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From Survey Irritants to Coordinated Street Protests: Reading Southern Europe’s 2025 Mobilizations Through Doxey and Butler

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Abstract. Classic 1970s tourism theory predicted resident antagonism as visitor numbers rose. Yet the June 2025 marches across Barcelona, Palma, Lisbon, and Venice tracked rent-to-wage ratios far more closely than raw tourist-to-resident ratios. Empirical highlights: June 15, 2025 (First coordinated cross-border anti-touristification marches across Spain, Italy & Portugal); 1975 / 1980 (Publication years of Doxey’s Irridex and Butler’s Tourist Area Life Cycle); 40%+ (Typical median rent-to-local-net-wage share in Palma, Lisbon & Barcelona protest districts).

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June 15, 2025 First coordinated cross-border anti-touristification marches across Spain, Italy & Portugal	**1975 / 1980** Publication years of Doxey’s Irridex and Butler’s Tourist Area Life Cycle	**40%+** Typical median rent-to-local-net-wage share in Palma, Lisbon & Barcelona protest districts

1. What Doxey (1975) and Butler (1980) got right—and what changed after 2015

Half a century ago, George V. Doxey proposed his 'Irridex' (1975), arguing that host communities move from euphoria through apathy and annoyance to outright antagonism as visitor numbers expand and commercialize daily life.[1] Five years later, Richard W. Butler’s Tourist Area Life Cycle (1980) mapped destination growth along an S-curve toward stagnation, where environmental and social carrying capacities are breached.[2]

Both frameworks treated resident irritation primarily as a friction of physical co-presence: crowded sidewalks, noise, coaches idling outside churches, and seasonal price spikes for café coffee. When the World Tourism Organization and Dutch researchers surveyed residents across eight European cities—including Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, and Lisbon—in 2018, their recommendations still leaned heavily on 'dispersal': nudging tourists toward outer neighborhoods and shoulder months so central squares felt less crowded.[3]

Table 1. Comparing classic overtourism irritation frameworks against observed 2024–2026 urban mobilization patterns

Analytical dimension	Doxey (1975) & Butler (1980)	UNWTO / CELTH 8-City Study (2018)	2024–2026 Southern European mobilizations
Primary causal trigger	Cumulative visitor volume crossing physical/social carrying capacity	Localized sidewalk, transit & nightlife friction in historic cores	Housing rent-to-local-wage squeeze & residential conversion to tourist/nomad use
Spatial footprint	Resort town or bounded historic tourist district	Monumental center vs. quieter outer residential wards	Spreads into working-class commuter districts (Palma, Tenerife, Lisbon peripheries)
Political expression	Diffuse resident 'antagonism' toward individual visitors	Low survey support for tourism growth; calls for dispersal	Transnational coalition (SET network) demanding hotel freezes, port caps & housing caps
Policy response demanded	Rejuvenation or visitor dispersal to new attractions	Smart-city crowd routing & off-season marketing	Hard quantity caps: Barcelona 2028 HUT zeroing, Balearic bed freeze, flight/cruise limits

2. Why dispersal backfired once tourism entered the residential housing market

On June 15, 2025, neighborhood assemblies under the Sud d’Europa contra la Turistificació (SET) banner staged the first synchronized demonstrations across Barcelona, Palma de Mallorca, Ibiza, San Sebastián, Granada, Venice, Genoa, Naples, and Lisbon—following massive 2024 marches in the Canary Islands.[4] Reading the demonstrators’ demands clarifies why 2018-style dispersal strategies lost political consent.

Spreading visitors from monumental hotel zones into residential neighborhoods via short-term rentals, boutique aparthotels, and medium-term remote-work leases transmitted international leisure purchasing power directly into local housing markets. In Palma, Tenerife, and central Lisbon, median asking rents rose well past 40 to 50 percent of local hospitality and service-sector wages—meaning the workers staffing hotels and airports could no longer rent apartments within commuting distance. Under those conditions, dispersing tourists into outer neighborhoods exports rent pressure rather than relieving resident antagonism.

3. Testable hypotheses for municipal attitude panels

Barcelona and Amsterdam both run annual municipal resident surveys asking citizens whether tourism brings net benefits or whether the city has reached its limit. Pairing those multi-year attitude series with district-level rent changes and policy milestones—Amsterdam’s 2021 20-million-night ordinance, NYC’s 2023 Local Law 18, Venice’s 2024 day fee, and Barcelona’s 2024 sunset announcement—allows researchers to test two open questions on MTRI’s agenda. First, do resident-survey irritation scores lead street protests by 12 to 24 months once rent-to-income crosses a threshold? Second, does enacting a visible rule actually lower resident antagonism, or does antagonism ease only if local housing costs and bus crowding measurably fall?

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