

SPAIN

POLICY BRIEF

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# Cultural Tourism for Community Engagement: The Case of Sant Pau Recinte Modernista

**Brief for local policymakers**

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## *Introduction*

Barcelona's international redevelopment and rebranding as an international tourism destination ahead of hosting the 1992 Olympic Games led the city to experience an exponential growth in visitor numbers and revenue in the decades leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, in 2019 the city of just over 1.6 million residents registered 9.47 million annual arrivals and 19.8 million overnight stays from visitors staying in hotels, without even contemplating the number of visitors staying in short-term tourist accommodations. As a result, Barcelona may clearly be identified as an over-touristed destination in the pre-pandemic years.

Tourism has long led to many positive externalities for the city, including increased economic development and employment opportunities in tourism and related sectors. In 2018, the tourism sector comprised 7.3% of the city's GDP and provided at least 95,256 jobs for those working directly in the sector, though if we consider the sector's spillover effects that number may actually be closer to 150,000 jobs. However, the shift toward mass tourism has also led to many negative consequences. Barcelona residents have registered complaints with tourism and its effects on the social landscape to some degree since at least 2010; this discontent peaked in 2017, when 15.6% of residents surveyed by the Barcelona City Council spontaneously

identified tourism as Barcelona's top problem. Residents have identified major issues with the leakage of economic benefits to international corporations, massification and the loss of access to public space, and increased complaints of noise, incivility, and littering. Ongoing gentrification and rising rents and housing prices have also been tied to tourism and the increasing prevalence of short-term vacation rentals.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic shocked the sector and halted both travel and tourism worldwide, with significant effects felt in Barcelona. 2020 visitor numbers fell to pre-Olympic levels, with just 2.1 million visitors (-77.8%) and 3.9 million overnight stays (-80.3%) registered by visitors staying in hotels. As a result, Barcelona's tourism sector suffered enormous losses in 2020 and saw only a tepid recovery in 2021. No clear strategic plan has yet emerged for tourism in the post-COVID future, though the current panorama presents a window of opportunity for Barcelona to re-think its relationship with tourism, privileging greater levels of social sustainability in the city.

Cultural tourism may play a key role in this socially sustainable recovery, given its strong rooting in the city's tourism trajectory. Cultural and architectural sites have made up a significant proportion of the most-visited tourist attractions in Barcelona throughout the past decade, with the city's historic Art Nouveau (Catalan Modernist) sites garnering regular and significant representation in the top-10 most-visited sites each year. The rise of the Art Nouveau movement in Barcelona developed simultaneously with the development of a new society and distribution of social power in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. As the city expanded beyond its medieval walls, the new bourgeoisie exposed their wealth and power through the expression of art and architecture, which led to some of the city's most famous and enduring monuments. The Art Nouveau style also emerged in social projects, such as the Sant Pau Recinte Modernista, which was originally constructed as a public hospital and is the largest Art Nouveau complex in the city today. This brief will consider how Sant Pau Recinte Modernista is a key example of cultural tourism's potential for improving visitor-resident relations and community engagement in the over-touristed city of Barcelona.

## 1. Evidence and Analysis

**Tourists' visiting habits in pre-pandemic years reflect a large interest in architecture, and particularly in Art Nouveau sites.** The Sagrada Família Basilica and Park Güell, two monuments designed by the famed architect Antoni Gaudí, were the most-visited sites in Barcelona in 2019, attracting over 4.7 million and 3.1 million visitors, respectively. The list of the top-20 most-visited sites also includes two additional enclaves of Catalan Modernism, the Gaudí-designed houses Casa Batlló (No. 9) and La Pedrera (No.17), which each drew over one million visitors in 2019.

At the same time, **residents' perceptions of tourism show clear correlations with its growing presence.** As we may see in Figure 1 below, initial observations bely a strong belief that tourism is largely beneficial for the city, with percentages of residents that agree with this statement consistently hovering over 80% from 2007 to 2021.

However, from 2018 to the present, there has been a **decrease in residents who believe tourism is beneficial** for the city and **an increase in residents who consider it to be detrimental** (18.2% in 2021), as well as a marked rise in the number of residents who opted not to answer this question in 2019. The pandemic has not interrupted this growing trend of considering the negative effects of tourism, but rather has contributed to its pattern of rising by nearly two points almost every year.

