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COMMITTEE WORK

BALANCING CULTURE AND LEISURE IN THE BALEARIC ISLANDS. A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Balancing culture and leisure in the Balearic Islands, a critical perspective

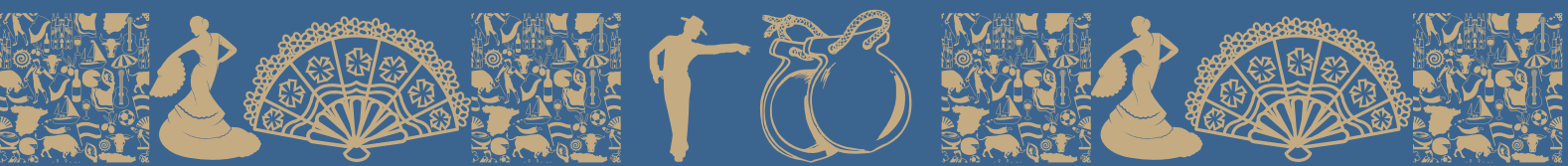
Spain offers a compelling interplay between modernity and tradition, shaped by centuries of cultural and historical layering. Its tourism sector draws deeply on a civilizational heritage that includes Islamic, Christian, and Romanesque influences. The enduring legacy of Al-Andalus exemplifies this fusion. As Menocal (2002) describes, it represented a “culture of tolerance,” where diverse traditions produced a refined, hybrid civilization that would later influence the European Renaissance. Sites like the Alhambra Palace in Granada, visited by millions each year (Patrimonio Nacional, 2023), reflect this historical richness, while also illustrating how Spain transforms its past into a curated experience for global audiences. In this way, tourism becomes both a space of memory and a tool of modern national projection, balancing cultural preservation with economic imperatives (Lowenthal, 1998).

This tension between preservation and commodification is not unique to Andalusia. In the Balearic Islands, tourism reveals another facet of Spain’s negotiation between global modernity and local identity. These islands, often reduced to symbols of mass tourism and nightlife, are also home to complex historical legacies and fragile ecosystems. The study of Mallorca and Ibiza highlights how regional heritage is shaped, marketed, and at times challenged, within the broader framework of Spain’s evolving tourist economy.

I - Historical tourism in Mallorca: between heritage and sustainability

In recent years, Mallorca has undergone a significant transformation in its tourism profile, shifting from its long-standing association with mass beach tourism toward a more diversified and culturally enriched model. This evolution reflects a broader European trend in which travelers increasingly seek meaningful historical experiences alongside leisure. According to a 2023 report by the European Travel Commission, cultural and heritage tourism continues to grow steadily, with 60% of travelers expressing interest in engaging with local history and traditions during their stays. In this context, Mallorca has begun to foreground its layered past as a strategic response to changing visitor expectations and local pressures surrounding overtourism.

Palma, the island’s capital, stands at the heart of this shift. Landmark sites such as the Gothic La Seu Cathedral originally built in the 13th century and later partially redesigned under the influence of Antoni Gaudí have become iconic symbols of the island’s architectural heritage. Equally significant are the Royal Palais of La



Almudaina, which reflects Mallorca's medieval Aragonese legacy, and the Arab Baths (Banys Àrabs), a rare vestige of the island's Islamic history dating back to the 10th century. These sites represent more than tourist attractions; they embody Mallorca's complex past shaped by Roman occupation, Islamic rule, Christian reconquest, and Catalan cultural integration. Beyond Palma, sites such as the Roman ruins of Pollentia in Alcúdia and the circular Bellver Castle further reveal the island's historical richness and strategic importance across centuries.

This growing focus on historical tourism is also informed by evolving local and institutional priorities. In response to the environmental and social impact of mass tourism, the Balearic government has introduced a set of ambitious policies aiming to redefine the island's tourism model. Measures include a reinforced tourist tax whose revenues are earmarked for heritage conservation and ecological projects, as well as restrictions on cruise ship arrivals and vacation rentals to mitigate the strain on infrastructure and cultural sites (Govern de les Illes Balears, 2024). These steps are aligned with global sustainable development goals, particularly those emphasizing cultural preservation and responsible consumption. According to the Institut d'Estadística de les Illes Balears (IBESTAT), Mallorca welcomed over 15 million international visitors in 2024, yet 63% of local residents stated that continued growth in tourist numbers would not improve their quality of life, highlighting a growing social awareness about the need for balance.

