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Hotel Rooftops as a Space for Consumption in Historic Centres: The Case Study of Palma (Spain)

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Abstract: This research analysed the transformation of hotel rooftops in the historic centre of Palma into new spaces for tourist consumption. Nowadays, tourists are looking for unique and special experiences, which has led tourist destinations to seek new attractions to offer. Rooftops are becoming privileged places and provide a differential experience, leading to an increase in the offer of tourist services on hotel rooftops. This study explored the change of use in hotel rooftops in historic city centres for the commercialization of tourism. In this sense, this research sheds light on the factors that influence the commodification of rooftops and the attributes that are most valued by users in Google Maps and TripAdvisor reviews of their experiences. Furthermore, the transformation of rooftops has not followed a single model of commodification, but different typologies were identified according to uses and access modalities. Finally, implications for the city's tourism planning and management are presented.

Keywords: landscape consumption; Palma; rooftops; tourism commodification; tourist experiences



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1. Introduction

Since the end of the 20th century, market forces aligned with public institutions have boosted the transformation of the historic centres of many cities, seeking their economic, cultural, spatial, and social revaluation [1]. One of the strategies used has been their commodification as a space for tourism and leisure consumption [2–4]. Tourism has thus played a crucial role in the process of ludification of cities [5], as it has favoured the proliferation of new activities linked directly or indirectly to visitor consumption [6] to the detriment of those focused on residents, which are displaced from the centre [7].

After decades of standardisation of tourism consumption, tourists today are looking for quality products and services that offer unique and special experiences [8,9]. This forces cities to continuously transform or reinvent themselves to remain competitive in a globalised market [10]. Because of this, destinations and their tourist offer evolve from a static to a dynamic model that includes aspects of co-creation of new tourism spaces that respond to the new needs of tourists [11,12]. This causes local governments to facilitate and promote the creation of new offers and experiences in their historic centres, which, in many cases, have become a kind of tourist bubble where consumption has replaced production, and tourism has been privileged over other sources of employment [13].

Some authors such as Thrift [14] speak of the configuration of an experience economy, which seeks to make the consumption of a product or service something memorable for the customer. In this sense, Young and Markham [4] have addressed the experiential nature of consumption, in the commodification of places for tourism purposes, as would be the case

with historic city centres. According to Harvey [15], the tourism industry commercialises citizens' common goods such as the environment and city attractiveness. Consequently, as Harvey [15] and Franquesa [16] pointed out, city spaces become a commodity that creates wealth for a few, especially for investment funds and large multinationals [17].

This commercialization of historic centres is reflected in different public and private spaces, which have been the subject of numerous studies that have analysed the cross-cutting impacts that this process generates on cities. In this sense, works such as those by Morales [18] and Sanz et al. [19] have addressed the private concession of public space through the installation of leisure terraces. Other processes studied have been the commodification of housing for tourism purposes [20,21], the transformation of historic buildings into boutique hotels [22,23], ethnic neighbourhoods [24], culture [2], street art [25], urban landscape [26], or authenticity [27]. However, neoliberal urban policies and practices continue to promote new forms of urban tourism consumption, which implies a continuous commodification of new spaces in the city in search of a greater spectacularization of the tourist offer of cities [28].

This study aimed to analyse the transformation of hotel rooftops into spaces for leisure and tourism consumption. The incorporation of services on rooftops allows hotels to expand their offer with experiences that contribute to diversifying their sources of income. However, it implies a commodification of high-rise cities and is a little-known field of analysis due to the recent development of this offer.

2. Tourist Commodification of Rooftops

Framed by this dynamic, building rooftops are becoming ideal spaces for experiential consumption of the urban landscape by both tourists and residents [29]. However, published research on urban tourism has scarcely addressed the verticality of urban destinations [30]. The few works on this topic have focused on the role of tall buildings as an attraction and their contribution to the urban environment [31]. However, as Wigoder [32] highlights, building heights are viewing machines and provide an opportunity to tour the built environment. In fact, as Smith [30] points out, in cities such as London, attractions have been built expressly to trade on the value of the panoramic view of the urban landscape. According to Dorrian [33], climbing to higher elevations allows a different view of the city. This allows for meeting the new demands of tourists, who are no longer satisfied with passive tourism and are looking for new experiences [34].

