

## **Entrepreneurs' attitudes towards seasonality in the tourism sector.**

### **Abstract**

**Purpose** – Seasonality is one of the biggest challenges that the tourism industry has to face. It does not only limit the profitability of entrepreneurship, but it also generates severe problems within the setting of the destination. This paper analyzes by means of a specific fieldwork the attitude towards seasonality of a sample of entrepreneurs of the tourism industry. Although it is possible to obtain revenue throughout the year, many entrepreneurs continue to pursue a season of low activity, which limits the effectiveness of public policies.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This paper uses data gathered by means of a survey of entrepreneurs located in two highly seasonal tourist spots of Spain, one coastal destination, and one mountain destination.

**Findings** – The results show that the entrepreneurs acknowledge the cost of shutting down during valley seasons, but in the assessment of costs and benefits, aspects such as the quality of life of the entrepreneur, the presence of a more profitable secondary activity in a different destination, or even the tenure regime of the business hold too much weight. These elements impede the decrease of seasonality and affect the destination severely.

**Originality/value** – This paper intends to shed light on whether there exist underlying non-economic motives that lead to a shutdown during the off-season. This work proposes an analysis focused on the assessment performed by the entrepreneurs of the costs and benefits derived from a seasonal resting period, something yet to be analyzed.

**Keywords** tourism industry, seasonality, profitability, Spain, entrepreneurs, quality of life

**Paper type** Research paper

### **Introduction**

Seasonality is a phenomenon affecting numerous economic sectors, being the tourism industry one of the most affected (Cisneros and Fernández, 2015). The phenomenon of tourism seasonality can be defined as follows “a temporal imbalance in the phenomenon of tourism, [which] may be expressed in terms of dimensions of such elements as numbers of visitors, expenditure of visitors, traffic on highways and other forms of transportation, employment, and admissions to attractions” Butler (1994: 332). This definition is proposed from the point of view of the tourist demand. However, it could also be defined from the point of view of supply, in which case tourist seasonality is described as the temporary imbalance that takes place in tourism when the marketing of products for tourists is concentrated in one or several periods (López and López, 2006). Several authors have noted the problems that seasonality implies for both the tourism industry and the environments in which said activities take place. “Many economic activities are highly dependent on tourism and are at risk because the high seasonality of the tourist destination does not allow continuity in commercial and economic operations during the

whole year” (Brida et al., 2011; 365). This effect is heightened in destinations with a weak economic structure, poorly diversified or highly dependent upon tourism, given that under these conditions the companies are more vulnerable to the systematic fluctuations of demand (Kastenholz and Lopes de Almeida, 2008). In actual fact, managers of tourism companies and even public agents consider seasonality a “disgrace”, given that it is complex to work around the consequences it has for the unemployment, the reduced business revenue, etc. (Candela and Castellani, 2009).

Even though the negative impacts derived from this phenomenon have been clearly defined, research on its causes is still limited. Higham and Hinch (2002: 176) argue that seasonality is one of the most prominent features of tourism, yet, paradoxically, it is also one of the least understood. Koenig-Lewis and Bischoff (2005: 201) indicate that “considerable gaps still exist in published research in this area and it argues that the field lacks a sound theoretical framework”. Dawson et al., (2011) note that it is necessary to explore conflicts of interest underneath the entrepreneurs’ decision to close their business during periods of less activity. The conflicts of interest mentioned by these authors reveal the personal motives that meddle with the entrepreneurs’ decision-making process are not only related benefits, but also to their lifestyle. This paper seeks to prove whether the hypothesis that certain business decisions leading to higher seasonality levels are motivated by non-economic reasons. Thus, the aim is to get to know how entrepreneurs assess the costs and benefits associated with a temporary shutdown, at the same time that we identify the factors influencing said assessment. This objective has not been approached before in the academic literature. Only a few studies have analyzed certain subjective aspects associated with the decision to close the business. The literature on entrepreneurship in the tourism industry is limited, despite being consolidated as an area of study since the 80s (Carmichael and Morrison, 2011). References related to the characteristics, the role, the importance, the impact and the connections between entrepreneurs in tourist destinations can be found in the bibliography (Narangajavana, 2016). The role of the subjective motivations that influence the entrepreneurs when making business decisions has also been analyzed (Getz et al., 2004). As a way of linking all of the above, this paper proposes an analysis focused on the assessment performed by the entrepreneurs of the costs and benefits derived from a seasonal resting period, something yet to be analyzed.