Public discontent has also taken visible forms, with demonstrations in Palma and other municipalities voicing concerns about gentrification, housing shortages and the loss of local identity. As a result, historical tourism is increasingly being reimagined not merely as an economic lever but as a means of community resilience, cultural education and regional authenticity. Initiatives such as “Mallorca és

Ca Nostra” (Mallorca is Our Home) promote tourist engagement with local language, artisanal crafts and Mallorcan culinary traditions, in order to foster respectful and immersive experiences. The rise of boutique hotels and heritage fincas—rural estates renovated to highlight vernacular architecture—further reflects the market's turn toward slow, sustainable, and culturally conscious travel. According to the Balearic Ministry of Tourism, more than €1 billion has been allocated to sustainable tourism initiatives through 2027, including investments in off-season tourism and support for heritage education



programs.

Ultimately, Mallorca's strategic pivot toward historical and sustainable tourism reflects a deeper recognition of the island's identity as more than a destination for sun and sea. Its value lies in centuries of cultural exchange, resilience, and artistic creativity. By investing in heritage preservation and community-centered tourism, Mallorca positions itself as a model for reconciling economic vitality with environmental and cultural sustainability. If successful, this transformation could ensure that its historical legacy continues to resonate with future generations not as a backdrop for consumption, but as a living narrative of place and people.

III - Balancing culture and leisure in Ibiza

Ibiza has long stood at the intersection of leisure-driven capitalism and cultural sustainability. Heralded as a Mediterranean icon of hedonistic tourism, the island exemplifies the tension between extractive tourism economies and the preservation of cultural and ecological capital. While mass tourism contributes to 84% of local GDP, its costs of socioecological degradation, loss of heritage, and civic unrest are mounting beyond sustainability thresholds (Cardona, 2014; Ibiza Preservation, 2023).

The prevailing model often summarized as the "party island" paradigm relies on a powerful ecosystem centered around Sant Antoni and Ibiza Town, where international clubs like Amnesia, Pacha, and Ushuaïa generate enormous seasonal revenues and exert influence over local urban planning and employment patterns. Ethnographic research conducted by Briggs (2014) and by the Ibiza Research Cluster reveals how the behaviors of British and Northern European youth excessive alcohol consumption, drug use, and sexual activity are not simply spontaneous, but orchestrated by an industry of "managed transgression."

This dynamic transforms designated "tourist zones" into liminal spaces where conventional moral codes are suspended, effectively reducing the local environment into a site of hyper-consumption and temporary escapism (MacCannell, 1976; Urry, 1990). Specific examples include "all-inclusive" party packages sold in the UK before arrival, or Ibiza Rocks' curated festival experiences, which consolidate control over tourists' behaviors while maximising profit margins. This commodified hedonism has turned parts of the island into what Boorstin called "pseudo-events" artificial spectacles that



reflect neither place nor authenticity, but instead respond to global market logic (Boorstin, 1964).

In contrast, Ibiza also offers a growing repertoire of cultural and ecological tourism rooted in heritage preservation and rural renewal. Since 1999, the island has hosted a UNESCO World Heritage designation: "Ibiza, Biodiversity and Culture," which protects the marine *Posidonia* meadows, the fortified Renaissance core of Dalt Vila, and archaeological remains of Phoenician settlements such as Sa Caleta and the Puig des Molins necropolis (UNESCO, 2024). These sites have become focal points for educational tourism, historical interpretation, and landscape protection. Furthermore, the interior of the island has witnessed the emergence of agritourism (*agroturismo*) with renovated *fincas* (traditional rural estates) offering locally sourced food, wellness retreats and engagement with traditional farming practices. Notable examples include the Can Lluç Boutique Country Hotel and Cas Gasi, which brand themselves around "slow living," "eco-luxury," and respect for the local environment. These sites not only diversify the island's offer, but also appeal to visitors seeking retreat from mass consumption and closer connections with place.

The latter remains politically marginalized, co-opted into "staged authenticity" and reduced to a marketable pseudo-alternative (Boorstin, 1961; D'Andrea, 2016). The island is increasingly marked by a "touristscape-lifeworld" conflict, wherein transient consumption disrupts the permanence of community life. Movements like Prou! and Eivissa es Planta (Noudiari, 2024) articulate this discontent, advocating for degrowth, territorial justice, and governance reform. Environmental stresses, such as the critical depletion of aquifers and degradation of UNESCO-protected *Posidonia* meadows are symptomatic of a tourism model cannibalizing its own ecological foundations (IUCN, 2017).

Policy responses, including the PIAT (Pla d'Intervenció en Àmbits Turístics de Mallorca) and PTI (Pla Territorial Insular) plans, have initiated partial containment through moratoria on tourist beds and enhanced rental regulation. However, their efficacy is undermined by powerful rent-seeking lobbies and the persistence of an unregulated shadow market (Bianchi, 2009; Blázquez-Salom, 2019). Even well-meaning initiatives like Ibiza Creativa risk being subsumed by dominant tourism logics if they are not supported by structural redistribution mechanisms and independent marketing channels (Interreg Europe, 2020).



iv - Conclusion & Recommendations

Mallorca, and Ibiza reflect the tensions at the heart of Mediterranean tourism. While rich in history, biodiversity and local identity, the Balearic Islands continue to be shaped by a dominant tourism model that prioritizes mass leisure and commercial entertainment. Although cultural and creative alternatives have emerged, particularly in rural Mallorca and parts of Menorca, these remain secondary to the logic of scale, visibility, and profitability. In Ibiza, the nightlife economy maintains symbolic and material dominance, often at the cost of ecological health, community cohesion and long-term resilience. The challenge across all islands is not a lack of alternatives, but a lack of structural support to sustain them.