In this context, hotel rooftops, located in the nerve centres of cities, have become privileged spaces for the consumption of the urban landscape and offer a differential experience [11]. Consequently, there is an increase in the supply of tourist services on the rooftops of hotels, which see in this space an opportunity to enhance the tourist value of a previously underused resource [35]. However, according to Speake [36], the commodification of the panoramic view is often associated with the creation of high-status leisure and tourism spaces for a wealthy elite. Consequently, it is a capital acceleration mechanism that contributes to the creation of new spatial inequalities and reinforces existing ones. Moreover, this offer contributes to the touristification of new urban areas [37], which can generate negative externalities of coexistence by becoming new sources of noise and nuisance for neighbours [38].

This article explores how the use of hotel rooftops in historic city centres has changed as a result of their commodification as tourist attractions. Specifically, the study focuses on the city of Palma (Spain), analysing how this phenomenon may contribute to expanding the bottom-up touristification of the city through the commodification of heights. This issue has hardly been addressed [29,36]. For this reason, a series of research questions are posed that are answered in the results and that allow us to deepen our knowledge of an emerging phenomenon in historic city centres:

RQ1. What are the factors that influence the commodification of rooftops in historic centres?

RQ2. What are the attributes most valued by users in Google Maps and Tripadvisor reviews of their rooftop experience?

RQ3. What impacts do rooftops have on the historic city centre?

3. Case Study and Methodology

3.1. Research Area: Historic Centre of Palma (Spain)

After the international financial crisis of 2008 and under the pretext of de-seasonalising tourism, the historic centre of the city of Palma (Spain) began to undergo a strong tourist transformation. Through the implementation of neoliberal policies, the tourist commodification of urban space was promoted with the aim of encouraging the consumption of leisure experiences. The aim was not only to increase the number of visitors but also to allow them to stay in the city centre. As a result, tourist activity has been taking over the city centre through the proliferation of tourist rental housing [39,40] and the conversion of historic buildings into hotels [41,42]. As a result, Palma has become an urban destination of global reference.

The result of this commodification of the historic centre is reflected in an intense process of touristification that has generated a profound transformation in its morphology, uses, and identities, which has consequences for the resident population. Authors such as Vives [43] and González-Pérez [39] have analysed the effects of tourist gentrification in the historic centre of Palma. Other works have addressed the commercial gentrification, such as that of Blázquez-Salom et al. [44], which focused on the transformation of retail shops as a result of overtourism, and that of Morales [18], who analysed the appropriation of public space through the installation of bar and restaurant terraces. Other studies have focused on the effects of current urban-tourist dynamics on heritage [41,45]. Finally, studies such as those by Gutiérrez et al. [46] have focused on the analysis of public policies in the face of the city's touristification.

Despite the intensity and magnitude of the tourist transformation process that the historic city centre has undergone, in recent years a new phenomenon has been observed, namely, the transformation of hotel rooftops to offer new leisure and tourism experiences. This article therefore analyses this phenomenon as a new strategy for the commodification of urban space. The case study of hotel rooftops in the old city of Palma can be extrapolated to what is happening in other historic cities in other countries, especially in Europe (Figure 1).