This paper focuses on two Spanish tourist destinations very different from each other but, which share a common characteristic: a high level of tourism seasonality. One of them is a coastal destination (Costa del Sol), whereas the second is a mountain destination (Sierra Nevada ski and mountain resort). The tourist activity developed in destinations with a particular natural and leisure allure like the ones that have been selected tend to attract young “lifestyle entrepreneurs” who seek a pleasant lifestyle (Dawson et al., 2011). El concepto de “lifestyle” emprendedor o “lifestyle” business, hace referencia a una situación en la que el emprendedor equilibra sus objetivos económicos y no económicos, e incluso define su motivación inicial por un conjunto de lifestyle aspirations a las que le otorga mayor importancia que a los objetivos económicos (Morrison, 2002; Lynch, 1998; Williams, Shaw, & Greenwood, 1989; Morrison &

Teixeira, 2003; Thomas, 2000). Ciertamente es que el uso del término “lifestyle” puede variar, pero el elemento clave es que los factores no económicos explican ciertos comportamientos empresariales (Dawson et al., 2011). Como señalan Andrew, Morrison, and Baum (2001), lifestyle-orientation puede ser una consecuencia de un conjunto de expectativas y valores que son escogidas por los propios emprendedores. Relacionado con lo anterior estaría el concepto de calidad de vida, cuya definición no es sencilla. Podemos tomar como referencia la definición propuesta por Somarriba (2008), quien indica que la quality of life is the result of complex interactions of a set of objective and subjective factors: objective factors refer to external conditions of an economic, socio-political, environmental, and cultural nature, while subjective factors refer to individuals’ perception of their own life and the satisfaction reached in its various dimensions. En este estudio se plantea que la decisión de detener la actividad empresarial durante una época implica ganancias en tiempo libre para el emprendedor que le permiten mejorar su calidad de vida prestando atención a otros objetivos no económicos.

Small municipalities are gaining momentum in terms of entrepreneurship generation (Roundy, 2018). Therefore, this type of destination seems adequate in order to test the hypothesis of this study. By means of a fieldwork that includes entrepreneurs developing their activity in both destinations, this paper intends to shed light on whether there exist underlying non-economic motives that lead to a shutdown during the off-season. It must be taken into account that the Sierra Nevada ski and mountain resort has developed a tourist product during the summer based on active, sport and nature tourism that causes many businesses to remain open throughout the year. In the Costa del Sol the tourist activity drops heavily outside the summer season, despite the fact that a large part of the companies maintain their activity throughout the year since the mild weather of the area keeps attracting visitors all year long.

The paper is organized as follows: Firstly, a presentation of the literature review concerning the causes of seasonality and the possible policies that seek either to reduce it or find a viable alternative to shutting down. Next, the conflict between quality of life and profitability is analyzed to determine whether it is a conditioning factor that influences the decisions associated with seasonality. Below, we present a brief reference to the area of study and methodology of the analysis. The paper finishes by offering the results and the conclusions drawn from the analysis proposed.

### **Causes of seasonality and possible strategies**

To understand the main causes behind the phenomenon of seasonality within the tourism industry is key in order to define public policies and private action able to restrain it (Martin et al., 2017). It is possible to explain the causes of tourism seasonality by analyzing the particular factors of each destinations as well as general conditioning factors. Hylleberg (1992) proposes three groups of factors that may explain the causes behind seasonality: weather-related factors, events-related factors and time-related factors, such as school holidays, bank holidays, fiscal or accounting periods, etc. The aforementioned factors may be exaggerated due to social pressure or inertia (Butlet,

1994). Higham and Hinch (2002) linked the main causes of tourism seasonality with the own limitations of tourism. Amongst specific factors we can find those related to the diversification of the tourist products offered at a destination, climate-dependence, changes occurring in the natural environment throughout the year, the type of tourism organization, the diversification of both tourist segments and the markets of origin (Martin et al., 2014; Fernández, 2003). Some of these causes can be altered, which has resulted in many destinations improving their level of seasonality, even though not all business owners are interested in long seasons.

Some authors have noted that a certain level of seasonality might be positive, given that a season with low activity allows for the recovery of both the environment and the local community as well as maintenance tasks (Martin et al., 2019; Lusseau and Higham, 2004; Ioannides and Petersen, 2003). However, the problems brought forth by seasonality make it advisable to reduce it as much as possible, if it is not possible to suppress it completely. The most widespread strategies when it comes down to reducing seasonality levels are grouped in the following thematic axes. To expand the combination of tourist segments that arrive at the destination and to diversify the products that are offered (Winter Tourism Sub-Committee Members and Apropos Planning, 2002). To introduce newly planned festivals or events, as well as promoting the existing ones (Brännäs and Nordström, 2002). To foster public-private cooperation as to encourage businesses to remain open during valley seasons by granting allowances or tax reductions (Koenig-Lewis and Bischoff, 2005). To improve the tourist infrastructure, both at the destination as well as transport infrastructures (Weaver and Oppermann, 2000). And lastly, to diversify the markets of origin, thus attracting visitors with non-simultaneous temporary holiday patterns (Martin et al., 2017). Many destinations have attained reasonable success in reducing their level of seasonality (Martin et al., 2018a), although some cases showing poor results make evident the necessity to continue analyzing the factors conditioning the success of these policies (Guaita et al., 2019). This paper moves in that direction, trying to determine whether certain subjective elements related to the quality of life actually condition the decision to keep businesses open during valley seasons.

