



Less is (not) better: *undertourism* in the Galician Mountains?

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1-Introduction

The saturation of some destinations has reached a critical level in the last years, a context in which the concept of ***overtourism*** emerges

Undertourism is conceived as a reaction to overtourism. It privileges a series of positive/negative values associated with low-frequented destinations

We propose to analyse Trevinca Mountains under the lens of ***undertourism***

Our goal is to understand how tourism is perceived in these mountains

2-Theoretical framework (I)

Concept of ***overtourism*** - perception of local actors or visitors - awareness of oversaturation (Butler, 2019)

Its use is full of **negative views** - new forms of **consumption** - neoliberal tourism planning model. (Saarinen et al., 2017; Milano et al., 2019)



*Photo:
Josep Lago/AFP*

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Beyond large global cities, the phenomenon also emerges in more or less **remote places**. *e. g. great peaks like Everest, Kilimanjaro...* (Doods & Butler, 2019a)



*Photo:
National Geographic*

2-Theoretical framework (II)

Undertourism emerges as a response to saturation, although it is ascribed to very different realities, characterised by:

- Low presence of visitors (Bušljeta, 2019)
- A unique and special experience for the visitor, which allows him to fulfil himself personally (Crang, 2004), in line with the introspective and contemplative “romantic gaze” (Urry, 1995)
- Slow tourism and relaxed mountaineering (Garbizu, 2016)



*Photo:
Martín Agrelo*

2-Theoretical framework (III)

Some alternatives to *overtourism*:

- **Sustainable tourism**: combining economic, social and environmental interests through governance that allows for a balanced dialogue between the actors concerned. (Butler, 1999; Carbone and Yunis, 2005; Hall, 2011)
- **Tourism degrowth**: planned reduction of the number of tourists in mass destinations (Blanco-Romero, 2019). A "break" with the notion of hegemonic development today, which is closely related to economic growth. (Latouche, 2007: 53)

3-Case-study area (I)

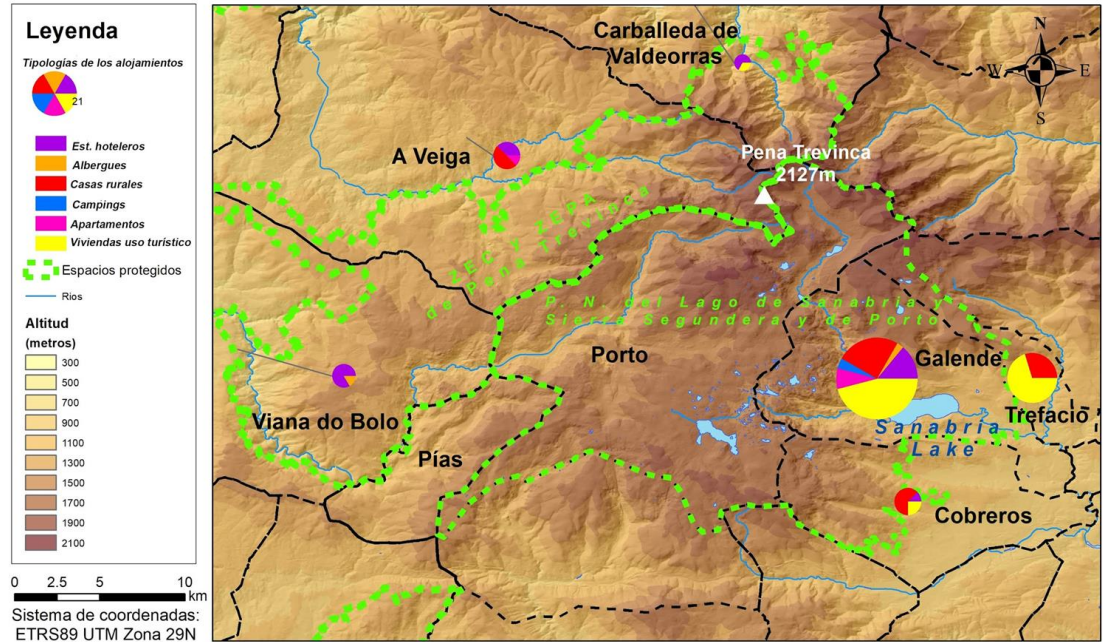
- NW of Iberian Peninsula
- Mountainous area between Galicia and Castile and Leon
- Highest point: Pena Trevinca (2127 m)
- Less than 10 inhabitants/km²
- Remarkable depopulation in the last century



3-Case-study area (II)

An analysis of the structure of accommodation offer in the area shows:

- Limited offer
- Predominance of rural houses and little hostels
- Low dependence on mass tourism



Leyenda

Tipologías de los alojamientos



Est. hoteleros

Albergues

Casas rurales

Campings

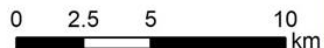
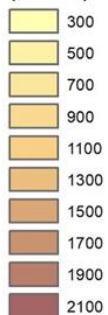
Apartamentos

