

## **Tourism as the development driver of Easter Island: the key role of resident perceptions**

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**ABSTRACT:** Residents' attitudes concerning tourism evolution and impacts in tourism host localities are a crucial determinant of the ability of the tourism sector to develop. Easter Island has recently experienced a tremendous tourism growth, which has nurtured expectations that the tourist sector could become the economic driver of the island. Using fieldwork, interviews and surveys, we investigate residents' perceptions towards tourism and analyse their implications for the sector's future development. The survey results show that 96% of residents believe that tourism is important or very important for the island's economy. We conclude that while residents of Easter Island are aware of tourism's negative impacts, they support the tourism sector, because they recognize it as the main future driver of the island's economy. However, due to the current environmental threats and the serious governance problems of the island, it is not clear if further expansion of the tourism sector will be sustainable.

*Keywords:* development, tourism, Easter Island, residents' perceptions, sustainability, governance

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### **Introduction**

Islands are relatively closed and bounded ecosystems, whose typical characteristics, such as small size, remoteness, and isolation, add extra strain on their development process. These characteristics are not generally consistent with the principles of economic attractiveness according to the current prevailing economic development model, which is based on economies of scale, low transport costs, and availability of human capital and natural resources. More particularly, small islands: a) cannot enjoy the benefits of economies of scale since they have limited natural resources; b) do not have good accessibility and transport costs are high; c) cannot profit from agglomeration externalities since they have a small population and few economic activities; and d) are characterized by low level of infrastructure and services offered to businesses and population (ESPON, 2009).

Consequently, many islands cannot compete for the same products and services in the worldwide economy, usually leaving tourism as the main default option for their economic development and prosperity. Especially in cases where islands cannot rely on natural resources, a large emigrated population that sends back remittances, or financial aid, tourism becomes the main option of choice in an effort to redress the perceived disadvantages that such islands experience in relation to other larger and non-island regions.

Easter Island (Rapa Nui, or Isla de Pascua) falls into this ‘development-through-tourism’ model. During the last decade, the tourism industry on this Chilean island has experienced a tremendous growth, with tourist numbers reaching 65,064 people in 2014 from only 17,305 in 2002 (CONAF, 2015). Research indicates that tourism is indeed the main economic sector on the island and that most residents work in the tourism sector (Azócar & O’Ryan, 2011; Ecopolis, 2010; Perez & Rodriguez, 2011). Tourism has led to the development of infrastructure, and health and education services, and has resulted in an overall improvement in the quality of life of the population (Figueroa et al., 2013).

On the other hand, rapid tourism growth has also created population pressure, stemming from the increase in permanent residents but also temporary workers<sup>1</sup> – primarily from mainland Chile – employed in the tourism sector. This situation has created conflict between the rapanui and the non-rapanui population, which mostly takes the form of protests from the side of the rapanui against the Chilean government: for instance, a series of demonstrations and closing off of archaeological sites and the airport have occurred in recent years with the rapanui making demands regarding the management of the Rapa Nui National Park, the under-discussion immigration law or the island’s self-determination. Moreover, the largely disorganized tourism development has exacerbated a series of environmental issues related to solid waste disposal, wastewater management, biodiversity, and air and water quality (Figueroa & Rotarou, 2013), which have been identified long ago as critical factors for the sustainable tourism of the island (di Castri, 1999).

This paper investigates the tourism industry in Easter Island with a particular focus on the residents’ attitudes and views concerning tourism development. Overall, while residents recognize the tremendous importance that tourism has for the local economy and society, they also acknowledge a series of problems that tourism has brought and which need to be dealt with immediately, before they cause a deterioration in living standards and decline in tourist numbers. Moreover, the lack of an effective management of tourism development in the island is a sign of the underdevelopment of an appropriate decision-making structure regarding resource use on Easter Island.

The next section reviews the literature on the relationship between tourism, development, and perceptions of local populations. Section 3 presents the methodology and data used in our research, while Section 4 provides data on Easter Island’s tourism industry and residents’ attitudes with regards to tourism, tourism development, and its impacts. The last sections present our suggestions for ensuring the sustainability of the tourism sector, a short comparison between Easter Island and the Galápagos, and our conclusions and final comments.

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<sup>1</sup> One reason for the tensions between local residents and temporary workers is that some of the latter seek to become permanent residents later on, a tactic often resisted by the locals. The origins for such a resentment range from local concern about the protection of their culture, to the prejudice of some against ‘foreigners’.

## **Literature review: tourism, development, and resident perceptions**

For many communities, tourism is considered as a very important tool for promoting local jobs (Besculides et al., 2002; Mitchell & Reid, 2001), creating new employment opportunities – especially for women – (Johnson et al., 1994; Mason & Cheyne, 2000) and raising living standards (Akis et al., 1996; Ryan & Montgomery, 1994). Empirical studies have shown that tourism is a driver of economic growth in developing (low and medium income) countries (Eugenio-Martin et al., 2004), and that sustainable tourism promotes economic growth (Freytag & Vietze, 2013). Moreover, tourism can support infrastructure development, protection of natural and cultural resources, and training and transfer of technology, management and technical skills (Cole, 2006; Hall & Brown, 2006).