### **Quality of life or profitability**

The traditional concept of entrepreneur has been usually associated with economic motivations (Ogbor, 2000). The current analysis of the entrepreneurship includes a wide range of disciplines, among which we can list economy and business sciences, but also others such as psychology, sociology or anthropology (Kalantaridis & Bika, 2006). Asumiendo una vision amplia del proceso de emprendimeinto, se debe destacar la importancia que el contexto tiene en el mismo, pues en el desarrollo de proyectos de emprendimiento intervienen factores económicos, culturales geográficos, sociales y políticos (Stam, 2003). En este sentido, algunos autores señalan que el proceso de emprendimiento no representa únicamente la expresión de una actividad económica, sino que está influenciado por las motivaciones de los individuos, quienes buscan satisfacer

sus objetivos personales y sociales (Getz, Carlsen, & Morrison, 2004). Obtener un beneficio económico es uno de los muchos objetivos que se plantea el emprendedor, y en muchos casos el emprendedor busca únicamente un nivel de ingresos suficiente para mantener cierto estilo de vida (Di Domenico, 2005). Esta idea no es nueva en la teoría sobre emprendimiento, pues ya Dewhurst and Horobin (1998) desarrollaron un modelo of owner-manager tendencies with a continuum for small-business owner-man- agers between commercial and lifestyle que considera estrategias y objetivos (Dawson et al., 2011).

This paper analyzes the way in which entrepreneurs assess the costs and benefits of a hiatus. En concreto, con esta investigación se buscan evidencias sobre la influencia que factores no económicos tienen en la decisión de cerrar en algunas épocas del año. Este análisis, centrado en las decisiones relacionadas con la estacionalidad turística, completaría a otros que reflejan el papel de factores relacionados con la calidad de vida en la toma de decisiones por parte de los emprendedores, siendo algo no analizado hasta el momento. It does so by trying to determine which non-economic elements intervene in the assessment process.

To understand the implications that closing the business for a period of time has, we must consider the different impacts derived from seasonality. The negatives impacts associated with tourism seasonality are diverse. There are usually four categories of effects derived from a high concentration of visitors: economic, labor, social and environmental (Martin et al., 2018b). In this case, the focus is on the first group, given that besides conditioning the profitability of the companies, they exert negative effects on the economic development of the area (Martin et al., 2019). The alternating peak and valley seasons generate diverse economic effects. The instability of the annual arrivals results in potential losses and a decrease in the profitability of the investment (Cuccia and Rizzo, 2011), as well as a deficient use of facilities (Rosselló et al., 2004; Getz and Nilsson, 2004; Georgantzas, 2003). The influx of visitors at certain times can affect the quality of the service (Koc and Altinay, 2007), whereas in the valley seasons, the closure of the companies will create a bad image of the destination (Flognfeldt, 2001). Economically speaking, the inhabitants of the tourist area shall also suffer from seasonality since they must compensate the imbalance produced by valley seasons by saving more during the peak season (Murphy, 1985). Instability in the economic activity conditions the quality of the employment and makes it impossible to develop stable professional careers and training programs, which thus leads to a lower quality of service. In fact, some companies have troubles finding qualified staff (Flognfeldt, 2001; Baum, 1999).

All of these shows the economic problems tied to seasonality, both from the perspective of the companies and the destinations. Therefore, reducing seasonality should become a goal for the business owners in the industry. Nonetheless, some studies have noticed that aims related to quality of life and other personal values might condition the way in which seasonality is dealt with (Dawson et al., 2011). In consequence, and given that they might condition the effectiveness of the public policies, it is important to know the impact that personal reasons might have on the strategic decisions related to the tourist

season. It is important to highlight the importance that the context in which the entrepreneur develops their project within the entrepreneurial process, which is why the economic, geographic, politic and social influences cannot be overlooked (Stam, 2003). Therefore, the entrepreneur does not develop just an economic project, but also follows personal motivations of a different nature in order to satisfy bigger goals (Getz et al., 2004). In this sense, the concept of “lifestyle business” describes an orientation in which the owner or promoter make an appraisal of the economic and non-economic aims related to a certain lifestyle (Morrison, 2002; Morrison and Teixeira, 2003; Thomas, 2000). This point of view helps to understand certain business decisions, particularly those related to business growth (Thomas, 2000).