Viviendas uso turístico

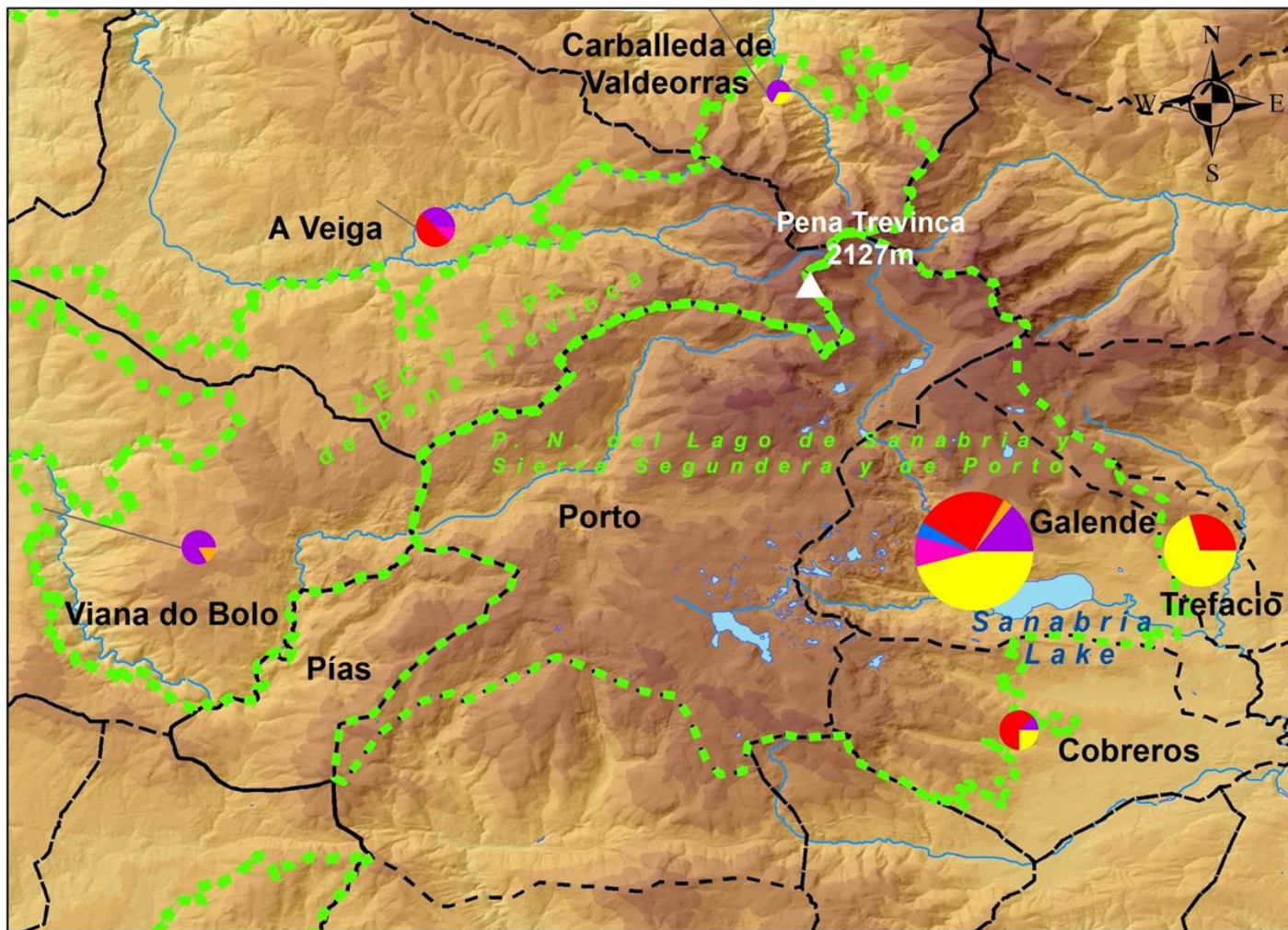
Espacios protegidos

Rios

Altitud
(metros)



Sistema de coordenadas:
ETRS89 UTM Zona 29N



4-Research methods

36 semi-structured interviews were conducted with actors linked to Trevinca. Four sets of themes were addressed:

- Perception of the area
- Identification of actors
- Evaluation of the role of the administration
- Assessment of the division of the massif between different administrative areas

4-Research methods

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Without a rigid dash, due to the need to go beyond quantitative data based on representative samples. (Ruiz Olabuénaga, 1999)

Interview analysis through a "**codebook**". (Cope, 2010)

- Distinction between verbalized codes (*emic*) and analytical codes (*etic*)

5-Main results (I)

Main discourses identified:



**Trevinca: destination (promoting
itself as) *undertourism***

5-Main results (II)

Trevinca: destination (promoting itself as) *undertourism*

- Trevinca as an unknown destination, most common reason to explain his low visitors flux:

“I think that if a person from Madrid is going to choose a destination for rural tourism, from all over the North of the peninsula he can choose Galicia, but if he chooses it from all over Galicia, the last destination will be Trevinca.” [Xil]



Although Trevinca has the symbolic relevance of being the highest peak of Galicia, it remains as unknown and remote place for most of Galicians.