To move toward a more equitable and sustainable future, tourism planning must shift from surface-level reforms to a deeper reconfiguration of power and governance. Institutions must be restructured to ensure meaningful participation by residents in decisions that affect their environment, economy and cultural landscape. This could take the form of permanent citizen councils tasked with co-managing tourism flows, funding cultural programming and monitoring ecological indicators. Financial tools such as progressive tourist taxes and targeted subsidies should be used to support year-round heritage tourism, small creative enterprise, and ecological restoration projects. Public policies must also include housing protections, support for cultural education and safeguards against speculation that undermines community life.

A valuable example of balanced tourism can be found in Hiiumaa, an island off the coast of Estonia. Hiiumaa has developed a model that places local well-being and environmental preservation at the center of its tourism strategy. The island limits development to protect natural landscapes, promotes traditional crafts and local gastronomy and involves residents in all aspects of tourism governance. As a result, Hiiumaa has avoided the negative impacts of overexposure and maintained its cultural and ecological integrity while still benefiting economically from tourism.

The Balearics can draw inspiration from this model. Smart regulation of visitor numbers, investment in local infrastructure, and a shift toward cultural authenticity rather than spectacle are essential steps. More than policies, what is needed is a shared vision of the islands as living territories rather than commercial products. Only through participatory governance, ecological



responsibility and cultural stewardship can Mallorca and Ibiza become destinations that honor both their past and their future.

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COMMITTEE WORK

MODERNITY MEETS TRADITION: BALANCING MASS TOURISM AND HERITAGE IN MALLORCA

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Modernity meets tradition: balancing mass tourism and heritage in Mallorca

In the Western Mediterranean, countries often have to find a balance between modern life and traditional culture. In Spain, this balance is especially visible in the tourism sector. For many years, tourism has helped the country to grow economically, especially in regions like the Balearic Islands. However, at the same time, mass tourism also creates problems: it can damage the environment, change the way cities look and feel and make it harder to protect local traditions and historical heritage.

In this article, we focus on Spain's need to balance mass tourism and historical heritage, looking at the case of Mallorca from a local and social perspective. We chose this approach because it helps us to understand how local people experience tourism – not just as an economic opportunity, but also as a phenomenon that affects their daily lives, their homes and their environment. We also wanted to connect this topic to the bigger theme of modernity and tradition in the Mediterranean: here, modernity means the arrival of tourism and the changes it brings, while tradition refers to the island's cultural identity and historic places.

Several academic studies help us to understand this situation better. In their 2011 article “The Weight of Tourism in the Balearic Islands”, Clemente Polo and Elisabeth Valle show that by 2004, tourism made up more than 40% of the region's economy. It created jobs not only in hotels and restaurants, but also in transport, construction and even agriculture. This shows how important tourism has been for the development of islands like Mallorca.

Other studies focus more on how local people feel about tourism. One of them, by Jesús Reina Estévez (2019), looks at how people in Málaga, back in 1897, created an organization to promote tourism during a local economic crisis. Tourism was seen as a way to modernize and bring progress to the area. Another study, from 2009, shows that people in Huelva (Andalusia) still see tourism as something positive: a source of jobs, better roads and new services.

In the rest of this paper, we will look at how these national and historical trends play out today in Mallorca. We will focus on three key issues: how tourism is changing the historic centre of Palma (through gentrification), how social media and geotagging are transforming local spaces and how mass tourism is affecting the environment and the quality of life of the population. Our goal is to better understand how Mallorca is trying to protect its identity and heritage while continuing to welcome millions of tourists each year.



I - Tourism gentrification: the case of the historic centre of Palma

We are witnessing a shift from an overwhelmingly positive narrative that focused primarily on the economic benefits of tourism to a more critical perspective. The historic center of Palma, the capital of the Balearic Islands, is experiencing a significant transformation due to tourism-driven gentrification. This process is reshaping the urban landscape, social fabric, and economic dynamics of the city. This phenomenon of tourism gentrification in Palma's historic center unfolds within a broader context marked by the post 2008 crisis dynamics and growing urban inequality.