On the other hand, tourism can cause negative impacts as well. The negative effects can be economic (increase in prices, infrastructure costs, economic leakages, seasonality), socio-cultural (loss of authenticity, cultural exploitation, crime, social tension) and environmental (land and biodiversity degradation, air, water and noise pollution, deforestation, waste and sewage problems) (Berno & Bricher, 2001; Dogan, 1989; Gerosa, 2003; Krippendorf, 1987; Mowforth & Munt, 1998).

Research has underlined that, to a large extent, sustainable tourism development depends on the support and acceptance of the host community (Choi & Murray, 2010; Dyer et al., 2007; Garau-Vadell et al., 2013). This is particularly true in the case of islands, which are characterized by fragile ecosystems and limited size, since the increased interaction between tourists and residents can reveal more easily any negative impacts caused by tourism development (Garau-Vadell et al., 2013). According to Ap (1992, p. 669),

... residents evaluate tourism in terms of social exchange, that is, evaluate it in terms of expected benefits or costs obtained in return for the services they supply. Hence, it is assumed that host resident actors seek tourism development for their community in order to satisfy their economic, social, and psychological needs and to improve the community's well-being.

Past research has tended to focus on the factors that are likely to influence residents' perception towards tourism, analysing both dependent variables (the factors that directly depend on tourism) and independent variables (the factors that are independent of tourism and may or may not affect residents' perception) (Brida et al., 2011). Such factors include: the development stage of a destination (Belisle & Hoy, 1980; Diedrich & García-Buades, 2008), seasonality (Murphy, 1985; Rothman, 1978); various demographic variables, such as gender, language, and marital status (Liu & Var, 1986; Madrigal, 1995; Petrzalka et al., 2005); level of participation and access to recreational facilities (Gursoy et al., 2002; O'Leary, 1976); personal reliance on tourism (Haley et al., 2005; Pizam, 1978); proximity to tourism centres (Belisle & Hoy, 1980; Sheldon & Var, 1984); length of residence (Lankford, 1994; Pearce, 1980); knowledge about tourism (Andereck et al., 2005) and tourism density (Pizam, 1978).

One main theory used to explain the relationship between tourism development in an area and host community's reactions has been Butler's (1980) tourism area life cycle (TALC) model. The TALC model encompasses five stages of the evolution of a tourist destination: involvement, exploration, development, consolidation, and stagnation. Butler proposes that, while most residents tend to start by viewing the increase in tourist numbers positively, later

on their attitude changes since they become aware how their daily life is affected. Various researchers followed this model to analyse tourism development in a region and to gauge host community reactions (Diedrich & García-Buades, 2008; Hovinen, 2002; McElroy, 2006; Moss et al., 2003; Upchurch & Teivane, 2000).

Ap and Crompton (1993) proposed another model that is currently widely used to explain how residents vary their attitudes and how their reactions can change. This model incorporates a four-stages/strategies continuum of tourism development and residents' reactions. First, residents accept tourists eagerly (acceptance); second, they show tolerance as they start to recognize both positive and negative impacts of tourism (tolerance); third, residents adjust as they try to avoid tourist crowds in order to perform their daily activities (adjustment); and fourth, they withdraw and move away temporarily in order to escape from tourists (withdrawal). According to Ap and Crompton's (1993) model, residents' reactions depend on tourist numbers and behaviour, and not so much on the cultural gap.

Another major theory concerning residents' attitudes toward tourism and tourism impacts is the social exchange theory (SET) (Andereck et al., 2005; Ap, 1992; Gursoy et al., 2002; Vargas-Sánchez et al., 2011). This theory states that residents compare the costs and benefits of tourism development and they support tourism depending on the outcome of their cost-benefit equation (Pearce et al., 1996). This implies that host communities will tend to support tourism, as long as they observe benefits for their well-being; in this context, there will be groups supporting tourism development since they will gain from this relationship, whereas other groups will be opposing tourism since they will reap no benefits and may even be harmed by it (Garau-Vadell et al., 2013).

Since the sustainable future of the tourism industry is closely related to residents' acceptance, many studies have been concluded on this relationship in the last decade, especially due to the concern of governments and local businesses that many communities will start opposing further tourism development (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004; Lee & Back, 2006; Zhang & Lei, 2012). In order to avoid this scenario, it is imperative that residents support the tourism sector and that all stakeholders involved collaborate closely with each other (Garau-Vadell et al., 2013). Therefore, residents' collective action and behaviour are crucial elements in ensuring the success and sustainability of tourism, and rely heavily on communities' support for tourism and their experience with tourists (Hwang et al., 2014).