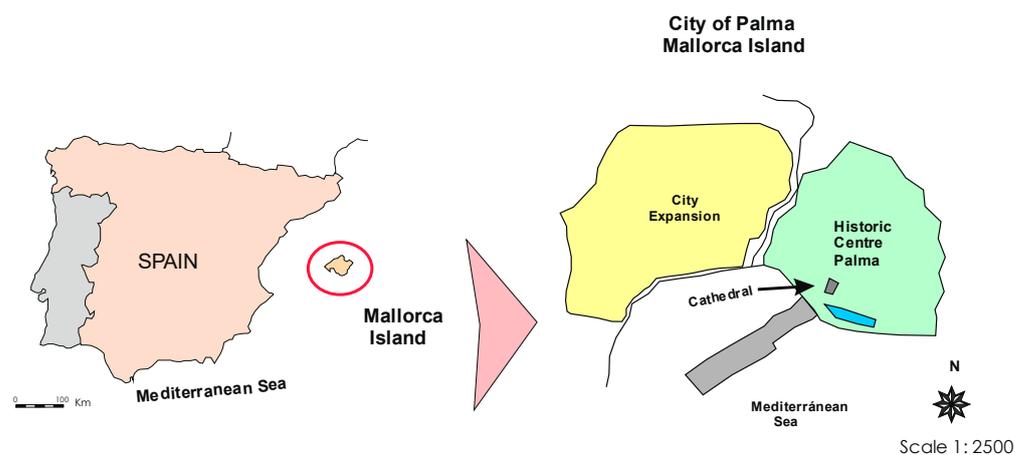


Figure 1. Localization of Palma City and the Historic Centre. Source: Authors.

3.2. Data and Methods

To study the tourist commercialisation of rooftops, the first step was to identify the hotels located in the historic centre. To do so, the website of the official register of tourist establishments (<https://www.caib.es/cathosfront/cens>, accessed on 10 October

2022.) was consulted, which provided the following information on the establishments: commercial name, address, type, category, and year of opening. This information was analysed cartographically using the ArcGIS 10.8 geographic information system.

Subsequently, the website of each establishment and aerial photographs were consulted to check whether they offer any type of service on their rooftop. If so, the following information was analysed: type of use (swimming pool/solarium; bar; restaurant; other), type of access (open to the public; only for hotel guests; exclusive for private suites), contents on the website and panoramic images (view of the cultural heritage; view of the urban landscape). Based on this information, a descriptive analysis was carried out on the characteristics of rooftops that are subject to commercialization.

Finally, user ratings and reviews on Google Maps and Tripadvisor platforms were analysed (until December 2022). The importance of these review platforms [47–50] makes them a valuable source of information to identify, from a demand-side perspective, the attributes that give value to this type of experience. To analyse the reviews, a qualitative open coding method [51,52] was used to establish six categories: food/meal [53], service [54], price/quality [55], place [56], atmosphere [57], and panoramic view [58]. Based on these, the factors influencing the experience of rooftop customers were analysed.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. The Hotelisation of the Historic Centre of Palma

Traditionally, the hotel activity in the historic centre of the city was characterised by the presence of a few low-quality hotels and hostels, as the city was undervalued in Mallorca's tourist offer [42]. Its hotel plant experienced significant growth beginning in 2012 (Figure 2). This was due to the approval of Law 8/2012 on Tourism in the Balearic Islands, which promoted the growth of the hotel offer through the creation of two types of hotels (urban hotels and inland tourism hotels). This regulation was accompanied by the modification of Palma's General Urban Development Plan to facilitate tourist use in the historic centre of the city. In addition, public city marketing policies were promoted, such as the creation of a tourist brand to position the city for tourism. The aim was to identify Palma as a tourist destination other than sun and beach and therefore to enhance the value of its urban space to attract tourism.