Several studies have demonstrated that factors such as lifestyle, autonomy or self-fulfillment prevail amongst the entrepreneurs of the tourism industry (Block and Landgraf, 2016; Andersson et al., 2002; Ateljevic and Doorne, 2000; Getz and Carlsen, 2000; Nilsson et al., 2003). Tourism is an industry of senses (Nogués-Pedregal, 2019). Something that connects with the ongoing discussion on the approaches to measure entrepreneurs’ success, which include non-financial and even qualitative aspects (Rey et al., 2016). Some entrepreneurs have seen themselves initiating a business in a destination after they experienced life as a visitor in said enclave (Muller, 2006; Williams and Hall, 2002; Williams et al., 2000). Getz and Carlsen (2000), conducted a study that sought to analyze the entrepreneurs’ motivations and established two categories: family-first and business-first entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs included in the family-first category accounted for two thirds of the total. They were motivated by emotional factors associated with their families and the optimization of their leisure time. Many entrepreneurs, mostly in peripheral areas, prioritize maintaining their lifestyle above business goals and maximizing profits (Sherwood et al., 2000; Thomas, 2000). Businesses guided by these ideas might pose opportunities in terms of tourism development, but they also pose a challenge and limitations to the growth and management of the destination (Stone and Stubbs, 2007). Controlling seasonality is not a minor problem within the management process of the destination, and it can be affected by motivations such as those detailed above. It may be possible that the decisions to close during part of the year are made under emotional circumstances instead of commercial ones, which would limit the effect of the policies seeking to reduce seasonality. Therefore, these decisions condition the development plans implemented by local authorities and governments (Goulding et al., 2004), something that generates potential conflicts amongst stakeholders (Muller, 2006).

## **Methodology**

### *Area of study*

This study is focused on two tourist destinations in Spain, both of different nature, but connected by a common characteristic: a high level of seasonality and the possibility of

having a continuous season without a hiatus. The first of the destinations is the Costa del Sol in southern Spain. The Costa del Sol offers a 200 kilometers long coast line and hosted 12.5 million tourists in 2017, out of which only 5.1 million were Spanish (INE, 2018). If we take into account the number of tourists accommodated in regulated establishments, a 50% of them arrive during the months of June, July and August. These data show a high level of seasonality, but they also are prove of the existence of a viable valley season (INE, 2018). It should be noted that a large number of tourists still arrive during the months of the valley season, all of them count with more than 260,000 arrivals (INE, 2018). To this we have to add the number of tourists who do not stay overnight at the destinations or those who do so in non-regulated accommodations. This destination's tourism model developed during the 50s and 60s. Its success was based on its mild weather, with average temperatures of 18°C during winter and 320 sunny days, making it an enjoyable destination all year long. The presence of an international airport plays an important role (the fourth most important commercial airport in Spain), as also does its good railway network, which connects with the main Spanish cities (Fernandez and Mayorga, 2008). Thus, the role of tourism is essential, and it is something that has brought the private and public sector together in order to improve the destination. Selecting this destination as area of study is, therefore, subject to a number of reasons: its importance for the Spanish tourist product, its high seasonality and the possibility of maintaining a stable tourist activity throughout the year.

The second destination experiencing a similar situation is the Sierra Nevada ski and mountain resort, also located in southern Spain. This destination hosted a total of 1,150,000 visitors during the winter season of 2017 (INE, 2018). Given that its main attraction are the winter sports, the peak season is concentrated in six months (November to April). The extreme seasonality derived from this was put to an end in 2010, with the development of a new spring/summer tourist product based on nature tourism and sport. This new season was planned and coordinated by the public company in charge of the resort, jointly with the business owners. In 2017, the number of visitors rose to 45,000 during the summer, a period in which, traditionally, the whole destination used to be closed. The average annual growth rate of the arrivals outside the winter season was of a 25% (INE, 2018). Currently, a 49% of the companies continue their activity during the summer, which can be considered a successful deseasonalization, although there is still room for improvements. Part of the companies operating in winter restructure their activity in order to attract a whole new type of visitor during the summer.

These two destinations share common characteristics: during the peak seasons there is a huge turnover and the work flow becomes intense, which leads to a situation in which it is not possible to count with a day off. Both of them count with a valley season that still makes it possible to keep the business open throughout the year, even though not every business owner opts for this. Both destinations attract young entrepreneurs due to its interesting business expectations, the natural environment that generates added value and the quality of life it offers, very much appreciated in the southern region of Spain.

### *Data collection*

The data were collected by means of a questionnaire proposed to 162 entrepreneurs who carry out their tourist activity in one of the two selected destinations. 41 of the questionnaires belong to the Sierra Nevada ski and mountain resort, whereas 121 belong to the Costa del Sol, which constitutes representative sample. The initial requirement in order to be eligible for the survey was that the business activity can be carried out throughout the year (that leaves the ski schools out, for instance). The next requirement was that the business had to be founded by an entrepreneur in the last five years. Therefore, businesses associated with business groups were left out. Both requirements explain the difference in the number of surveys conducted in each destination, given that only 68 businesses were eligible in the ski resort, whereas the number rose to 210 in the Costa del Sol. The database was generated by means of the information provided by the finance information company AXEXOR. In Sierra Nevada, the survey was carried out during December in 2017, while in the Costa del Sol, it was carried out in the month of July of 2017. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used for the selection of the subjects. In the first stage, we selected four spots to conduct the survey based on the number of visitors that arrive every year at each of these destinations in the Costal del Sol: Torremolinos, Marbella, Torrox and Benalmadena. These destinations cover the entire coast line. The surroundings of the Ski station of Sierra Nevada was also selected to carry out the survey. In the second stage, we concluded the proportional number of surveys to be carried out in each type of business according to the weight they hold in comparison with the total number of companies located in the destination: restaurants, accommodations, tourist-oriented shops and tourist services companies. The next stage was based on a simple random sampling of the database that was generated, from which phone surveys were carried out.