Theoretically, it is conceptualized through Neil Smith rent gap theory and David Harvey accumulation by dispossession theory. Indeed, rather than slowing gentrification, the global financial crisis facilitated new cycles of speculative investment by attracting foreign capital¹. In this context, Palma noticed a massive increase in eviction. There has also been a conversion of public spaces into sites of consumption². This phenomenon of overcrowding leads to a diminished quality of life for local residents, who may face issues such as noise pollution, etc.

Gentrification by tourism disposition is characterized by the proliferation of luxury hotels, intensified demand for luxury property, an explosion of short-term holiday rentals, especially via platforms like Airbnb which reconfigures entire neighborhoods into exclusive tourist enclaves.³

Since 2016, Palma has witnessed a growing social opposition to tourism-driven gentrification, prompting significant urban policy responses. This resistance evolved from earlier environmental concerns in the 1980s and land-use activism in the 1990s-2000s to more explicit anti-touristification movements in the mid-2010s, particularly focused on Palma's historic center⁴. Civil society organizations such as "Terraferida and Ciutat per qui l'Habita" emerged as influential actors, shaping public discourse⁵.

To conclude, we are observing a growing discontent with tourism impacts, with the city of Palma materializing this constant and prevalent tension between the need of balancing mass tourism and historical heritage.

¹ González-Pérez, J. M. (2019). The dispute over tourist cities: Tourism gentrification in the historic centre of Palma (Majorca, Spain). *Tourism Geographies*, 21(1), 1–21. | ² Ibid. | ³ Ibid. | ⁴ Ibid. | ⁵ Ibid



II - Geotagging

Geotagging refers to the process of adding geographical identification (like GPS coordinates) to media such as photos, videos or social media posts. It's commonly used to share the location of landmarks, cultural sites or natural attractions.

Geotagging emerged with the integration of GPS in smartphones and spread through social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok. When users share a photo, they often add the name or exact location of the place, turning each post into a viral “map.” A photo taken in a little-known spot can attract hundreds of visitors who want to recreate the same picture. The ability to link digital content to a specific geographic location has made discovering new destinations easier and turned every traveler into a potential tourism promoter. Meanwhile, tourist destinations can use the data generated to enhance their territorial marketing strategies, monitor visitor flows, and optimize their offerings.

This new phenomenon leads to a lot of benefits. First, it helps people discover lesser-known historical and cultural sites, in fact the access to tourism becomes more democratic. Surely it boosts cultural appreciation promoting awareness and education about different traditions and heritage. It also encourages tourism in under-visited areas distributing tourists and aiding local economies. It could be a community engagement where locals and visitors can contribute together preserving and documenting cultural narratives. It can support preservation thanks to a creation of a digital footprint of cultural sites for posterity.

On the otherhand, this new trend has caused a lot of problems and in particular it has a big contribution to overtourism. Especially if not used responsibly, geotagging can have significant side effects. It has raised concerns both environmentally and culturally.

Although it was born as a harmless sharing tool, geotagging can unintentionally contribute to overtourism. When a location is geo-tagged and shared repeatedly on social media, it can quickly become a popular destination, attracting large numbers of visitors in a short time. This phenomenon has been observed in different parts of the world. For example, the viral sharing of previously little-known locations can lead to a massive influx of visitors, threatening fragile ecosystems and local communities. Some



places aren't able to host many tourists especially during the holidays. Another problem is the loss of authenticity, in fact the sudden popularity of a destination can lead to changes aimed at catering to tourists, stripping the place of its original character. At the cultural level, another study published on MDPI examined the consequences of the pressure brought by digital tourism on the identity of places. The research has shown how excessive tourist exposure can push destinations to transform to meet visitors' aesthetic and photographic expectations. This process involves a progressive loss of local characteristics, both architectural and cultural, in favor of a standardized "instagrammable" image. The result is a dangerous homogenization, in which distant and different places end up resembling each other, losing the authenticity that made them unique.

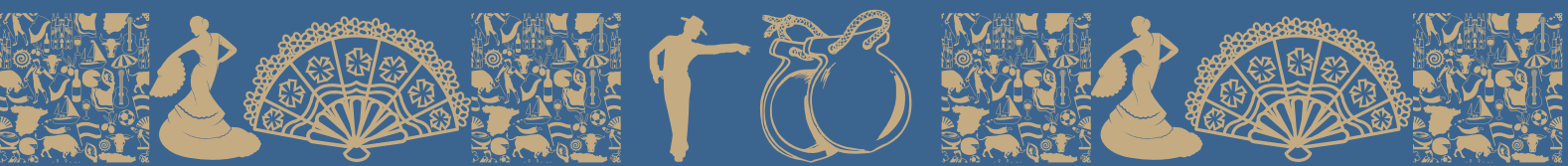
Geotagging represents two sides of the same coin: on the one hand, the desire to share authentic experiences; on the other, the risk of compromising the very authenticity of destinations. It is necessary to find a balance between the freedom to explore and document the world and the duty to protect it. Through a conscious use of technologies, a greater focus on sustainability and the principles of sustainable tourism, it is possible to imagine a future in which tourism is not a threat but a resource for all. Resorts, travellers and governments must work together to build a new model of tourism that is more ethical, responsible and inclusive.