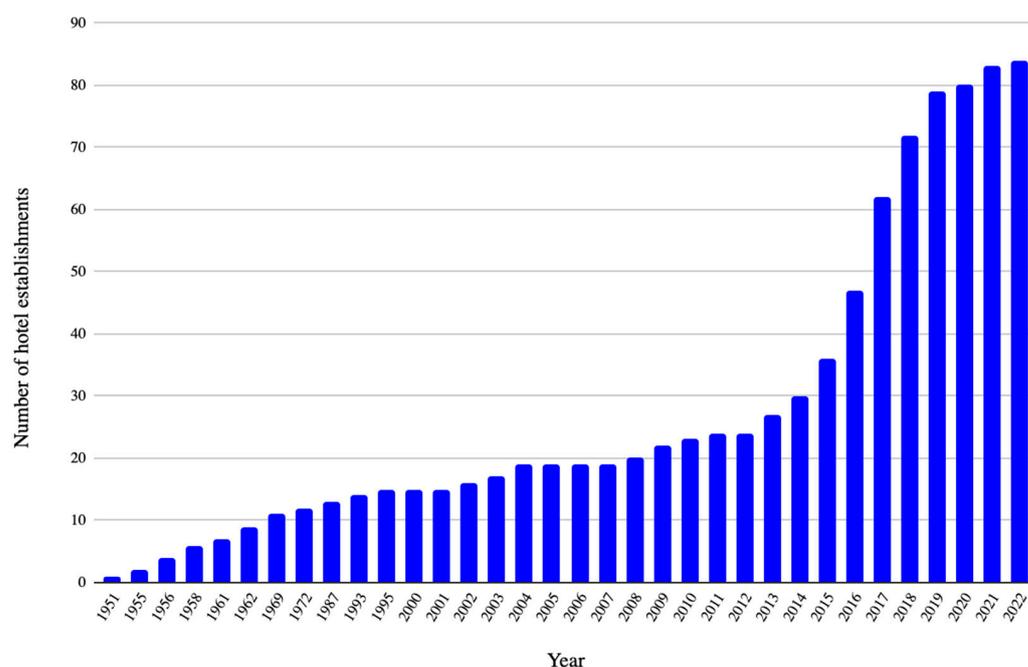


Figure 2. Evolution of the number of hotel establishments in the historic centre of Palma (1951–2022). Source: Authors and Register of Tourism Establishments of the Consell Insular de Mallorca.

The city's commercialization of tourism policies quickly resulted in an increase in the supply of hotel rooms, tourist housing, and tourism-related businesses. As can be seen in Figure 3, between 2012 and 2022, there was a major expansion of hotel supply. Specifically, in January 2012, the centre of Palma had 26 hotel establishments with a total of 1816 beds, and in December 2022, the number of establishments rose to 84 with a total of 4330 beds. In 2022, the average hotel supply for the municipality of Palma was 33,391 beds, so the historic centre accounted for 13.96% of it [59].

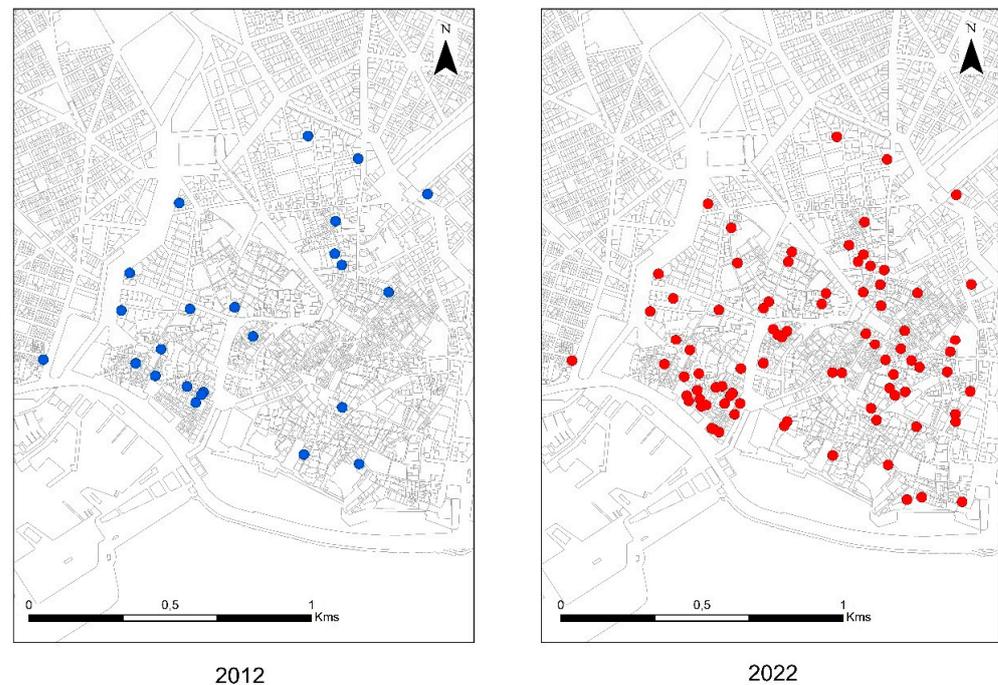


Figure 3. Location of hotel establishments in the historic centre of Palma. Source: Authors and the Register of Tourism Establishments of the Consell Insular de Mallorca.