The questionnaire was divided into two sections, en la Tabla 1 se detallan todas las variables analizadas. The first of them consists of the basic information of the business and the entrepreneur: the age and origin of the entrepreneur, gender, type of activity, whether the entrepreneur is the owner or rents the space, whether the business remains open or closes during a specific time of the year, invoicing volume, and whether the entrepreneur counts with a secondary complementary activity. The second part of the questionnaire assesses the general perception of the entrepreneur with respect to a number of benefits and costs associated with a temporary shutdown. Said assessment focuses on a series of specific benefits and costs associated with a temporary shutdown. The result of the assessment is then placed in a scale from 1 to 5. In the case of the benefits, a score of 1 corresponds with a minimum benefit, whereas 5 shows a maximum benefit. When assessing the costs, 1 shows minimum costs, whereas a score of 5 shows maximum costs. The items related to the benefits and costs of shutting down temporarily included in the questionnaire have been extracted from the literature on tourism seasonality by taking into account the main impacts on the business activity and the destination itself. Likewise, the main motivations behind the decisions of the entrepreneurs have also been drawn from the literature presented in the previous sections.



## **Table 1.**

### **Results**

#### *Profile of the entrepreneurs interviewed*

It is crucial to describe in detail the profile of the entrepreneurs interviewed in order to interpret the results correctly (Table 2). In accordance with the size of the destination, almost three quarters of the interviewees were entrepreneurs located in the Costa del Sol. More than a 61% of the interviewees was not originally native to the destination, which only adds to the bibliography on the capacity of some tourist destinations to attract entrepreneurs who are not born in the area where they set up their business. A 62.35% of the interviewees are men. Entrepreneurs younger than 35 years old account for the 35.80% of the total and almost a 50% are aged between 36 and 50. The majority of the interviewees, (37.65%), completed the secondary education, even though when the percentage of interviewees who completed a degree is of 35.19%. Almost a 60% of the entrepreneurs develop their activity in a rented space, which may condition their decisions. In both destinations altogether, a 46.30% of the business owners do not interrupt their activity throughout the year and a 60.5% develop a secondary activity that complements the one being analyzed here. Of the businesses analyzed, a 47.5% records an annual turnover of less than 250,000€, a 30.8% records between €250,000-500,000, and a 20.9%, more than 500,000€. The businesses conforming the sample are as follows: a 27.7% are restaurants/bars, a 12.9% are accommodations, a 33.3% are tourist-oriented shops, and a 25.9% are tourist services companies.

## **Table 2.**

#### *Assessment of the benefits and costs of a shutdown period according to the characteristics of each segment*

Both t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) have been used in order to analyze whether the assessment performed by the entrepreneurs about the costs and benefits of a seasonal shutdown is influenced by socioeconomic characteristics of the entrepreneurs or by the particular characteristics of their businesses. The t-test was applied to variables that are expressed in a dichotomous scale. These are: location of the activity, place of origin of the entrepreneur, gender, tenure regime of the premises where the activity is being developed, whether the business shuts down during part of the year, and existence of a complementary economic activity. Other characteristics like the age of the entrepreneur, their level of education, the billing range and the type of activity were measured along interval scale differences, which were sought through one-way analysis of variance. The data relative to the answers obtained about the perception of the costs and benefits of a shutdown period are shown in Table 3, according to the characteristics of the business and the entrepreneur themselves.

The t-test shows that there are significant statistical differences in the perception of the benefits of a shutdown period if we take into account the place of origin of the

entrepreneur as a segmentation criterion. Those entrepreneurs who are not native to the destination have shown a better assessment of the benefits associated with a temporary shutdown (3.12 versus 4.46), which reinforces the idea that entrepreneurs are attracted by a certain lifestyle. There are also significant differences according to the tenure regime of the place where the activity is developed. Given that those who need to rent their space assess the benefits more poorly than those who actually own it (3.91 versus 4.44). In the third place, there exist significant differences according to whether the entrepreneur develops or not a complementary activity. If the entrepreneur does, the assessment of the shutdown period reaches a score of 4.44, as opposed to a 3.26 in the cases that do not. The one-way analysis of variance has not shown significant differences in the perception of the benefits of the shutdown period in accordance to the age or the level of education of the entrepreneur, the amount invoiced by the business or the type of business. Likewise, the t-test has not found significant differences associated with the location of the business or gender.

