

Chapter 4

Public-Private Partnerships and Good Governance

The case of Benidorm Tourist Foundation

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Introduction

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) are a widespread and controversial phenomenon. In the last three decades they have gone from being just one more option in the toolbox of policy makers, to occupying a central place in government action, at all levels of government, in almost all sectors, and virtually in every country (Boardman, Greve & Hodge, 2015) (Bovaird, 2004).

At the international level, a growing interest in PPPs has also been observed. International organizations of different kind have issued recommendations, guides and general frameworks to assist and support governments in the adoption of the governance model introduced by the PPPs. Thus, for example, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2008; 2012); or, for example, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2003; 2015; 2017).

Indeed, the tourism sector is one of the sectors in which the presence of PPPs is dominant. As early as 1997, the UNWTO drew attention to the changes that national administrations were undergoing in the tourism sector (UNWTO, 1997) and the role that new forms of public-private collaboration were playing in these transformations. More recently, Tourism PPPs have been both advocated and analyzed as a key element in the implementation of new models of collaborative governance leading to sustainability and organizational resilience (Amore & Hall, 2016; Baggio, 2011)

The case of Benidorm and Benidorm Tourist Foundation is a case of collaboration and resilience. It is an illustration of how PPPs can redesign public governance and enhance efficiency and innovation.

Theoretical framework. What are PPPs and what they do.

The term Public-Private Partnership actually covers a wide range of meanings. Hodge and Greve (2007) maintain that the name PPP is used in reference to (1) a certain project, (2) a specific technique for the provision of a service, (3) a policy preference, or (4) a management tool.

Under any of these various meanings, it is important to clearly differentiate

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partnership from any other public-private relation. PPPs are characterized by non-hierarchical principal-principal (rather than principal-agent) relations (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2011). PPPs also involve joint outcomes, synergy or added value for the partners. In the third place, risk sharing is also crucial.

All these three characteristics are common to most conceptualizations of PPP, but there is also an important point of departure: whether partnership is more a relative than a categorical phenomenon (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2011). PPPs may entail a formal collaboration between public agencies and private enterprises in the planning, construction and management of public services (Ansell & Gash, 2008), but may also involve a relatively 'loose' contractual partnerships for financing, designing and constructing infrastructure (concessions), whilst others involve more 'tight' cooperation in the on-going co-production of services (alliances) (Hodge & Greve 2007). Partnerships can actually be made of different combinations of actors, with different commitments and different levels of formalization, thus extending the field of study and analysis.

The rationale for using PPPs has changed over time, but in general could be summarized as follows:

- (1) To enhance efficiency and effectiveness through a reliance on comparative advantages, a rational division of labour and resource mobilization
- (2) To provide the multi-actor, integrated resources and solutions required by the scope and nature of the problem being addressed.
- (3) To move from a no-win situation among multiple actors to a compromise and potential win-win situation
- (4) To open decision-making processes to promote a broader operationalization of the public good. (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2011)

According to Siemiatycki, Reeves & Palcic (2022) these various motivations have evolved under two global waves. In the first wave between the early 1900s to the mid-2000s PPPs were the response to government need to fund infrastructure with private money, in a way that does not count as a part of the public debt. The second wave started in the mid-2000s, when PPPs emerged as an approach to deliver value for money, being the main objective the transference of major project risks from government to the private sector.

Despite the reasons and motivations behind the decision to use PPPs, there are significant changes that PPPs create in organizational ecosystems and governance structures. According to Waring & Bishop (2018), in the PPPs, there is a blurring of public and private cultures, thus creating what it is known as "hybrid spaces" that blur spatial boundaries, combine different interests and produce shifting social identities. This hybrid nature of PPPs environment has also an impact in the way governance is understood. PPPs evolution lead to the definition of a "collaborative governance" (Emerson, Nabatchi & Balog, 2012).

Collaborative governance “captures a fuller range of emergent forms of cross-boundary governance” (Emerson et al., 2012). Collaborative governance is not reduced to formal, state-initiated arrangements, or to engagement between government and non-governmental stakeholders. Collaborative governance is a “multi-partner governance” which can include the state, the private sector, the civil society and the community.

PPPs have gradually extended its scope and in many sectors, such as tourism or development have evolved to encompass this kind of multi-partner structure. No single analytic framework can capture the diversity, relevant parameters and qualities of PPPs (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2011).

The case of Benidorm and Benidorm Tourism Foundation

Benidorm is a sun and sand tourism destination located in the Mediterranean coast of Spain, in the province of Alicante. It emerged in the 1960s as a major international and national coastal resort, characterized by elevated occupancy rates along the year (75,96% average occupancy) and long stays (average stay of 5,6 nights) (National Statistics Institute). In 2017 it was the fourth destination in yearly hotel overnights in Spain after Barcelona, Madrid and San Bartolomé de Tirajana in the Canary Islands (HOSBEC).