## **Methodology**

This paper relies on both primary and secondary sources regarding Easter Island's tourism industry, and its positive and negative impacts. Besides information acquired from existing studies and research on Easter Island, we use data obtained from two research trips, undertaken in September and December 2012. During both trips, the research team, composed of the two authors of this paper and three of their graduate students at the Department of Economics of the University of Chile, carried out interviews with local actors, such as local development agencies, the Chamber of Tourism, the provincial government of Easter Island, tourism agencies, and various environmental departments. During the second trip, the team also applied surveys to tourists and residents with the purpose of obtaining first-hand information regarding the challenges that Easter Island faces today. In total, a number of 171 surveys were carried out: 99 for residents and 72 for tourists. The sample population was

selected through simple random sampling and is presented in [Table 1](#).<sup>2</sup> The surveys were face-to-face, lasted for about ten to fifteen minutes each, and included five or seven-point Likert-type questions, as well as a few open-ended questions.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 1: Population sample characteristics (residents) (N = 99).**

Characteristic		%	%	%
<b>Gender</b>				
	Male	39.4		
	Female	60.6		
<b>Age</b>				
		<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
	19-25	3.0	8.1	11.1
	26-35	11.1	24.2	35.3
	36-50	8.1	17.2	25.3
	51-65	12.1	8.1	20.2
	66+	5.1	3.0	8.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>39.4</b>	<b>60.6</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Nationality</b>				
	Chilean	98.0		
	Foreigner	2.0		
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
	Rapanui	55.6		
	Chilean	39.4		
	Foreigner	2.0		
	Mixed	3.0		

*Notes:* Ethnicity was self-reported in every case . Chilean = Chileans from mainland Chile; Mixed = This category includes people with one parent rapanui and the other non-rapanui. *Source:* Own elaboration.

This paper is part of a larger investigation, looking at the current socio-economic situation on Easter Island, the central role that tourism plays in the local economy, and present and future challenges related to the island's sustainability. As a result, during our research trips we mostly focused on the interviews and meetings we undertook with various public and private organizations on the island. Due to time and budget constraints, as well as the small size of the research team, we were not able to perform more surveys; hence the small sample size. However, the results of the surveys back up the information we received during the interviews with local actors together with field observations.

Finally, note that available socio-economic information on Easter Island is scarce, often incomplete or even erroneous. While more data is available regarding tourism than any

<sup>2</sup> This paper focuses on resident attitudes towards tourism development; thus, only the sample population for residents is presented.

<sup>3</sup> The ethnicity of the interviewer may influence the answers of respondents (Anderson et al., 1988; Van Heelsun, 2013; Van't Land, 2000). As explained before, the team of researchers that carried out the interviews and surveys on Easter Island consisted of the two authors of this paper and three graduate students, four (mainland) Chileans and one Greek, all non-rapanui. However, assessing whether or not any eventual bias did exist in this specific case, and attempting to reduce such a bias if it did exist, would had been very difficult, as recent literature shows (e.g., Gaertner and Dovidio, 2012), and it would had also been a task far beyond the scope of this work.

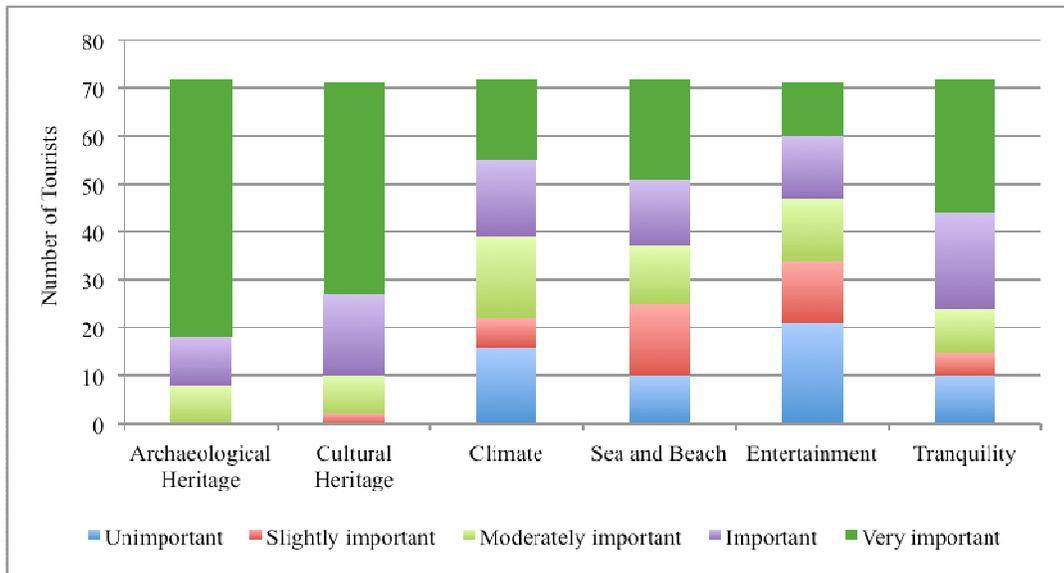


2012 ranged between US\$ 46-90 million; the annual income per capita was in the range of US\$ 8,000 to 15,500 (Figueroa et al., 2013).