The perception of the costs associated with a temporary shutdown has been analyzed separately, given that it is possible to assess positively a resting period while being aware of the costs that it entails. In this case there are significant differences associated with the location of the business since the entrepreneurs established in the coast note higher costs associated with a shutdown period, whereas those located in the mountain resort do not assess said cost as negatively (4.23 versus 3.47). Differences associated with the place of origin of the entrepreneurs have also been found. The entrepreneurs who are native to the region assess the costs of a shutdown period more negatively. Esto puede estar relacionado con el hecho de que los emprendedores no nativos tengan una segunda actividad económica fuera de estos destinos, posiblemente en su lugar de origen, lo que hace reducir los costs percibidos al cierre estacional. The perception of the costs associated with a temporary shutdown is also more negative in the case of the entrepreneurs who do not own the space where the activity is developed, which falls in line with the fact that they must assume. Developing a secondary activity also affects the way in which the costs associated with a shutdown period are assessed. The entrepreneurs who develop an alternative activity assess the cost with a 3.85, versus a total of 4.41, which belongs to those who do not. The ANOVA test has also shown differences according to the type of activity. The entrepreneurs who assess more negatively the costs derived from shutting down are engaged in retail and tourist services.

### **Table 3.**

#### *Evaluation of the decision to shutdown*

In accordance with the academic literature on the economic effects of seasonality and the subjective motivations that may influence the decisions of the entrepreneurs, this paper proposes the analysis of 10 items that represent diverse costs and benefits associated particularly with a temporary shutdown (Table 4). These items are related to the general perception of the benefits and costs associated with a seasonal shutdown. The multiple regression model applied to the data leads to the results presented in Table 4. The F-values

of both regression models suggest that there is a statistically significant relationship between a number of independent variables and each of the impact domains. All the F-values generated showed a significance level lower than 0.05. These results show that the joint group of independent variables explains around a 61% of the variation in the benefits received by the entrepreneurs and around a 51.2% of the costs.

#### **Table 4.**

The details regarding the nature of the relationships between variables and their significance can also be found in Table 4. A significant relationship has been found between the assessment of the benefits associated with a seasonal resting period and the assessment of the increase in the quality of life associated with it ( $b = 0.233$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ). It has also been found a significant relationship between the perception of the benefits of a temporary shutdown and the assessment of the possibility of focusing on a more profitable alternative ( $b = 0.407$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ). However, there are not statistically significant relationships between the assessment of the resting period and both the possibility of implementing improvements in the business, or the effects derived from the resting period on the local community and the environment. From the point of view of the assessment of the costs associated with a shutdown period, this paper has found two statistically significant relationships. Said relationships are focused on the relation with the environment, “economic harm to the destination” ( $b = 0.194$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.004$ ), and “harm to the image of the destination” ( $b = 0.269$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ). Interestingly enough, there is no significant relationship between the costs associated with a temporary shutdown and the loss of revenue of the business, or the employment instability that is generated. Thus, the perception of the damage is more closely associated with the destination itself rather than with the activity. Lo anterior puede asociarse a un sentimiento de responsabilidad social por parte del emprendedor, quien en cierta medida asume los perjuicios asociados al cese de su actividad durante una temporada. Thanks to these relationships, this research has been able to obtain valuable information regarding the elements associated with a resting period that the entrepreneurs consider to be beneficial or detrimental.

Lastly, interviewees were asked to point out which three elements out of all the items they keep into account when deciding to keep their business open during the valley season. The results fall in line with all of the above. The decision to stay open consists of a group of economic and subjective elements, out of which “the possibility to focus on a more profitable activity” (57.10%), “the increase in the quality of the private life” (41.08%), and “the loss of potential profits” (26.44%), are specially noted. It seems that the assessment of the potential loss of benefits is not very high. The interviewees were given the change to point out “Other elements” that play a role in their decision. A 15.2% chose this option, and the majority expressed the influence of fixed costs. This, too, falls in line with the results, given that the revenue during the off-season must make up for the costs. Not any amount of revenue is enough to do so.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

Meter alguna reflexión más sobre los resultados.

Understanding the motivations that lead entrepreneurs to make business decisions is both important and necessary. By doing so, it will be possible to define more effective public policies according to the criteria followed by entrepreneurs when planning their business activity. A particular scenario is that of the temporary shutdowns during the tourist off-season. In this case, profitability criteria may conflict with others relative to subjective decisions and the private life of the entrepreneur. All of this, assuming that remaining open during the off-season is profitable, although to a lesser extent than during the peak season. The results of this study have allowed us to obtain interesting findings. For instance, the fact that entrepreneurs are attracted to the tourist destination -instead of being native to it- emphasize to a larger extent the benefits of a seasonal shutdown. This might be derived from the hypothesis that establishing an economic activity in the destination is, precisely, influenced by improvements in their lifestyle.