In Mallorca, geotagging can be used for various purposes, including tourism, property mapping, and geocaching. Geotagging enhances discoverability, allows for location-based searches, and provides context for digital content. It can be used to showcase properties with accurate location information, making it easier for potential buyers and renters to find suitable accommodations or investment opportunities.

In conclusion, tourists and influencers can choose to avoid geotagging fragile locations or use vague tags. Another solution could be that social media platforms could promote best practices or limit exact location tagging for sensitive sites. And last thing, educating users about the consequences of overexposure through geotagging can mitigate harm.

III - Environmental impact of mass tourism on the population in Mallorca

Mass tourism has profoundly shaped Mallorca, making it one of the most visited destinations in Spain. This economic success has greatly contributed to



to the island's prosperity, but it also carries significant environmental consequences that directly affect the local population.

Water Scarcity: A Critical Resource at Risk

One of the most urgent issues facing Mallorca is water scarcity, which has been exacerbated by mass tourism. Studies indicate that tourists consume approximately two to three times more water per day than local residents¹. This increased demand places immense pressure on groundwater resources, causing aquifer depletion and pushing the island to rely heavily on desalination, which comes at a high financial and environmental cost.

This situation has direct repercussions for the local population, who frequently face water shortages and rising water prices. Moreover, agricultural activities, essential for local food production, suffer from reduced irrigation capacity due to the prioritization of water supply for tourism.

Tourism's pressure on water availability is more than an environmental issue—it is a social concern that undermines the quality of life for residents and threatens traditional economic sectors.

Coastal Degradation: The Disappearing Natural Defenses

Mallorca's coastline, which attracts millions of visitors each year, has been severely affected by rapid tourism-driven urbanization. The construction of hotels, resorts, and transport infrastructure has contributed to accelerated coastal erosion and the destruction of natural dune systems². Popular tourist destinations such as Es Trenc and Cala Varques have lost significant portions of their coastal protection, leaving local communities increasingly vulnerable to flooding and storm surges.

This erosion not only damages the island's natural heritage but also puts at risk the livelihoods of coastal populations. The degradation of Mallorca's beaches diminishes both their environmental value and their long-term appeal as sustainable tourist attractions.

Waste Management: A Growing Challenge

Mass tourism also generates substantial amounts of waste, far beyond the island's handling capacity. Each hotel guest is estimated to produce approximately 1.5 kilograms of waste per day³. Local waste management systems, especially recycling facilities, are not equipped to process this volume efficiently, leading to an increase in landfill use, visual pollution, and sanitation concerns. For residents, this situation results in deteriorating living conditions, increased health risks and a negative impact on public spaces.



The issue of waste is a daily reminder of the need to develop more effective, environmentally conscious policies that prioritize the well-being of local **communities alongside tourism development.**

Marine Pollution: A Threat to Coastal Communities

The environmental impact of mass tourism extends beyond the land. Marine pollution has worsened considerably, particularly due to tourist-related activities such as excessive boat traffic and the discharge of untreated wastewater into the sea⁴.

This degradation affects fragile ecosystems, including seagrass meadows and coral reefs, which play a vital role in preserving marine biodiversity. For coastal residents, the consequences are tangible: declining fish stocks, reduced recreational spaces, and a loss of traditional marine livelihoods.

The health of Mallorca's coastal environment is closely tied to the health of its population and the sustainability of its economy. Mallorca's experience highlights the urgent need to rethink tourism models to balance economic growth with environmental sustainability and social well-being. Protecting the environment is essential not only to preserve the island's natural beauty but also to safeguard the living conditions of its residents. The case of Mallorca provides a valuable lesson for other regions facing similar pressures: sustainable tourism is the only viable path for long-term prosperity.

IV - Measures to tackle mass tourism

-Visitor quotas: Authorities set a maximum number of visitors allowed per day or during specific periods.

-Higher tourist taxes: Involves increasing taxes on accommodation, entry tickets, or services used by tourists.

This generates additional income for local governments to invest in infrastructure, environmental conservation, and maintenance of attractions.

Besides, they act as a deterrent to excessive cheap tourism while retaining visitors who are willing to spend responsibly.

-Ban on new tourist apartments: Governments prohibit the licensing of new short-term rental apartments (Airbnb).

This helps maintain housing availability and affordability for local residents who might otherwise be priced out. It also reduces neighborhood gentrification and preserves community identity.



-Restrictions on cruise ships: Limits the size, number or frequency of cruise ships allowed to dock at a destination.