Easter Island as a tourist destination faces several handicaps that add extra strain and involve higher costs for the management of natural or anthropogenic impacts. The main obstacles include its isolation and insularity, logistical difficulties, low local supply of products, and often low quality of services. This leads to most products – from cars to supermarket produce – being imported primarily from mainland Chile, and thus raising the prices of the products and services offered on the island. The tourist questionnaires that we undertook revealed that 64% of tourists think that the island is expensive or very expensive, while 25% believe it is neither expensive nor cheap; tourists though justified higher prices because most products had to be imported. Overall, 89% of tourists questioned declared that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the services that the island offers.

The survey questionnaire applied to foreign and Chilean tourists in the island showed that the three most important reasons for visiting Easter Island were the archaeological heritage (78% among foreigners and 69% among Chileans), cultural heritage (52% among foreigners and 73% among Chileans), and tranquillity (24% among foreigners and 65% among Chileans) (see [Figure 2](#)).

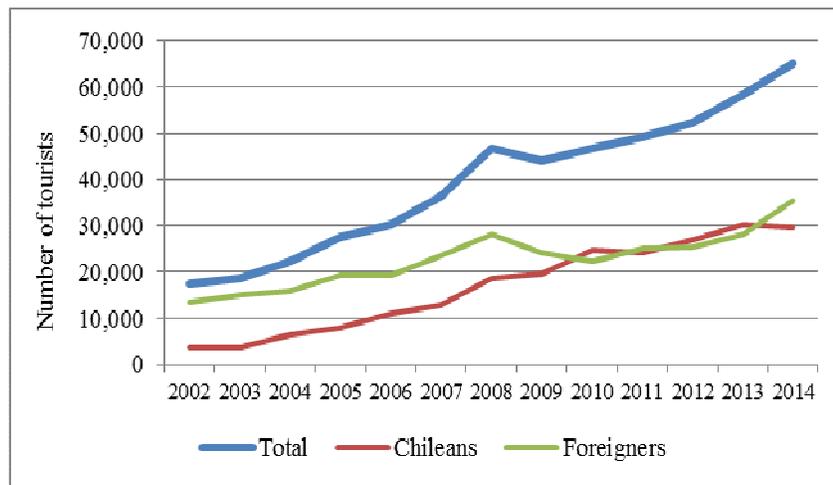
**Figure 2: Tourists’ main reasons for visiting Easter Island.**



Source: Figueroa et al. (2013).

The calculation of tourist arrivals to Easter Island is a complex task; the challenge lies in the existence of various sources providing different estimations. One such source is the National Forest Corporation (CONAF), the public agency that registers visitors to the Rapa Nui National Park. As seen in [Figure 3](#), there were 65,064 visitors to the National Park in 2014, of whom 35,330 were foreigners and 29,734 were Chileans (CONAF, 2015). The figure also reveals the dip in foreign visitors during the 2008-2010 period, probably provoked by the global economic crisis initiated in 2008; Chilean visitors, on the other hand, have been increasing, and apparently have not been affected by the crisis.

**Figure 3: Tourist arrivals to Easter Island, 2002-2014.**



Source: Own elaboration, with data from CONAF (2015) and INE (2003, 2004).

In 2013, out of the foreign tourists to the Rapa Nui National Park, 15.9% came from the United States, 11.7% from France, and 9.3% from Brazil (INE-SERNATUR, 2014). Tourism in Easter Island has a highly seasonal character: most Chileans visit Easter Island during July – September (winter in the southern hemisphere), while foreigners prefer the period November – February (winter in the northern hemisphere).<sup>4</sup>

Although the vast majority of tourists do go to the Rapa Nui National Park and the figures provided above by CONAF are a relatively close approximation, it is considered that they are an underestimation of the total number of tourists on the island. Other sources provide different numbers.<sup>5</sup> This lack of exact information on tourist arrivals hinders current assessment or projections of future tourist numbers. Nevertheless, an estimate by Figueroa et al. (2013) suggests that, taking into account the current growth in tourist numbers, by 2020 tourist arrivals are expected to range from 92,000 to 118,000; by 2030, this range could be between 168,000 and 215,000 tourists.

#### *Resident perceptions about tourism in Easter Island*

Regarding the three most important reasons that tourists come to Easter Island according to the residents, the vast majority (96%) answered that it was because of the archaeological heritage,

<sup>4</sup> February, followed closely by January and November, is the month that shows the largest arrival of foreign tourists to Easter Island (Figueroa and Rotarou, 2013). This is partly explained by the ‘Tapati Rapanui’ (or week of Rapa Nui) festivity, which is the most important cultural event of the island.

<sup>5</sup> SERNATUR (National Tourism Services) and INE (National Institute of Statistics) provide information on tourists residing at various accommodation facilities. They recorded only 40,213 tourists in 2012 (INE-SERNATUR, 2013). However, 52,202 tourists are reported to have entered the National Park that year. There are also figures provided by the Civil Aviation Board (JAC) regarding arrivals at Mataverí Airport on Easter Island. JAC reported that, in 2013, there were a total of 76,121 arrivals to Easter Island from Santiago, 1,772 from Lima, Peru, and 3,437 arrivals from Papeete, Tahiti; these figures do not distinguish between tourists, residents, and travellers on business. Furthermore, an increasing number of tourists arrive to Easter Island via cruise ship; in 2013, 6,640 tourists visited the island in this way (INE-SERNATUR, 2014).