The benefits of a seasonal shutdown are associated with improvements in the quality of life, thus contributing as a subjective element to the decision-making process. It is also important when deciding to remain open whether the entrepreneur counts with a complementary activity that provides more profits during the off-season. Therefore, there are both economic and non-economic motivations involved in this process. When assessing costs, entrepreneurs do not assign much importance to the impacts that a seasonal shutdown has on their business, however, they do highlight the effect it has on the destination altogether. This may derive from the general perception that the revenue potentially obtained during the off-season would not make up for the fixed costs in which they incur. Therefore, a direct cost is not noticed to a larger extent, or in other words, said direct cost is put into perspective with other fixed costs. An extra element emphasized as being influential in the decision-making process is the tenure regime of the business, given that the perception of the costs during a seasonal shutdown is subject to the activity being developed in a rented space or a space of their own. Likewise, the type of activity also influences the process, something that can also be tied up to the fixed costs during the off-season.

This study is coherent with previous ones that explored the motivations that drive the behavior of the entrepreneurs, given that the results show how important is the quality of life in decision-making processes. However, in the particular case of the decisions conditioning tourism seasonality, there is a mix of influential variables that includes other economic motives, such as the existence of a secondary activity, the tenure regime of the business or the type of activity. Es importante destacar que el emprendedor destaca los posibles impactos negativos sobre el entorno, derivados de cerrar en una época del año. Esto puede estar asociado a un sentimiento de responsabilidad social, y debería ser analizado en investigaciones adicionales. Ciertamente es que no se puede otorgar al

emprendedor toda la responsabilidad de mejorar la estacionalidad. Las autoridades públicas deben ser conscientes de que determinadas actividades económicas, como el turismo o la agricultura, implican cierto nivel de estacionalidad. Por lo tanto, para limitar el efecto de la estacionalidad sobre la economía de una región se deben proponer políticas que diversifiquen su estructura económica. De forma complementaria es posible mejorar la estacionalidad turística, la bibliografía sobre este tema señala ciertas soluciones, tales como: diversificación de productos y mercados emisores, planificación de eventos, mejora de las infraestructuras, introducción de actividades menos clima-dependientes, etc.

Es importante destacar algunas limitaciones que condiciona a este estudio y que podrían dar continuidad a esta investigación. Por ejemplo, en este trabajo se han analizados algunos factores destacados en la literatura previa como potencialmente influyentes en la toma de decisiones de los emprendedores, pero se deberían ampliar el rango de factores que son analizados, y que pueden tener alguna incidencia en el comportamiento de los emprendedores. Igualmente, partiendo de la idea que da sentido a este trabajo, se recomienda repetir el mismo en otros destinos turísticos a fin de ampliar la muestra de análisis y contrastar las conclusiones. Esto es importante pues este trabajo ha quedado limitado por el número de empresas que potencialmente podían ser encuestadas, en Sierra Nevada el número de empresas no es demasiado elevado y ha sido necesario descartar a aquellas que no pueden operar todo el año. Por último, sería interesante realizar un análisis cluster tal y como el que realizó "Getz and Carlsen (2000), quien clasificó a los emprendedores en "family-first" and "business-first" entrepreneurs", si bien en este caso el análisis se debería focalizar al análisis de su actitud ante la estacionalidad. También sería interesante analizar la variación de precios a lo largo de la temporada, para determinar cómo la cuantía del beneficio puede modelar la actitud del emprendedor. The model could grow stronger if it could take into consideration the tourists perspective on traveling outside the high-peak season, lo que se plantea igualmente como una línea de trabajo a future.

This must be taken into account by the public policies that seek to reduce seasonality. It would be interesting to compare the conclusions drawn from this study with those obtained in different destinations to then perform an analysis by type of destinations and degree of dependence on tourism. Mejorar las implicaciones de política pública.

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## Tables.

**Table 1. Variables**

Location	Local Tenure Regime	Origin	Type of season	Gender	Invoicing volume
Age	Developing a secondary activity	Level of education	Type of activity	Benefits of closing outside the peak season	Costs of closing outside the peak season

**Table 2. Profile of the entrepreneurs interviewed.**

	Number	Percentage (%)		Number	Percentage (%)
<b>Location</b>			<b>Local Tenure Regime</b>		
Entrepreneurs in the Costa del Sol	121	74.69%	Ownership	67	41.36%
Entrepreneurs in Sierra Nevada	41	25.31%	Rented	95	58.64%
<b>Origin</b>			<b>Type of season</b>		
Environment of the destination	63	38.89%	Closing outside the peak season	87	53.70%
Other locations	99	61.11%	Continuous season	75	46.30%
<b>Gender</b>			<b>Invoicing volume</b>		
Male	101	62.35%	< €250,000	77	47.53%
Female	61	37.65%	250.000 € - 500.000 €	50	30.86%
<b>Age</b>			> € 500,000	34	20.99%
< 35 years old	58	35.80%	<b>Developing a secondary activity</b>		
36-50	87	53.70%	Yes	98	60.49%
> 50 years old	17	10.49%	No	64	39.51%
<b>Level of education</b>			<b>Type of activity</b>		
Primary education	44	27.16%	Restaurants/bars	45	27.78%
Secondary education	61	37.65%	Accommodations	21	12.96%
Higher education	57	35.19%	Diverse businesses	54	33.33%
			Tourist Services activities	42	25.93%

Source: the authors.