It is worth noting that the growth was so strong that the Palma City Council approved a moratorium on licences between 2017 and 2019 for the opening of new tourist establishments in the historic centre. However, as Novo Malvárez [41] points out, the measure was permissive towards high-end boutique hotels, which continued to grow.

4.2. The Tourist Transformation of Hotel Rooftops

Today's postmodern tourists are looking for unique and special experiences [9,60]; so, the success of hotels is increasingly conditioned by their ability to respond to the new demands of the market. Drewer [61] noted an increase in the number of tourists seeking establishments that offer experiences in themselves. As a result, both new and existing hotels have been (re)designed in search of differentiation that would give them a distinct character [62,63].

Within the need for hotels to constantly (re)invent themselves, a new trend of converting the rooftop into leisure and tourism spaces has emerged, with the aim to attract tourists and residents [29]. This process is especially significant in historic city centres, as for example, in the case of Palma, where up to 51 hotels with rooftops were identified (Figure 4). This means that more than 60% of the hotels located in the old city centre have enabled their rooftops to offer some kind of service. These data demonstrate how rooftops are treated as a commodity in the context of neoliberal capitalism, to create high-status leisure and tourism spaces for a wealthy elite. Therefore, as Speake [36] pointed out, they are a mechanism of accelerating capital accumulation that creates new spatial inequalities and reinforces existing ones.

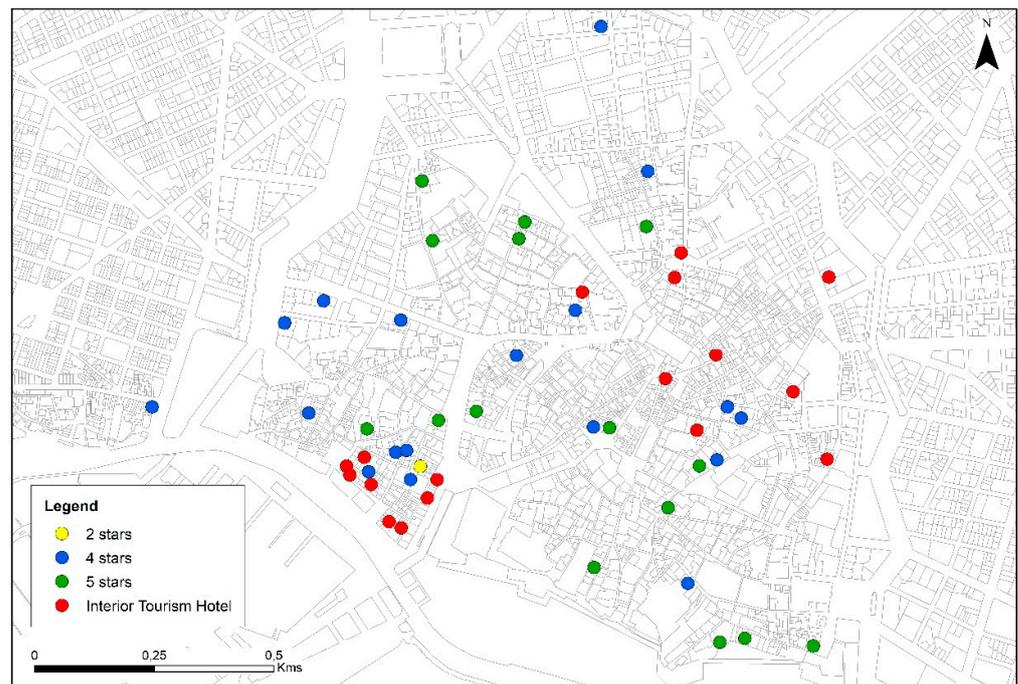


Figure 4. Geographical distribution of rooftops according to hotel category. Source: Authors.

From the analysis of rooftops according to hotel category, 30% are in five-star hotels, 35% are in four-star hotels, 33% are in interior hotels, and 2% are in lower-category hotels. Therefore, these results are in line with those of Erkuş-Öztürk [64] that showed that high-end city hotels have a higher tendency to diversify their products and services than lower-end hotels.

The transformation of rooftops has not followed a single model of commercialization, but different typologies have been identified according to the uses and access modalities (Table 1).

Table 1. Characteristics of the supply created by rooftops.