90% the cultural heritage, and 62% because of the tranquillity.<sup>6</sup> The importance of tourism for the island was recognized by 96% of the resident respondents, who replied that tourism is important or very important for Easter Island. These results reflect similar larger-scale research regarding tourism's role in Easter Island (e.g., Ecopolis, 2010).

On the other hand, opinions as to whether the island has been properly organized and prepared for the massive increase in tourism in the last few years were more spread out. In fact, 26% of the resident interviewed believed that tourism has been organized poorly or very poorly, 27% neither poorly nor well, 32% that it has been done well, and 14% that tourism has been organized very well or in an excellent manner. Some of the negative comments regarding tourism organization in Easter Island included the following: “only large businesses are prepared and get most rewards”, “there is an explosive growth of tourism without first taking care of electricity, water, etc.”, “quality of tourism services need to increase”, and “tourism is becoming massive without any proper planning”.

During our interviews with staff employed or involved in the tourism sector, most declared that tourism development has been a vastly individualistic process, disorganized, and without a proper management plan. As a result, the gains from tourism have not been evenly distributed, with major hotel owners or tour operators reaping most profits, especially in the case of inclusive packages, where tourists do not really bring benefits to a larger segment of the local population.

Table 2 presents the perceived main tourism impacts in Easter Island and the importance assigned to them by the residents interviewed. As can be seen, the main problems caused by tourism, according to residents, are car vehicle increase and congestion (96%), waste increase (88%), environmental impacts (72%), water contamination (69%), and sewage increase (66%).

**Table 2: Tourism impacts and their importance (by %).**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4 + 5</b>
Noise	44.44	10.10	9.09	24.24	12.12	36.36
Destruction of flora and fauna	36.36	19.19	10.10	18.18	16.16	34.34
Waste increase	4.04	5.05	3.03	27.27	60.61	<b>87.88</b>
Water contamination	15.31	12.24	3.06	38.78	30.61	<b>69.39</b>
Sewage increase	19.79	8.33	6.25	35.42	30.21	<b>65.63</b>
Increase in nightlife	29.59	8.16	18.37	18.37	25.51	43.88
Vehicular increase and congestion	3.06	1.02	0.00	13.27	82.65	<b>95.92</b>
Loss of security (violence, theft, etc.)	43.30	11.34	8.25	22.68	14.43	37.11
Loss of rapanui identity	35.05	2.06	8.25	37.11	17.53	54.64
Environmental impacts	2.02	17.17	9.09	49.49	22.22	<b>71.71</b>

*Note:* Grade 1 means ‘insignificant’ while grade 5 means ‘very significant’. The areas shaded in grey indicate the most problematic issues that have received a high percentage of 4 and 5 scores.

<sup>6</sup> As already mentioned, the tourists interviewed confirmed that these three reasons were the most important motives for visiting Easter Island (see Figure 2).

Table 3 presents a list of problems often faced by modern island communities. The residents interviewed were asked to respond about the severity of these problems, taking into account the island's recent development (i.e. these problems were not necessarily attributed to tourism increase). As can be observed, the most serious problems that the interviewees identified were vehicular congestion (93%), population increase (92%), waste management issues (83%), sewage management issues (79%), and electricity service problems (77%).

**Table 3: Contemporary island problems faced by Easter Island residents (by %).**

Grade	1	2	3	4	5	4 + 5
Population increase	4.04	1.01	3.03	38.38	53.54	<b>91.92</b>
Electricity service	4.04	8.08	11.11	31.31	45.45	<b>76.76</b>
Vehicular congestion	0.00	3.03	4.04	30.30	62.63	<b>92.93</b>
Waste management	5.05	7.07	5.05	24.24	58.59	<b>82.83</b>
Sewage management	8.08	4.04	9.09	30.30	48.48	<b>78.78</b>
Urban infrastructure	14.43	13.40	15.46	29.90	26.80	56.70
Potable water service	24.24	16.16	13.13	29.29	17.17	46.46

Note: Grade 1 means 'insignificant' while grade 5 means 'very significant'. The areas shaded in grey indicate the most problematic issues that have received a high percentage of 4 and 5 scores.

Concerning who should invest in order to solve the island's major problems, 78% of the non-rapanui people and 84% of the rapanui interviewed answered that the main investor should be the central Chilean government. Regarding other investors who should participate in the problem-solving process, 71% of the rapanui interviewed mentioned the tourism sector itself, 67% the community, and 58% the business sector; the percentages for the non-rapanui interviewed were 63%, 71%, and 56% respectively. These figures show no significant differences between rapanui and non-rapanui residents' answers, in spite of such an expectation, given the different attitudes that these two groups have, especially about the Chilean government's role in the island's development.<sup>7</sup>

Ethnic rapanui are particularly concerned about the increase in the non-rapanui population (i.e. mostly Chileans from the mainland that arrive as temporary workers but then decide to stay permanently), since they argue that there is a process of the island's 'Chileanization' where values, food, family structures, language and image are changing from Polynesian to Chilean patterns. They feel marginalized and abandoned by the Chilean state despite the importance assigned to Easter Island by the Chilean government. As a result, they often express negative views about non-rapanui residents. Continental Chileans are very aware of these views and the antipathy of the locals, and in turn many of them see the rapanui as 'underdeveloped' and living at the expense of Chile. This is another case of outsiders being seen as 'invaders' and natives as 'primitives' (Grenier, 2002).