Photo: Valerià Paül

5-Main results (II)

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- The most recent strategy of the local administration is focused on placing the name of Trevinca as a brand in the alternative mountain tourism circuits:

“I think the key, the decisive and initial step, must be to put in value, ordering everything we have to show. (...) [The] key is the product in everything. [...] Marketing, the promotion of a brand, of a territory, encompasses everything.” [Hadrián]

5-Main results (II)

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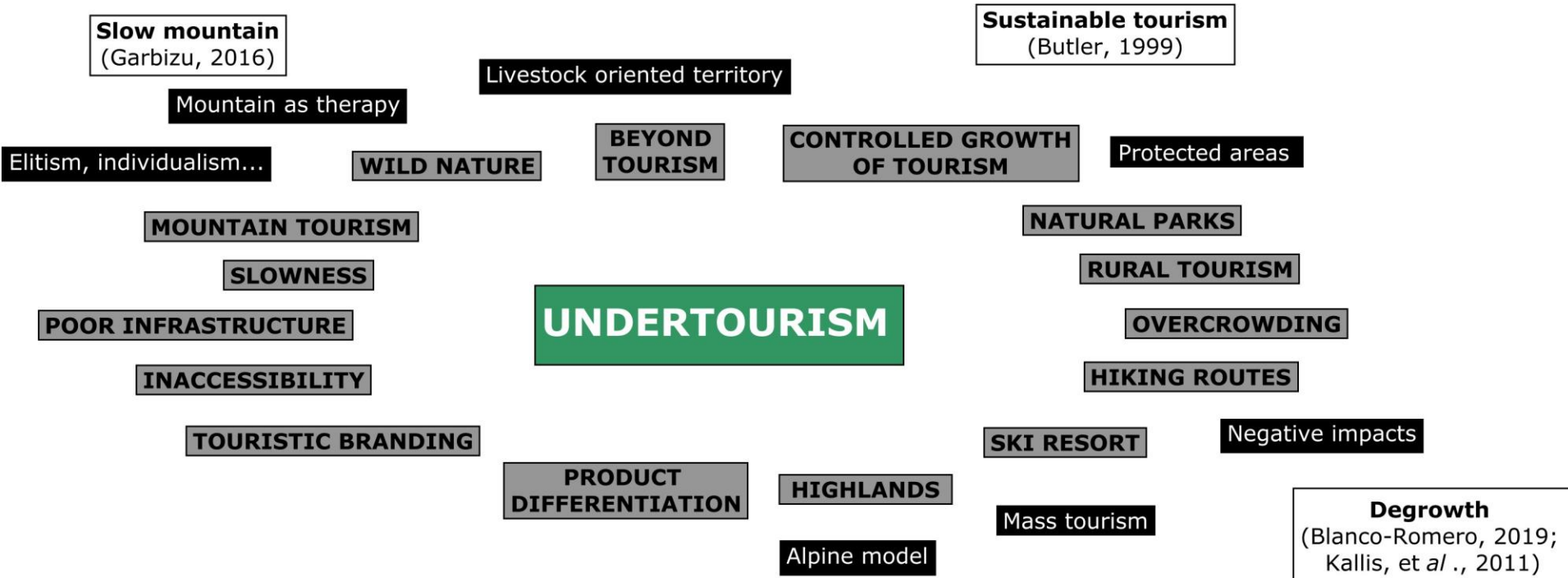
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- This promotion strategy conveys an idyllic image of space. Trevinca is credited with values such as purity, solitude and stillness:

“It is a mountain area in the interior of Galicia, and rural. Free of light pollution, environmentally quite pure and little degraded and with many peculiarities and much to discover, very virgin.” [Cristovo]

5-Main results (III)



Map of verbalised/emic codes (in grey) and analytic/etic codes (in black)

6-Discussion

UNDERTOURISM DISCOURSES

- It is more consistent with the *degrowth* model (Büscher and Fletcher, 2017; Blanco-Romero, 2019; Milano et al., 2019)
- Modest tourist arrivals should occur with a focus on personal enjoyment and individual experience [Elvia]
- The vision of loneliness emerges on the mountain routes, which form a kind of "therapy" [Iago], a proposal that Garbizu (2016) defines as "slow mountain"
- In line with the "romantic gaze" defined by Urry (1995)
- It does not welcome the arrival of large organised groups, which fits in with the "elite tourism" identified by Busljeta (2019: 262)

7-Conclusions

The application of the theoretical phenomena applied to the area of study leads us to infer:

- *Undertourism* discourses are present in these mountains
- *Overtourism* is very limited in territorial terms, although it is discursively expansive
- The disparate management models on both sides of the regional border lead to the absence of a joint approach to the massif

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Two main questions emerge from this work:

- **How to control that the success of an *undertourism* destination does not become *overtourism*?**
- **Is unlimited growth the real objective of some of the actors who claim to defend a form of alternative tourism?**



THANK YOU!
FOR YOUR ATTENTION

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