Benidorm can fairly be considered a paradigm of resilience in the tourism sector after COVID-19. An overall package of programs and actions was undertaken even during the lockdown in spring 2020 in order to prepare for the peak season in the summer, when any expectation to avoid further economic losses could only rely upon domestic demand.

The response to COVID-19 challenge materialized in a set of coordinated interventions under the Benidorm Smart Tourism Destination + Safe Plan (Benidorm City Council), whose main objectives were (1) building trust on visitors and residents and (2) promoting employment and local productive networks. Benidorm STD+Safe Plan encompassed three connected lines of action: (1) Management of public space through pedestrianization (2) Management of beaches through Benidorm Beach Safety Plan, (3) Trust enhancement through public health monitoring, with the implementation of protocols such as COVID-19 Protocol-ON and programs such as PATTi Recovery and City Sentinel.

In addition, a great effort was made on branding. The channel Life in Benidorm, a part of Visit Benidorm web page (Visit Benidorm), began to create and share contents related to daily life in the city. It was intended for former and potential visitors to follow, even during the lockdown, a variety of online activities and to discover the city under a new different view. Visitors to come could also find updated information on uses of common spaces and travel restrictions.

Year 2020 (as well as 2021) saw important overall losses despite the good behavior of domestic demand (Exceltur, 2020). However, Exceltur’s Solytur monitoring reports give evidence that Benidorm’s rebound began sooner when compared with

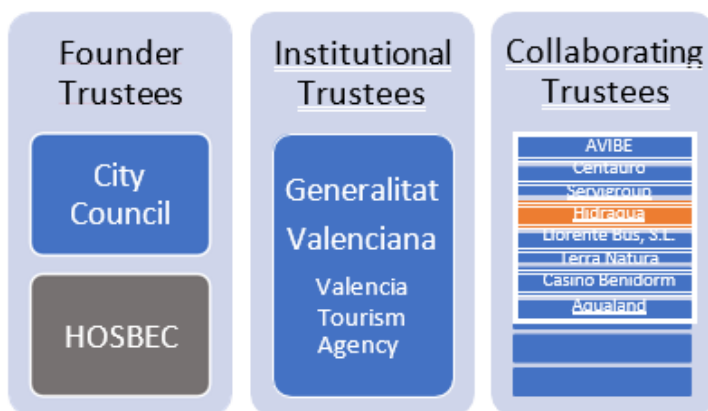
other destinations in the Spanish Mediterranean Coast (Exceltur, 2021). Thanks to the recovery of international tourist arrivals, in the third quarter of 2022 the average occupancy reached 87,3% in hotels, 92,8% in camping facilities and 63,3% in apartments, with an average of 4,9, 11,6 and 6,2 overnight stays respectively (HOSBEC, 2022). These numbers are already very close to those previous to COVID-19 crisis, and announce a stable and sustained recovery.

The case of Benidorm shows that despite the lack of prior preparation in the tourism sector, the response to COVID-19 challenge has been much more interesting and valuable in some destinations than in others. Agility in decision making and determination to undertake the necessary – but sometimes difficult – changes seem to have been the key to success. Benidorm is an exemplary case in terms of agility, innovation and resilience capacity, and Benidorm Tourism Foundation has been the main driver.

Benidorm Tourism Foundation as an example of Public-Private Partnership

The Benidorm Tourism Foundation, best known by its commercial name Visit Benidorm, is a public-private entity created in 2010 by Benidorm City Council and HOSBEC – an association of local businesses in the hotel and tourism sector – on the basis of a 50/50 holding. The purpose was to introduce a more agile, transversal and innovative management model in an extremely changing and dynamic sector such as tourism. HOSBEC and the City Council became Founder Trustees of the Foundation, a non-profit organization acting under the guardianship of the regional government, Generalitat Valenciana, represented by the regional Tourism Agency. The governing body is the Board of Trustees, comprising the Founder Trustees, the Institutional Trustees (Generalitat Valenciana) and the Collaborating Trustees.