Due to the vast increase in population and tourist numbers, a special immigration law is currently under discussion by the Chilean parliament, in order to address the rapanui

<sup>7</sup> An explanation of this fact could be that the existing perception regarding the differences in the attitudes of rapanui and non-rapanui groups of residents may be highly influenced by the public demonstrations and press releases of the first group. The latter could reflect more an instrumental tactic of this group of Rapanui residents to pressure the Chilean government and other stakeholder groups than the real underlying attitudes of its members.

concerns regarding the negative economic, social, and environmental impacts of population and tourism growth.<sup>8</sup> It should be noted though that, according to our surveys and interviews or informal discussions with local residents, their main issue lies with mainland Chileans or foreigners who decide to remain permanently on the island, and not so much with the increase in tourist numbers. In fact, 61% of those interviewed believed that tourism in Easter Island should increase because it is the main source of employment and income, while 82% believed that the overall impact that tourism has on the island is positive, very positive or excellent. Residents recognize though that tourism needs to be more sustainable, more selective, respect the island's carrying capacity,<sup>9</sup> while tourism-related businesses need to offer better-quality services.

#### *Assuring sustainability of the tourism sector in Easter Island*

As is evident from the previous sections, the challenge that Easter Island faces in order to transform its dynamic tourism sector into the driver of its future sustainable development is to provide solutions to the various economic, social, and environmental impacts that the rapid growth of the sector has created. These impacts have been noticed by the island's inhabitants, who are therefore changing their attitudes in positive *and* negative directions. Such behaviour changes could impact on the further development of the sector. This latter fact points to the necessity of establishing an effective system for the management of the island's environment and ecosystem which implies, in turn, the need to address the lack of social capital and adequate institutions in order to provide the island with effective governance.

Easter Island has been cited as the best illustration of a permanent 'decision-making crisis' (di Castri, 1999). This is due to several facts: different groups of local people are constantly fighting each other<sup>10</sup>; Chilean officials and representatives of the national government in the island are viewed suspiciously by the local residents; and, the islanders' aspirations are often in conflict with the Chilean government's policies (di Castri, 2002). It is therefore evident that promoting sustainable tourism on Easter Island depends to a large degree on the level of partnership between the various stakeholders. Tourism development and sustainability on Easter Island cannot depend solely on the public sector, but needs to focus on community cooperation and the participation of different groups (Andriotis, 2001; Painter, 1992; Simmons, 1994; Timothy, 1998; Tosun, 2000).

And yet, cooperation in the tourism industry in Easter Island appears elusive (Figueroa et al., 2013). The relevant stakeholders – local, regional, and national – that ought to be involved in any institutional arrangement providing adequate governance to the island's

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<sup>8</sup> The main measures proposed in the immigration law include: a) reduction of the period of staying for tourists – including Chileans – of up to 30 days, or 90 days but only if they are related to permanent residents; b) a US\$ 100 entrance fee for tourists, which will increase depending on the duration of stay on the island; and, c) special provisions for temporary workers, who are obliged to leave the island as soon as their contract is over (Ministry of Interior and Public Safety, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> The last report on the carrying capacity of Easter Island – undertaken fifteen years ago – concluded that, while carrying capacity had not been exceeded, it was critical for local authorities to solve problems related to public services, such as solid waste management, water sewage and potable water, and electricity, due to the increasing growth in tourist numbers (AMBAR, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> Piergentili (2011) indicates that the sociopolitical actors of Easter Island are very diverse and heterogeneous, which partially explains the difficulties the Chilean government finds in reaching agreements. See also de la Croix and Dottori (2008) for a theoretical model in which non-cooperative bargaining between clans to share the crop offers an alternative explanation of Easter Island's historic collapse.

resources have a conflicting relationship characterized by lack of trust and which has culminated in recent years in a series of demonstrations and violent protests on the island.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the lack of collective action further exacerbates the current sustainability issues and hinders future common action due to the absence of effective governance on the island. According to Delaune (2012), local reality is often a struggle to balance the policies of the Chilean government to the demands and needs of local clan leaders, a situation that often reveals conflicts of interests and different viewpoints.