They prevent sudden influxes of thousands of passengers that overwhelm local infrastructure, create congestion and strain environmental resources.

-Limiting tourist vehicles: Restricts private vehicles used by tourists in certain areas or times. It aims to reduce traffic congestion, pollution, and carbon emissions in tourist destinations and encourages the use of public transport.

-Promotion of secondary destinations: Reduces pressure on iconic sites while spreading economic benefits to rural or under-visited regions.

It also encourages a more balanced and authentic tourism experience for visitors.

Specific measures in the Balearic Islands

1. One of the most significant steps is the elimination of 18000 planned new tourist accommodation beds in Mallorca.

The goal of this measure is to halt the growth of the tourism capacity on the island.

2. The regional government has added strict regulations for car rentals.

These measures are meant to reduce traffic congestion, environmental damage..., issues that have been exacerbated by the high volume of rental vehicles during peak tourist seasons.

The Balearic president Marga Prohens claimed that “The Balearic Islands have reached their limit”. This statement reflects a growing political and social consensus that uncontrolled tourism growth is no longer viable and that stronger policies are needed to protect local identity, infrastructure and the natural environment.



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COMMITTEE WORK

YOUTH AND RELIGION IN THE WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN: TRADITION REJECTION OR REINVENTION

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3



Youth and religion in the western Mediterranean: tradition rejection or reinvention

Introduction

Religion has historically been a cornerstone of identity, morality, and social cohesion across the Western Mediterranean, shaping laws, traditions, and daily life in regions such as Mallorca (Spain), France, Tunisia, and Malta. Whether through Catholicism in Malta and Mallorca, Islam in Tunisia, or France's unique secular-religious dynamic, faith has deeply influenced cultural values, family structures, and even political systems. However, in the 21st century, younger generations are redefining or outright rejecting these religious traditions, raising critical questions about the future of faith in an increasingly globalized and digital world.

Yet today, youth across these regions are showing shifting attitudes: some distancing themselves from institutional religion, others are blending spirituality with modern values and some are claiming faith in new, personalized ways. This transformation is driven by multiple factors: rising individualism, exposure to global cultures through digital media, economic pressures and, in some cases, political distrust of religious institutions.

By comparing Mallorca, France, Tunisia, and Malta, this study explores whether young people are abandoning religion, adapting it to contemporary life or forging entirely new spiritual paths. Understanding these trends is crucial, as they signal broader societal shifts changing family structures, evolving national identities and the role of tradition in an increasingly interconnected world. Will religion fade into the background or will it be reinvented for a new generation?

I - Mallorca, between ritual and relevance : youth, religion and cultural transformation

In Mallorca, as in much of the Western Mediterranean, young people are navigating a changing relationship with religion—reflecting broader shifts in identity, cultural heritage and personal values. Historically a deeply Catholic Island with strong ties to Spanish religious traditions, Mallorca has seen significant changes in the way its younger generations engage with faith.

While traditional religious practices such as Semana Santa (Holy Week processions), patron saint festivals and Catholic rites of passage remain part of the island's culture, fewer young Mallorcans today consider religion to be central to their personal identity. Church attendance has declined significantly and young people's religious affiliation is often more cultural than spiritual. Many participate in religious events as expressions of community or family tradition, rather than as acts of faith.



This suggests that for many, religious rituals have taken on a symbolic or social function rather than a spiritual one.

At the same time, a growing number of young people in Mallorca are rejecting organized religion altogether. Influenced by secular education, exposure to global values and progressive social movements, they often question the Church's stance on issues such as gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, and sexual freedom. This rejection is not always antagonistic—it is frequently a quiet distancing, characterized by personal disinterest in institutional religion rather than overt rebellion.

Yet alongside rejection and detachment, there are signs of transformation. Some young Mallorcans are reinterpreting spiritual identity outside traditional structures, turning to personal spirituality, meditation or environmental ethics as alternative belief systems. Others engage with faith through artistic expression, local heritage projects or community initiatives, blending the old with the new. These new forms of spiritual engagement reflect a generation that values authenticity and relevance over dogma.

In Mallorca, then, religion is neither totally maintained nor completely abandoned—but is in the process of being reshaped. The way young people engage with religious tradition reveals a dynamic relationship with identity; rooted in heritage but responsive to modern realities. This transformation highlights the adaptive nature of tradition and emphasize the importance of cultural continuity that evolves alongside the values of a new generation.

II - Youth, religion and identity in France: between heritage and secularism

France is a secular Republic, but also a nation shaped by diverse religious traditions and a long history of immigration. In recent decades, it has welcomed large communities from North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, many of whom brought with them strong religious and cultural identities. In this context, French youth, especially those from immigrant backgrounds, are at the crossroads of personal belief, cultural heritage and the principles of *laïcité* (secularism). How do they navigate this complex environment and what does religion mean to them today?