Use Rooftop	N	%
Swimming pool/solarium	42	82.4
Bar	28	54.9
Restaurant	14	27.5
Others	2	3.90
Modality	N	%
Public access	14	27.5
Only hotel guests	27	52.9
Only private suite guests	10	19.6

Source: Authors.

In the case of Palma, most rooftops have a swimming pool or solarium (82.4%) and a bar service for drinks and snacks (54.9%). This type of rooftop is usually focused on providing an exclusive service to hotel guests (52.9%). To a lesser extent, we find restaurants or other services such as outdoor gyms. In the case of restaurants, they are usually open to the public (27.5%), and a wide variety of gastronomic experiences were identified, ranging from signature cuisine to traditional, fusion, and fast food, among others. Exclusive rooftops were also identified for suites (19.6%), which in some cases also have a solarium with a swimming pool or jacuzzi.

4.3. Identification of the Main Attributes of the Rooftop Experience

The customer experience is an important source of competitive advantage for companies. A positive customer experience can lead to a number of favourable outcomes, such as satisfaction, loyalty, attitude, and brand preference [54,65,66]. Therefore, it is important for owners and managers of hotel establishments with rooftops to understand the underlying attributes of the customer experience [67] offered by these consumption spaces. To this end, it is essential to identify the rooftop attributes that positively or negatively influence the customer experience.

Experience is a vital concept because it is considered the measure of the quality of the company as perceived by its customers [68]. In this research, experience refers to customers' awareness, observation, or perception of rooftop attributes during their experience [69].

A total of 1577 rooftop reviews were collected, of which 839 from the Tripadvisor platform, and 738 from Google Maps (Table 2).

Table 2. Frequency of rooftop attributes according to user reviews.

	Reviews	Views %	Place %	Food/Drinks %	Service %	Atmosphere %	Price/Quality %	User Rating %
Tripadvisor	839	57.3	53.4	51.7	28.4	14.3	11.3	4.4
Google Maps	738	40.5	34.4	25.3	18.3	13.8	9.90	4.4
Total	1577	48.9	43.9	38.5	23.3	14.1	10.60	4.4

Source: Authors.

On both platforms, the businesses associated with the hotel rooftop have a rating of 4.4 out of a maximum value of 5. On both platforms, there is a coincidence in the order of importance assigned by users to the different attributes analysed. A total of 48.9% of users highlighted the importance of the panoramic view in their satisfaction with their experience. In the case of Palma, cultural attractions such as the cathedral, the views of the sea, and the cityscape are especially valued. The second most outstanding attribute corresponds to the place, which 43.9% of the reviews refer to. On this issue, the users highlighted design aspects such as uniqueness, style, or comfort. In third place is the food and beverage attribute, with 38.5% of the reviews. In fourth place comes service, with 23.3% of mentions, with professionalism and customer service standing out. In fifth position we found the atmosphere, with 14.1% of mentions, highlighting aspects such as the intimate, warm, or experiential character of these high-altitude terraces. Finally, the least valued attribute, with 10.6% of mentions, corresponds to price and quality. It is assumed that price is implicit in the place, which may even compensate for low quality.

For bars and restaurants, food appeared as the most impactful attribute in customer experience through an analysis of TripAdvisor [70] or Google Maps [49] reviews. However, the results of this research showed that for rooftops, the importance of the drink and food attribute is outweighed by the added value of the panoramic view they can offer over the city's urban landscape and the city's heritage attractions. Therefore, it is crucial that the rooftop is designed so that all customers can enjoy a good panoramic view during their experience.

4.4. Analysis of the Impacts and Key Issues of Rooftop Commodification

Rooftop development represents the bottom-up expansion of commercialization of tourism in cities. The results of this research showed that, in the case of Palma, the growth experienced by rooftops makes them a new actor that contributes to the intensification of tourism in the city and, therefore, a generator of new impacts on the historic centre (Table 3).

Table 3. Issues that are attributed to rooftops.

Type of Impact	Issues
Economic	New hotel supply, commodification of new building sites, revenue diversification, competitiveness.
Social	Exclusivity, elitization, social and spatial segregation, gentrification.
Environmental	Urban landscape transformation, noise, and touristification.