As a result, it is quite difficult to establish a socially agreed system in Easter Island that will manage the problems threatening the island's future sustainability. Therefore, even though the current perceptions and attitudes of the local community with respect to the fast growth of the tourism sector in the last decade could apparently lead to the materialization of this sector's promising perspectives for the future economic development of Easter Island, nothing guarantees that this will effectively occur. If the existing sustainability challenges are not met, the island's attractiveness is bound to fall, due to degradation of quality of services and tourist experience, rise of health-related threats, increase in mass tourism lacking environmental and cultural responsibility, or maintenance and escalation of conflicts either among the rapanui themselves or between the rapanui and the national government (Azócar & O'Ryan, 2011). In fact, the threats to the future sustainability of the tourism sector on the island are so relevant and urgent that they could turn the continuous unwise growth of tourism into the cause of another collapse of Easter Island's ecosystem and society.

#### *Easter Island and the Galápagos Islands: a comparison*

Easter Island and Galápagos Islands are two of the most iconic representatives of insular tourism in the world due to their natural and archaeological richness. Both have and are experiencing an accelerated process of development mainly driven by their tourism sectors with all its positive and negative consequences. Thus, it is interesting to look at their current experiences jointly and to highlight some of their similarities and differences.

The Galápagos Islands – the basis for Darwin's theory of natural selection – are a group of islands situated 906 km west of continental Ecuador, of which they are part. While the first settlers started arriving to the islands at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was only during the last few decades that the Galápagos have experienced a significant increase in its population on account of flourishing tourism, fisheries, and commerce. Thus, the population increased from roughly 3,000 people to about 30,000 in 2012 (WWF, n.d.). By comparison, the population of Easter Island has not increased to such an extent. There were roughly 2,000 people in 1982; by 2012, the population had reached a little less than 6,000 people (INE, 2012). Of course, Easter Island is also much smaller, only 163 km<sup>2</sup>, whereas the Galápagos have a total land area of 8,010 km<sup>2</sup>; however, only 3.3% of this area, i.e. 236.5 km<sup>2</sup> is reserved for human settlements on four islands (Epler, 2007).

While they are famous each in its own right – the Galápagos for its amazing biodiversity and Easter Island for its archaeological heritage – they face similar socioeconomic

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<sup>11</sup> In September 2008, Chile ratified Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on Indigenous People. This agreement establishes the rights of indigenous people to prior consultation and participation regarding decisions that may affect their community (Azócar & O'Ryan, 2011). Legally, this implies that the national government cannot take any action that affects the life of the rapanui community without consulting the rapanui first.

and environmental problems. During the last fifteen years, they have experienced drastic economic, social, cultural, and ecological changes. The most pressing problems include: uncontrolled increase of tourism visitations; increasing invasion by introduced animal and plant species (Donlan et al., 2011); overfishing and destruction of habitats; increase in immigration, due to growth in tourism; increase in pollution; limited healthcare and education opportunities for locals; increase in waste, with little or no treatment or separation of waste; increase in traffic congestion and noise pollution; and intensification of sewage problems (Epler, 2007; Figueroa & Rotarou, 2013; IGTOA, no year).<sup>12</sup>

Both places have benefitted tremendously from tourism that forms the largest source of employment and has helped to improve local living standards. In the Galápagos, tourists arrivals reached 216,000 in 2014 – more than triple the number of tourists in Easter Island – from only 17,500 tourists in 1980 (Galapagos Park, 2014; Parque Nacional Galápagos, 2015). In the case of the Galápagos though, tourism seems to have become *too* successful: despite high prices and the introduction of a US\$100 entrance fee to the National Park to foreign tourists, tourism has not declined. On the contrary, the building of a third airport, the start of the arrival of cruise ships in 2007, and the invasion of mainland Ecuadorians have increased the socioeconomic and environmental problems of the archipelago (Baldacchino, 2010).

In order to promote the sustainable development of Easter Island and the Galápagos, it is important to reach consensus and ensure open debate among state institutions, civil society, and local and international organizations. Furthermore, specific interventions in certain areas are needed, including education, health, biodiversity conservation, waste management, so as to be able to address the dynamics of a society that is increasing in numbers and thus, places greater demands on its natural resources (Matoko & Castillo, 2008). However, while Easter Island and the Galápagos share many characteristics – both are remote islands with a sensitive ecosystem, that are facing sustainability issues due to large increase in tourist numbers and permanent residents – they also have one big difference: the Galápagos Islands do not have an indigenous population; the largest ethnic group is composed of Ecuadorians mestizos. The existence of an indigenous population – like in the case of the rapanui on Easter Island – adds an extra strain on the already difficult problem of governance.