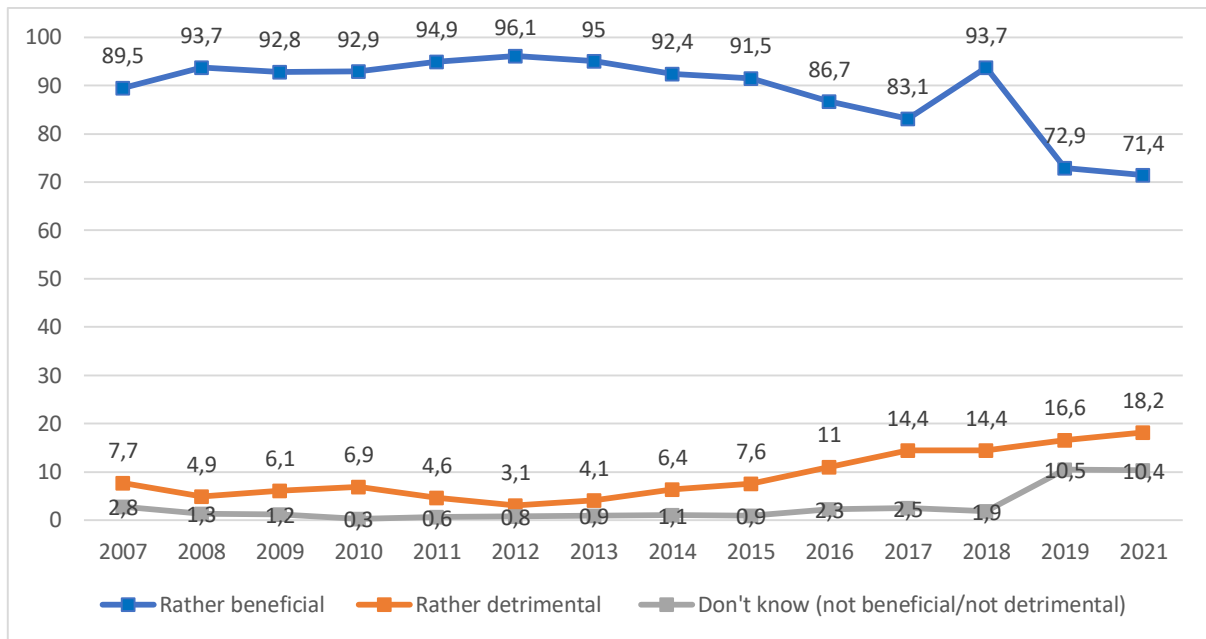


FIGURE 1: Evolution of the Perception of the Role of Tourism in Barcelona, 2007-2021 (%)

Source: Graphic from Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2021, p. 10.

In further analysis of these survey results, the University of Barcelona (UB) team found that **tourist-heavy neighborhoods are generally more critical of tourism’s effects** on the city, with 65.4% of heavily-touristed neighborhoods seeing tourism as positive for their areas, compared to 72.9% of non-tourist neighborhoods. The amount of time spent living in the city or in one’s neighborhood also affects residents’ perceptions of whether tourism is beneficial. A difference of nearly 20 percentage points was found between those who have lived in the city between 6 months and 2 years (88.2%) versus those who have lived in the city their whole lives (68.2%). These results allow us to observe that **the more time residents live in Barcelona, the more critical their position becomes regarding tourism’s impacts on the city.**

When asked about **the future of tourism**, 84.4% of respondents agreed that the city should take advantage of the current moment (during the pandemic, 2021) to initiate **changes in its management of tourism**. The most frequent suggestions for doing so were grouped along the lines of limiting and regulating (38.5%) or incrementing and diversifying (31.2%) the tourism on offer in the city. More concretely, residents cited a need to increase surveillance of uncivil tourism as their maximum priority, as well as attracting better-quality tourism with greater purchasing power and regulating or eliminating tourist apartments. Residents also concretely wished to **attract greater numbers of educational, professional, and sports and cultural tourists**, regardless of whether they live in touristic or non-touristic neighborhoods. This belief was reinforced in a survey carried out by the UB team with residents of the Eixample neighborhood in October 2020, as part of the SPOT project’s fieldwork.

Given the shift in opinion toward greater management of tourism and embracing cultural tourists as part of the sector’s (and city’s) recovery, we believe that the confluence of these factors points toward the possibilities of cultural tourism to address the negative consequences of pre-COVID tourism and to help build a more sustainable pathway for the sector in the future. However, not every cultural tourism attraction will produce inherently positive results. Cultural tourism sites must embrace innovation and give much greater thought to the ways they engage with the local community, not just international visitors.

