessibility and the closeness to coast and beaches. This counts for the spatial patterns of all LCCP as well as partly for certain groups among them (short time visitors prefer easy accessible places; residential tourists accumulate in areas with high number of secondary homes). The results of the spatial tourist consumer research suggest that the LCCP are more flexible than the German tourists in general and thus can adjust their travel behaviour and their destination very good to their likings. This phenomenon is reflected in their distinct distribution pattern and consumer profiles.

A lot of factors influence the composition of a consumer group at certain places. It is, however, more difficult to name the influence of qualitative factors and the image of a place (which is very important in tourism) because data on these matters are missing and are difficult to collect. Therefore, some of the results are still speculative ideas. Nevertheless, these ideas are the result of the spatially enhanced tourist consumer analysis and would not have been generated without it.

Since it is not to be expected that the technical development and the legal privacy issues will make it easier in the future to collect data about tourists (the interview will stay the most important research instrument), the requirement for a high number of cases and the difficulty to obtain additional qualitative statistics will hinder the further development of spatial analysis in tourist consumer research. But the now widely available and affordable GIS technology together with growing possibilities of coupling software could be a driving force for spatially aware consumer research. Spatial profiling of consumer groups and the analysis of their distribution will then be a useful and easy to achieve extension to classical tourist consumer research and consumer profiling. The results will assist participants in the tourism industry, especially destinations, to adjust their marketing and management.

Mallorca itself will experience a shift in its tourism industry. It will probably not change from a low budget mass tourism destination to a high quality resort. They will get less package tourism and more individual tourism with high market shares in residential tourism and a growing number of short time visitors. The consumer groups in the different tourism spaces around the island will probably get stronger contours.

I have been living with UNGIS for several years. Sometimes it has been hard to be motivated and to work solitary on all the interesting topics I was able to have a look at during all the different modules. Therefore I especially enjoyed all the appointments and workshops I have been to in Amsterdam. The warm and family-like but as well demanding learning atmosphere always gave me new power to go on and discover new parts of the world of GIS I would not have entered without UNIGIS.

I hope I will see some of my fellow students, better to say now fellow alumni, at the UNIGIS alumni meetings. I am looking forward to travel to Amsterdam again.

Greetings from Hannover, Germany,
Johannes 'Jojo' Luberichs