France as a multicultural and religiously diverse society

The history of French immigration, particularly since the 1960s, has led to the emergence of multicultural urban areas where various traditions coexist. Young people of Muslim, Christian and Jewish origin often experience religion not only as a set of beliefs, but also as a connection to their family's culture and history. Religion can serve as a way to maintain a sense of belonging, especially in a society from which they may feel excluded or misunderstood.

For many, religious identity is deeply tied to cultural pride and collective memory. It is a part of who they are, even if they are not deeply practicing. Celebrations such as Ramadan, Eid, or Christmas often take on a social and symbolic dimension, reinforcing community ties and cultural continuity.

Laïcité and tensions around religious expression

Laïcité, or French secularism, is one of the pillars of the Republic. It aims to preserve neutrality in public institutions and to guarantee freedom of conscience. However, its interpretation and application, especially in schools, can create tensions.

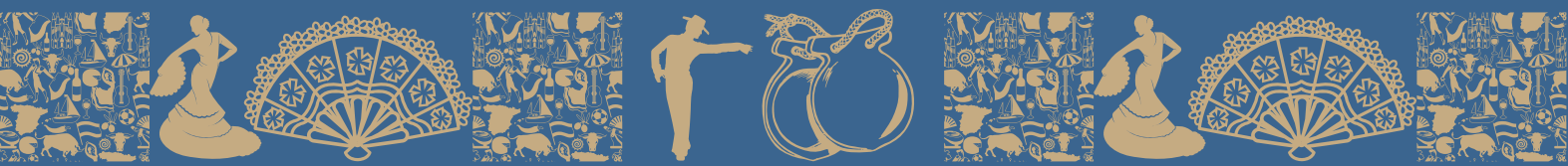
The 2004 law banning conspicuous religious symbols in public schools has had a significant impact, particularly on Muslim students wearing the hijab. For many, this feels like an infringement on personal freedom and identity. What is meant to guarantee neutrality is often perceived as a denial of visibility for certain communities. These tensions are further amplified by media discourse and political debate, making religion not just a personal matter, but a public and sometimes polarizing issue.

Changing relationships with religion: from obligation to choice

Beyond legal and political dimensions, there has been a broader shift in how young people relate to religion. Compared to past generations, many now see religion as a personal decision rather than a family-imposed obligation.

Surveys show that a growing number of French youth identify themselves as non-religious or believe without belonging to any formal institution. Others adopt a more flexible, individualized form of faith. They may choose to commit to certain rituals or values while rejecting others.

This evolution also reflects broader trends of individualism and critical thinking in contemporary French society. For some, religion is no longer about obedience but about meaning, ethics or even aesthetics.



Conclusion: tradition reimagined

In today's France, religion is no longer a social norm to be followed blindly. It is a resource, sometimes spiritual, sometimes cultural, that young people can explore, adapt or set aside. For many, tradition is no longer inherited, but questioned and reinvented.

Rather than signifying the end of religion, this transformation reveals a new landscape where faith, identity, and freedom coexist in complex ways. Ultimately, young French people are not entirely turning their backs on religion, they are reshaping it to reflect who they are and the world they want to live in.

III - Tunisian Youth and Religiosity in Daily Life

Tunisia boasts a long and complex religious history, reflecting its strategic geographic position as a crossroads between Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. This location has made it a meeting point for civilizations, religions, and beliefs for thousands of years. While Islam has dominated the religious landscape for over thirteen centuries, Tunisia's spiritual fabric has also been woven with threads of Christianity, Judaism and indigenous traditions a diversity that continues to shape its cultural identity today.

As inheritors of this layered religious heritage, young Tunisians today navigate a rapidly transforming society where global influences, digital connectivity and shifting values intersect with tradition. Young people constitute a central axis in the structure of social change in the Mediterranean region generally and in Tunisia particularly. Consequently, the events and developments that have occurred or are currently unfolding and which have strongly affected the perspectives and ideas of these young people raise numerous questions about emerging phenomena within their ranks, such as atheism, religiosity, and others.

In this context, I will refer to the book "Tunisian Youth and Religiosity in Daily Life" by Tunisian researcher Amal Moussa. The author analyses the determinants of Tunisian youth's relationship with religion, seeking to answer questions such as: What determines the nature of Tunisian youth's religious practice in their daily lives? What is the influence of social frameworks and the role of familial, popular, global and official Islamic references in shaping the religious behavior of Tunisian youth?



Moussa's study provides critical insights into how young Tunisians navigate religion amid a rapidly changing social landscape, where traditional structures coexist with modern influences, and where personal belief often intersects with broader cultural and political dynamics.