**The Sant Pau Recinte Modernist provides a compelling example of how these sites may respect local residents and improve community engagement while still generating economic benefits through tourism.**



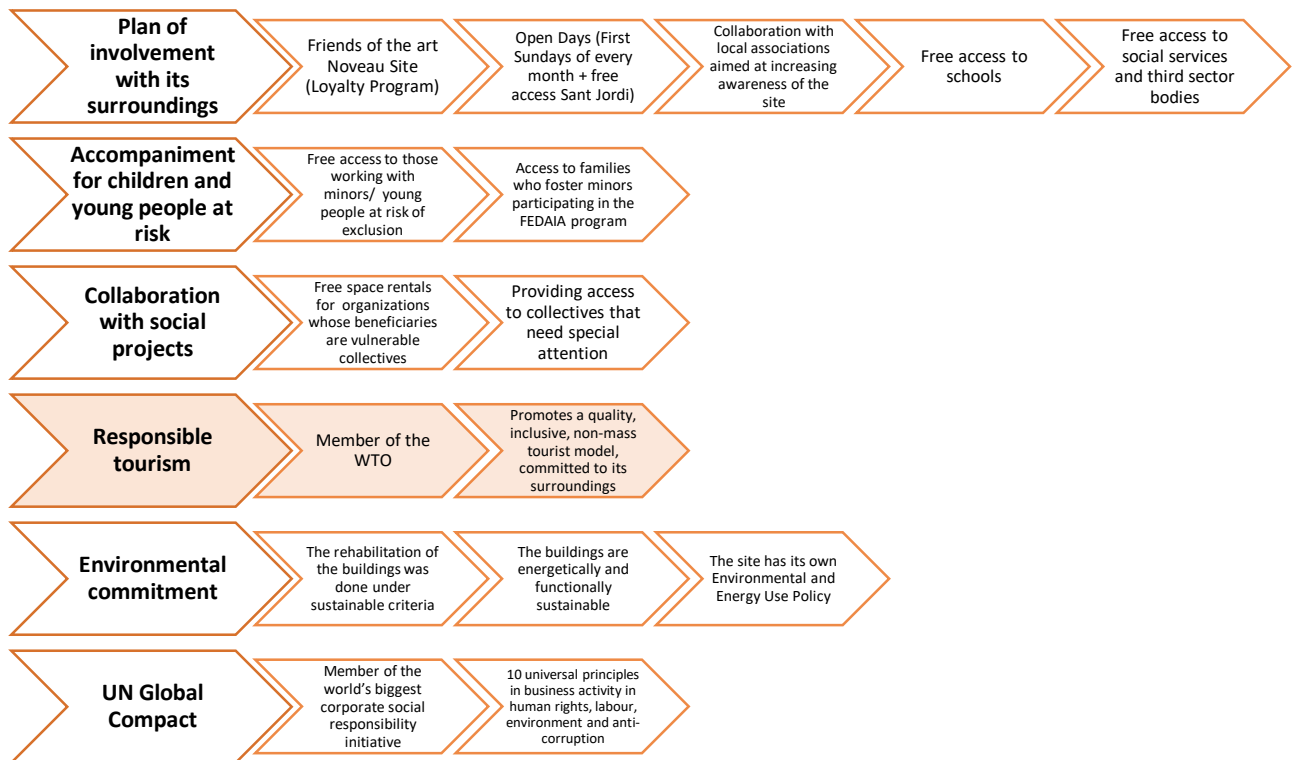
**FIGURE 2: SANT PAU RECINTE MODERNISTA.** Photo credit: Saara Mildeberg

The **Sant Pau Recinte Modernista** is the largest of Barcelona's Art Nouveau sites, comprised of a complex with multiple pavilions and extensive gardens designed by the architect Lluís Domenech i Montaner in 1902. It was opened to the public in 1920, upon its completion. The institution's vocation for serving the community stems from its origins as a public hospital serving less privileged members of Barcelona's society. After 80 years of service, the hospital moved to a new building at the rear of the complex in 2009, at which time the complex carried out widescale restorations to several of its buildings before opening to the public as a tourist attraction in 2016. Prior restorations of its Modernist pavilions earned the complex UNESCO World Heritage Status in 1997.

Today, the Recinte Modernista has become a reference in Barcelona for being an institution that is deeply engaged with the local community. It is the only one of the many Art Nouveau sites open to the public that is not under fully private ownership, but is instead managed by the Hospital Santa Creu i Sant Pau Private Foundation, which is made up of the Chapter of Barcelona Cathedral, the Barcelona City Council, and the Catalan regional government (Generalitat de Catalunya). Certainly, this **hybrid (public-private) management** plays a central role in the complex's dedication to community engagement, since the venture is not entirely for-profit and is still strongly tied to the presently functioning Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau.