On the one hand, governance is complicated on the Galápagos due to the existence of many institutions – such as the Galápagos National Park Service, municipal government, the Navy, Governing Council – that have decision-making powers; their interaction is highly complex and has been blamed for the current chaotic development of the islands (UNESCO, 2010). On the other hand, governance is even more complex on Easter Island, where besides the many stakeholders involved – such as the Municipality, Chamber of Commerce, LAN airlines, and Tourist Guides Association – various rapanui organizations, for example, the National Corporation for Indigenous Development and the Council of Elders of Rapa Nui, are also involved in the decision-taking process, bringing to the table issues such as the island's

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<sup>12</sup> In 1998 a Special Law for the Galápagos was introduced addressing three big issues: immigration restriction, quarantine of introduced organisms, and fisheries. Unfortunately, this Law has not been properly implemented and enforced, due to various loopholes (IGTOA, no year). Additionally, in 2012 the Galápagos National Park introduced new regulations aimed at protecting the fragile ecosystems of the islands, that included for example, limiting visits to some sights, allowing travellers to stay for a maximum of four nights and five days per ship, and improving physical and staff infrastructure. A US\$100 entrance fee on foreign tourists entering the National Park was also introduced (a similar measure is contemplated in the Immigration Law for Easter Island, which is currently under discussion); however, the park receives only 25% of that (Galapagos Islands, 2011).

autonomy or even independence. Despite recent progress, the relationship between the rapanui community and the Chilean government continues to remain strained, characterized generally by little cooperation (Figueroa et al., 2013).

Besides the additional pressure that the existence of an indigenous population adds, another significant difference between the two places also lies in the visions that residents, local authorities, and the government have of the islands. In the case of Easter Island, there is a tension between the rapanui on the one hand, and the non-rapanui residents and the government on the other hand, regarding issues such as greater autonomy and land disputes; all sides, however, are in favour of tourism development, despite the problems it causes. Nevertheless, in the case of the Galápagos, the main cause of the conflict lies in the existence of conflicting visions: that of the isolated archipelago championed by conservationists and that of the increasingly open archipelago supported by residents and local authorities, i.e. a conservation versus development conflict (Ospina, 2006, González et al., 2008, in Baldacchino, 2010; Muñoz, 2015).

Overall, tourism can be a great opportunity if managed well, but without planning and regulation, it may pose a threat and cause the collapse of ecosystems and societies (Ecopolis, 2010). Tourism development in Easter Island and the Galápagos has been largely disorganized, unregulated, and unsustainable while authorities responsible for tourism and conservation have been lacking a clearly articulated vision (di Castri, 2002; Figueroa et al., 2013; UNESCO, 2010). These stakeholders are often unwilling or unable to reach a timely decision regarding the sustainable development of the islands, may that involve land use, water resources, eco-friendly practices, new agricultural methods or tourism development.

## **Conclusion**

As a renowned national and international tourist destination, Easter Island has experienced massive tourism growth in the last few decades. Due to its island geography, small size, remoteness and fragile ecosystem, Easter Island may be largely unable to diversify its economy, thus leaving tourism as the island's present and future economic motor. While tourism has effectively brought a series of benefits – employment, income, investment, and improvement of living standards – it has also led to certain negative effects, such as environmental degradation and population pressures. Nevertheless, Easter Island's residents, despite certain reservations, acknowledge the important role that tourism plays in the local economy and society.

This paper uses primary sources – surveys and interviews conducted during two research trips to the island – as well as on secondary sources, mainly previous studies on Easter Island's tourism sector and sustainability issues. The residents' attitudes to tourism revealed by these surveys, interviews and field observations suggest that Easter Island is presently in the second stage-strategy of Ap and Crompton's (1993) four-stages/strategies continuum of tourism development and host community's reactions. This means that Easter Island is currently in the stage of tolerance from the side of residents who start to recognize both positive and negative impacts of tourism. Indeed, our research indicates that residents often complain about waste and sewage increase, and vehicular congestion caused by the immense tourism growth of the last years; they also criticize the lack of organized tourism management and the vast increase in local non-rapanui population. On the other hand, they largely have a positive view of the tourism sector on the island and they support its further

development, since they acknowledge tourism as the main source of their income and employment.

While Easter Island seems to be in Ap and Crompton's (1993) second stage of host community reactions, it can be argued that it is also in the third stage of Butler's (1980) TALC: the development stage, which results from the growing number of tourists that have reached the island. This is an important stage in the development of a tourist destination, since it involves the increase in the growth rate of tourism services and activities, the introduction of new services, and the appearance of tourism influences in the daily life of the local population (Romão et al., 2012). It is important that the issues of governance and of introducing new and sustainable tourist services are addressed soon, so that this stage of development does not eventually lead to the decline of Easter Island as a tourist destination. The improvement in the quality of services and tourist experiences has been shown to consolidate destination competitiveness (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Chen, Chen, & Lee, 2009; Nowacki, 2009), while diversification creates opportunities for local economic growth, in the sense of developing opportunities for employment in both tourist and non-tourist related businesses (Bernini & Cagnone, 2012).

To safeguard the island's sustainability, particular attention needs to be paid to its tourism sector and its economic, social, and environmental impacts. A sustainable tourism sector can be achieved through higher investment in infrastructure, especially transport and telecommunications; well-designed and appropriately implemented and enforced regulations to tackle urban, environmental and biodiversity externalities; better services, a more equitable distribution of gains, as well as the provision of high-quality training for people employed in the tourism and hospitality industries. Overall, a sustainable planning, operation and management of the island is crucial; this includes a collectively agreed, responsible and purposely-driven management of the island's natural and cultural resources and its tourism activities, so as to avoid the development of mass tourism and a new ecocide in Easter Island with most undesirable social consequences for the local population.

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