**Table 3. Average of the answers to the benefits and costs derived from a shutdown period organized by the characteristics of the entrepreneur and the activity.**

	Benefits of closing outside the peak season					Costs of closing outside the peak season				
	N	Mean	Std D.	Test statistic	P-value	N	Mean	Std D.	Test statistic	P-value
<b>Location</b>										
Entrepreneurs in the Costa del Sol	121	3.49	0.49	t-test 0.51	0,610	121	4.23	1,111	t-test 4,233	0,001*
Entrepreneurs in Sierra Nevada	41	3.51	0.51			41	3.47	0,677		
<b>Origin</b>										
Location of the destination	63	3.12	0.51	t-test 4,051	0,000*	63	4.33	1,147	t-test 4,121	0,000*
Other locations	99	4.46	0.44			99	4.01	1,001		
<b>Gender</b>										
Male	101	4.12	0,811	t-test 0,740	0,462	101	4.12	0.41	t-test 1,059	0,057
Female	60	4.08	1.29			61	4.19	0.98		
<b>Age</b>										
< 35 years old	55	4.49	1.10	ANOVA 6,011	0,064	58	4.11	1.11	ANOVA 2,331	0,081
36-50	87	3.97	1.19			87	4.21	1.21		
> 50 years old	17	3.33	1.00			17	4.02	1.31		
<b>Level of education</b>										
Primary education	44	3.82	0.48	ANOVA 2,441	0,879	44	4.21	0.49	ANOVA 2,211	0,079
Secondary education	61	4.48	0.45			61	4.01	0.71		
Higher education	57	4.01	0.51			57	4.09	0.56		
<b>Local Tenure Regime</b>										
Ownership	67	4.44	0,781	t-test 4,264	0,000*	67	3.87	0,787	t-test 3,947	0,000*
Rented	95	3.91	0,994			95	4.34	1.26		
<b>Invoicing volume</b>										
< €250,000	77	4.12	1.21	ANOVA 2,731	0,065	77	3.77	1.27	ANOVA 2.661	0,059
250.000 € - 500.000 €	50	3.74	1.34			50	4.32	1.35		
> € 500,000	34	4.31	1.36			34	3.97	1.34		
<b>Developing a secondary activity</b>										
Yes	64	4.44	0,711	t-test 3.71	0,000*	64	3.85	1,010	t-test 4,210	0,001*
No	98	3.26	1.11			98	4.41	0,711		
<b>Type of activity</b>										
Restaurants/bars	45	4.01	0.47	ANOVA 2,211	0.0792	45	3.98	0.51	ANOVA 8.77	0,000*
Accommodations	21	4.10	0.55			21	3.74	0.47		
Diverse businesses	54	3.78	0.48			54	4.32	0.60		
Tourist Services activities	42	4.31	0.53			42	4.37	0.54		

Source: the authors. \*  $p < 0.05$ .

**Table 4. Regression analysis of the factors influencing the perception of benefits and costs associated with a seasonal shutdown.**

Variables	B	Std. Error	Std. Beta	t-ratio	Sig.
<b>Benefits of closing outside the peak season</b>					
Constant	1.148	0.189		5.486	0.000
Increase in the quality of the private life	0.233	0.025	0.382	9.488	0.000*
Possibility of implementing improvements in the business	0.017	0.022	0.023	0.814	0.441
Possibility of taking part in a more profitable alternative	0.407	0.043	0.379	9.211	0.000*
Environmental recovery of the destination	0.008	0.111	0.017	0.845	0.494
Resting period for the local community	0.044	0.017	0.076	2.444	0.211
Model summary: $r^2 = 0.612$ , $F$ -value = 78.48, Sig. = 0.000					
<b>Costs of closing outside the peak season</b>					
Constant	6.101	0.664		9.121	0.000
Loss of potential profits	0.017	0.222	0.022	0.853	0.394
Economic harm to the destination	0.194	0.071	0.096	2.718	0.004*
Harm to the image of the destination	0.269	0.034	0.271	7.689	0.000*
Increase in employment instability	0.006	0.019	0.018	0.0688	0.497
Difficulty to find stable staff	0.004	0.014	0.017	0.0594	0.331
Model summary: $r^2 = 0.512$ , $F$ -value = 61.12, Sig. = 0.000					

Source: the authors. \*  $p < 0.05$ .