The foundation manages the key projects that currently comprise the Recinte Modernista's **Social Program**, which, as we may see in Figure 3, has a strong focus on the social return generated by its tourist and cultural activity, attention to the most vulnerable social collectives in the city, and the sustainable management of its cultural heritage space. The complex is heavily engaged with projects and activities that aim to improve the sociocultural fabric of the city, particularly by offering free visitor access to children, young people at risk of exclusion, foster families, social services, schools, and other collectives in need of special attention. The addition of several Open Days allows any resident to visit the complex for free on the first Sunday of each month or on the city's special celebration of Sant Jordi (April 23). It also offers free rentals of its private spaces for organizations that serve vulnerable collectives, thus removing one important obstacle for these organizations to meet, exchange knowledge, and carry out their work.





**FIGURE 3: Sant Pau Recinte Modernista’s Social Program: Strategic Lines and Actions, 2022**

Source: Prepared by the authors, based on information from the Sant Pau Recinte Modernista website, 2022.

In terms of its direct engagement with the tourism sector, the Recinte maintains its commitment to the principles of responsibility and sustainability in tourism through its connection to the **World Tourism Organization (WTO)**, as well as being a recipient of the **Biosphere Certificate from the Responsible Tourism Institute (RTI)**. This certificate confirms the complex’s fulfilment of responsible, environmentally sustainable, socially inclusive, and accessible activities. The foundation that manages this certificate launched a manifesto called the Responsible Tourism Policy in 2016, in which its members commit to managing their activities sustainably by adopting strategies and actions aimed at preventing, reducing, or eliminating both the internal and external impacts of their facilities and activities, as well as optimizing their locations’ sustainability through improved environmental performance. The Recinte has promised to fulfill all these requirements and more, hence meeting the Biosphere’s standards for regulating tourism activity and its impacts.

Another significant component of the Recinte’s commitment to responsible tourism is its direct reference to promoting “a **quality, inclusive, non-mass tourist model**” that is “**committed to its surroundings**”. This strategic line goes a step further than its WTO and Biosphere regulations, confirming not only its commitment to community engagement and fair access in its surrounding neighborhoods (and the city at large), but also its commitment to operating under a more just, inclusive, and intentional tourism model that rejects massification while celebrating the complex’s unique cultural heritage.

Such a commitment is evident in the **visitor experience**, which is designed and executed in a manner that is clearly meant to appeal to **both local and international visitors**. The use of the dual local languages, Catalan and Spanish, is prevalent along with English translations in all the texts and video subtitles that comprise the visual tour. In addition, the local community and its history is built into the visitor experience from the start, with the first stop on the visitor route being an immersive video explaining the hospital complex’s history

and ending with a variety of local residents proudly claiming (in Catalan and Spanish): “I was born at Sant Pau.” The tour continues over several floors containing large text explanations of the hospital’s history, as well as background on the complex’s architect, Lluís Domenech i Montaner. This focus on the complex’s social and medical history foregrounds the later experience of its impressive Modernist pavilions and extensive grounds, a strategy that seems to privilege local history and scientific and cultural heritage over more internationally celebrated aspects like its UNESCO World Heritage status. Such an approach not only keeps the local community and its history at the forefront of visitors’ minds, but also rejects the idea of massification.

Finally, the Recinte also maintains several **internal and external programs for education and knowledge exchange**. First, the complex has an Education Service program that further strengthens its commitment to the community by disseminating the work of Domenech i Montaner in educational programs adapted to a variety of learning levels. Second, the complex has also opened its doors to a variety of organizations with high social impact, providing them not only physical spaces to work on a diverse array of projects in the spheres of sustainability, health, education, culture, and innovation, but also opportunities for knowledge exchange and collaboration.

## 2. Policy Implications and Recommendations

From centering local history and cultural heritage in the visitor experience to its commitment to education and knowledge exchange and the wider products of its social program, the Sant Pau Recinte Modernista engages in many best practices that demonstrate its suitability as a model for future cultural tourism efforts wishing to be more socially sustainable and engaged with the local community.