Source: Authors.

Due to the economic conditions imposed by globalisation, differentiation is the only way to face competition [71]. Tourism destinations that remain stagnant are likely to decline and even lose tourists if they are unable to rejuvenate designs and determine the originality of the tourism ideas and products being marketed [72]. Consequently, innovation and diversification of products and services are increasingly seen as indispensable factors for the survival of hotels [64]. Hotels have been pursuing different diversification strategies [73], with rooftops being one of the latest trends, as analysed in this research. The incorporation of this new offering provides urban hotels with a differentiation that has an impact on improving their competitiveness and diversifying their revenues. In addition, they allow hotels to make an often-underutilised space economically profitable.

With this new ‘vertical’ tourist service, the offer is differentiated from that provided by ‘horizontal’ terraces on the street, which are available to any tourist or resident. Therefore, this vertical landscape is altered and privatised through the commodification of the panorama [36], whose consumption is limited to a few affluent tourists or residents. There are even hotels that offer it only as an exclusive product associated with suites for high-status clients. Therefore, the development of rooftops is favouring a process of elitization that will contribute to a greater spatial segregation and increase the gentrification that the city’s historic centre has been experiencing.

On the other hand, rooftops contribute to an intensive use of the resources of historic centres that favours the tourist saturation of these spaces and puts the sustainability of historic heritage at risk [41]. Furthermore, the development of this new tourist consumption has significant implications for the quality of life of the residents. On the one hand, the massive use of terraces in historic centres means the creation of new sources of noise for the residents of these spaces [38]. Thus, not only do they have to put up with noise from horizontal street terraces [19], but also they must put up with noise from vertical terraces. This is especially annoying in summer when the terraces are occupied late into the night. However, due to the recent growth of this offer, the local governments have not yet developed stricter regulations to limit the proliferation of these high-rise terraces.

5. Conclusions

Faced with the tourist overcrowding suffered by many historic city centres [74], in recent years, new tourist offers have been developed that offer differentiated and more exclusive experiences [75]. One example is the rooftops of city hotels [11,36], which, in the case of Palma’s historic centre, are mainly located in high-end boutique hotels. A significant number of these hotels have (re)invented their rooftops to provide a variety of leisure and dining options that contribute to a more exclusive experience. Even though the results are for the city of Palma, the value of the case presented lies in the fact that this new disruptive agent facilitates the commodification for tourist consumption of a hotel space that had been neglected until now. The case of Palma points to the situation that is developing in other successful tourist destinations in Spain and Europe. Therefore, the growth process analysed and its effects can be extended to these destinations.

The analysed offer is associated with high-class hotels, which occupy historic buildings that have a rooftop terrace with unique views of the old city’s historic heritage, the urban landscape, and the sea. These hotels have transformed their roof terraces into a perfect vantage point for overlooking the city and, therefore, a tourist attraction. Moreover, these

spaces have been redesigned with the aim of maximising the value of the panoramic view, thus contributing to enhancing the customer experience. In fact, as observed in the tourist reviews, the main attraction of the hotel terraces is the panoramic view they offer over the urban landscape of the historic city centre.

However, this new supply represents an expansion of the bottom-up touristification of cities, which entails a series of consequences that have been identified as potential sources of conflict and which require a public policy response. This new offer needs reflection and regulation, just like short-term rentals.

5.1. Practical Implications

This case study can be extrapolated to other tourist cities, and the results obtained can be used to regulate or formulate tailor-made solutions to channel the development of this new actor and prevent its possible impacts. In the case of Palma, it is proposed that the City Council, as the main public agent in both tourism and urban planning, should develop specific ordinances to limit the expansion of hotel terraces and prevent the location of these roof terraces on buildings of historical value. On the other hand, the local government should identify areas that are saturated with this type of activity, as noise negatively affects the residents. The demarcation of these saturated areas should be combined with regular inspections of the noise generated, especially at night.

5.2. Limitations

More detailed statistical sources on this phenomenon were not available, as there is no specific register for rooftops. On the other hand, this study could have been complemented with interviews and qualitative studies with public and business agents to grasp their perceptions. This fieldwork will be carried out in future research related to this offer.

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