Moussa identified the most important characteristics of the religious life of young people, highlighting the following:

First: A Pluralistic Religious Life

The religious behavior of young people is dominated by phenomena of plurality and diversity. There are multiple and varying patterns of behavior in terms of their relationship with religion, a diversity that reflects the nature of social action in individuals, which combines both the personal and the communal. Despite the limited size of the representative sample in the author's study consisting of around two hundred young people—the observed religious behaviors were varied and diverse. For some, religious life is rooted in rituals, while for others, it lacks formal acts of worship and religious rites.

However, this pluralistic nature of religious life, along with the varying degrees of religious engagement whether in beliefs, values or practices from one individual to another, did not prevent the majority of young people from agreeing on the dominance of the religious component in their symbolic construction of identity. This characteristic was evident in the structure of their identity, as well as in the widespread observance of Ramadan fasting and its central role in their religious practice. This may be attributed to the effectiveness of this seasonal religious practice in revitalizing religious memory and strengthening social cohesion.

Second: A Tolerant Religious Life

One of the key characteristics highlighted by multiple data points is the prevailing tolerance in the religious behavior of young people. This tolerance toward oneself and others seems, in part, to reflect the inherently tolerant nature of the foundational Tunisian social character.

Regarding social relationships, the youth interviewed display a notable tolerance, reflecting openness and an absence of dogmatism in judging others and forming social bonds. Religiosity does not serve as a mechanism for social or moral differentiation, as evidenced by the fact that most young people in the sample do not consider religious behavior a significant factor in choosing friendships.



This characteristic of tolerance appears linked to the cultural horizon of the Tunisian personality, which includes the notion of religious freedom a principle dating back to the era of Ahmed Bey and the issuance of the Security Pact (Ahd al-Aman) in 1857. Thus, we observe a harmony between the cultural framework, shaped by secularization accompanying the construction of the modern nation-state and the positive stance of most surveyed youth toward freedom of belief.

Third: A Contradictory and Fragmented Religious Life

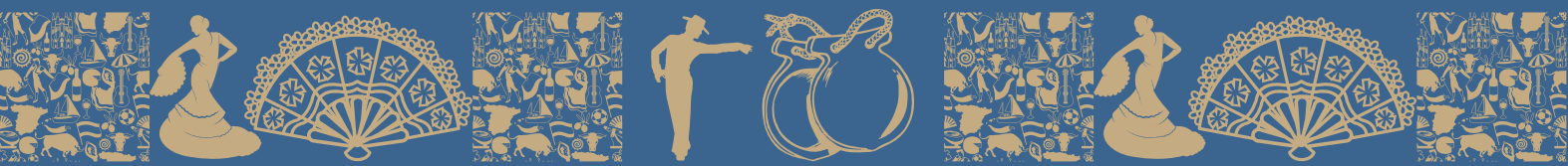
Contradiction is a striking feature of young people's relationship with religion, whether in terms of symbolic values or actual behavior. This contradiction does little to facilitate a clear understanding of youth religious practice; instead, it reinforces ambiguity. Sometimes, religious perceptions are disconnected from practice, while in other cases, there is a kind of fragmentation between religious symbols and the obligations or intentions that shape religious behavior. This inconsistency creates a paradoxical dynamic where young people may uphold certain religious values while disregarding others or engage in rituals without deep spiritual engagement contributing to an overall sense of dissonance in their religious lives.

Conclusion:

Tunisians youth today show diverse attitudes toward religion, although most remain connected to Islam in some way. While some practice devoutly and others adapt traditions to modern life, very few completely abandon their Muslim identity. Even those who criticize religious institutions or practice less still often keep cultural ties to Islam through family traditions or celebrations. This shows how Islam remains deeply woven into Tunisian society, even as young people interpret it differently. The religion continues to shape personal and national identity, even amid growing debates about its role in public life.

IV - Malta: Faith, Culture and Change: How Youth Navigate Religious Identity

In Malta, a predominantly Catholic nation with deep-rooted religious traditions, young people today navigate a complex relationship with religion and identity. While the island has long been known for its churchgoing culture and national holidays tied to Catholic feasts, recent shifts in attitudes among the youth suggest a nuanced transformation rather than a simple rejection or adherence



to religious practices.

Many young Maltese continue to maintain aspects of religious tradition, particularly those that are deeply embedded in cultural identity. Participation in village festas, traditional weddings and baptism ceremonies remains popular—not necessarily as expressions of deep personal faith, but more often as community-centered cultural events. These practices serve to affirm local and national identity, even as personal belief in doctrine declines.

However, there is a clear trend of religious detachment among the younger population. Regular church attendance has dropped significantly in recent years and surveys indicate a growing number of Maltese youth identify as non-practicing Catholics or as spiritual but not religious. This shift is partly influenced by global exposure, education and the increasing influence of secular values. Many young people reject religious teachings on issues such as sexuality, gender roles and personal autonomy, viewing them as incompatible with contemporary values of inclusivity and individual freedom.

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