Of course, this model is not perfectly reproducible at every scale. Smaller or privately funded organizations may not have as much space at their disposal, nor as much financial support backing their activities, and thus it may be harder for them to offer the wide range of social programs and activities the Recinte currently offers. However, many aspects of this model are indeed likely to be easily transferrable to other cultural tourism entities, whether big or small, in Barcelona or in other heavily touristed cities.

As the Sant Pau Recinte Modernista illustrates well, the tourism sector’s goal for the future is not to stymie international tourism, but rather to include greater community engagement efforts in the models of tourism already being practiced, a goal which seems particularly well-suited to cultural tourism and heritage sites.

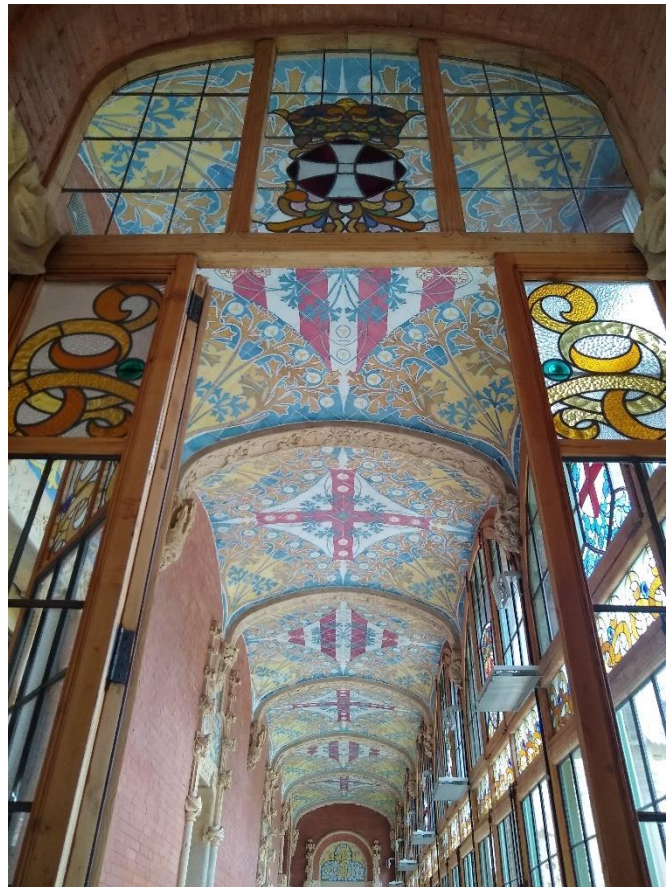
### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS:

1. Over-touristed cities experiencing the negative social consequences of tourism should actively invest in **cultural tourism initiatives designed to renew community engagement** or improve sociocultural sustainability, as the Sant Pau Recinte Modernista model illustrates well.
2. Improving the sustainability of the tourism sector requires cultural tourism sites to center a more **comprehensive type of sustainability** (not only economic, but also social, cultural, and environmental) in both their missions and their actions if they wish to benefit all stakeholders.
3. The tourism sector should not lose sight of the contributions of **local and “proximity” tourists** in the post-COVID future. Instead, it should continue to attract them and to place even greater emphasis on adapting the tourism on offer to their specific interests and needs by allowing them to participate in the development of local tourism agendas.



**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CULTURAL TOURISM ENTITIES:**

1. Subscribe to **principles of sustainability, inclusivity, and responsible tourism** from the outset, or remodel mission statements to fit these new goals.
2. Begin to **integrate smaller elements of community engagement into touristic products** immediately— such as offering special admissions prices or free access to local residents— rather than waiting years to unveil larger-scale transformations.
3. Adapt the visitor experience to include a greater focus on the **local community, history and cultural heritage**. This likely requires only slight changes that generate large returns in terms of community engagement.
4. Consider reserving a portion of the organization’s economic benefits to **give back to the local community**, through initiatives such as creating and funding educational programs in local schools or offering free space rentals for community groups serving collectives in need, in order to improve the social return of cultural tourism activities.



**FIGURE 4: SANT PAU RECINTE MODERNISTA.** Photo Credit: Danielle Bishop



# Project Identity

<b>Project name</b>	Social and innovative Platform on Cultural Tourism and its potential towards deepening Europeanisation (SPOT)
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<b>Budget</b>	3 000 000 EUR
<b>Website and social networks</b>	<a href="http://www.SPOTprojectH2020.eu">www.SPOTprojectH2020.eu</a> fb: @SPOTprojectH2020 twitter: @H2020Spo
<b>For more information</b>	Contact – Dissemination team: spotprojecth2020@gmail.com

Horizon 2020



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