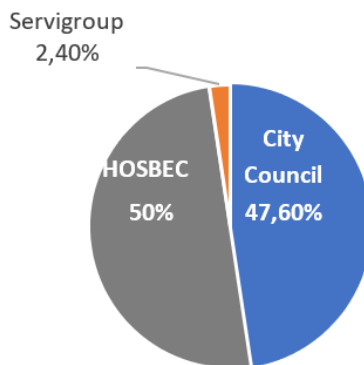
Figure 4.1 Benidorm Tourism Foundation Board



Source: Benidorm Tourism Foundation Board, 2010

The hotel chain Servigroup was among the Collaborating Trustees from the outset, and joined the City Council and HOSBEC as Founder Trustee in 2018, an action which involved a far-reaching strategic movement. The integration of Servigroup in the Board of Trustees as Founder Trustee forced a change in the share of the other two. In the new structure, the private part of the partnership, represented by HOSBEC and Servigroup, owns a share of 52.4% while the City Council has the remaining 47.6%.

Figure 4.2 Founder Trustees' share in Visit Benidorm Foundation



Source: Founder Trustees' share in Visit Benidorm Foundation, 2018

Thus, the private share surpasses –by a minimum difference – the public share, with important consequences in PPP management. With the previous distribution – the public and the private partners sharing the capital 50/50 – there was an obligation to apply administrative procedures and regulations to Foundation's management. With the public partner in minority, more agile procedures could be implemented for decision making and, therefore, the organization could be best adapted to the changing dynamics in the sector. The importance of having more agile and flexible decision processes came out when Visit Benidorm had to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.

The private partners

HOSBEC was born in 1977 as a local association of hoteliers in Benidorm and the surrounding area, and since then it has gradually expanded in territorial scope. Until 2011 HOSBEC associates were only established in the province of Alicante, but that year the General Assembly decided to incorporate new partners in the entire Valencian Community, changing its name to "Hospitality and Tourism Business Association of the Valencian Community" and maintaining its acronym HOSBEC.

HOSBEC MONITOR currently reports 310 associated establishments with a total of 101,281 accommodation places on offer in 43 tourist destinations throughout the Valencian Community. Only in Benidorm, HOSBEC has 153 associated establishments (112 hotels, 33 tourist apartments, 8 campsites, 2 hospitals and

8 other establishments including restaurants, parks, golf and nightclubs) whose global offer is over 50,000 beds, which is equivalent to 86% of the total offer of beds in hotels and campsites and 23% of the total offer in tourist apartments.

In the province of Alicante, the places offered by establishments associated with HOSBEC represent approximately 67% of the total offer in hotels and campsites and 4% in tourist apartments. For the Valencian Community altogether, the figures would be 45% in the case of hotel beds, 30% for campsites and 3% for tourist apartments (HOSBEC, 2022). These data clearly speak of the origin of HOSBEC as a local association, its relatively recent territorial expansion, and the importance of Benidorm as a tourist destination in the region.

HOSBEC's Managing Director coordinates a staff of 10, organized in 4 departments:

- Communication and Marketing (visibility of associate establishments and destinations)
- Quality and Projects (creation of managerial tools aimed to facilitate certification, innovation and sustainability in the tourism sector)
- HOSBEC Health (training and consultancy for associates and representation before Health authorities).
- HOSBEC Data (elaboration and diffusion of statistic reports – MONITOR Reports – and implementation of projects based on the use of AI).

Servigroup Hotels has its origins in 1969 when Servihotel, the first establishment in the group, was opened in Benidorm. Therefore, it is originally a local business, as HOSBEC is. Servigroup's market niche is sun and beach tourism. In 2003 the group started its expansion outside the region, and in 2011 consolidated its position as a leader in the Valencian Community. Based in Servihotel Benidorm, the group manages 18 hotel establishments in different destinations on the Mediterranean coast, with an offer that amounts to 9,500 accommodation places.

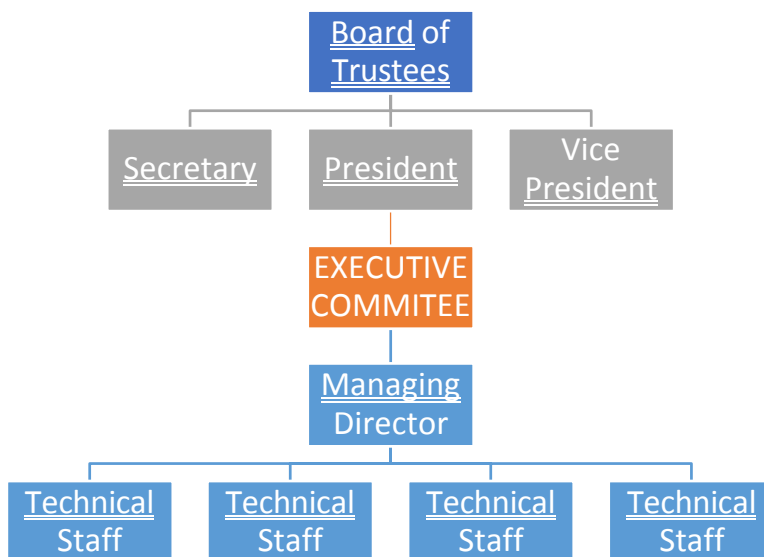
The group of Collaborating Trustees complete the Board structure by incorporating a representation of the rest of the local tourist industry. Current members are:

- AVIBE, the Association of Benidorm's Travel Agencies.
- Centauro Benidorm, the local subsidiary of Centauro rent a car.
- Hidraqua, a local subsidiary of Suez Group in charge of sewerage and water treatment and supply.
- Llorente Bus S.L., Avanza Group, passenger transport by bus and coach.
- Casino del Mediterráneo de Benidorm, Grupo Acrismatic, a HOSBEC associate.
- Aqualandia Benidorm (Aqualandia Group) recreational park, a HOSBEC associate.
- Terra Natura Benidorm, Fuertes Group, zoo and recreational park.

Governance structure and activity

The Major of Benidorm chairs the Board of Trustees and, on behalf of the Board, the Executive Committee, assisted by a Vice President and a Secretary, appointed among the Board members. The Executive Committee includes the Founder and the Institutional Trustees, and is the center of the planning and decision-making processes. The Committee appoints a Managing Director who coordinates the implementation of marketing and destination development actions.

Figure 4.3 Benidorm Governance structure



Source: Visit Benidorm Foundation. Transparency Portal

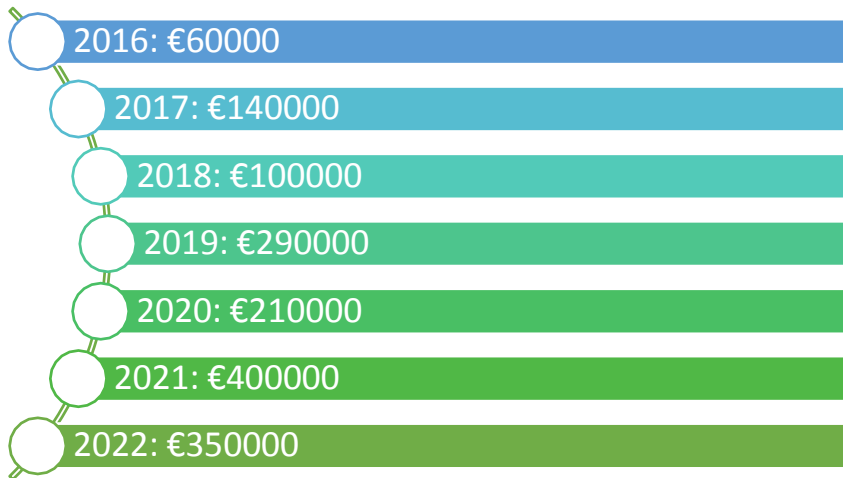
In 2021, 227 actions concerning marketing and destination development were finally carried out in 23 countries and Visit Benidorm was present at 18 Tourism Fairs. Also with promotional purposes, a total of 64 journalists, 86 influencers and 51 travel agents were also contacted. The 2022 Operative Plan of Benidorm Tourist Foundation encompasses more than 200 actions to be carried out during 2022 in twenty countries, focusing on a dozen products and segments. Among them, those that have experienced a greater momentum in the last few years are: Sports (diving, cycling, golf and running), Health and wellness, MICE tourism (Meeting, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) and Digital nomads.

PPP embeddedness in policy networks

The Benidorm Tourism Foundation participates in different policy arenas from local to national level as a relevant actor in the policy process. At the local level the PPP encompasses and represents almost every industry and business in the tourism sector. Besides, it is also a fundamental stakeholder in regard to the policies and programs

implemented by the regional Tourism Agency. Being financing of marketing and development projects –national and international – one of the chief policy instruments in the hands of the regional Agency, Visit Benidorm has benefitted from increasing budget allocations, as reflected in the Transparency Portal.

Figure 4.4 Funds received via collaboration agreements between Valencia Tourism Office and Benidorm Tourism Foundation



Source: Visit Benidorm. Transparency Portal

In the national arena, Visit Benidorm participates in the policy process at the highest level via the relational network of HOSBEC and Servigroup.

HOSBEC has become a regional and national reference in tourism, with membership in a number of bodies and associations that hold representation in crucial decisional settings at national and regional levels. It is a member of the Chamber of Commerce in the province of Alicante, and the Confederation of Employers Association in the Valencian Region (CEV). At the national level, HOSBEC is associated to the Spanish Confederation of Hotels and Tourist Accommodation (CEHAT). CEHAT is the employer's association that encompass and represents the national accommodation sector as a whole, including hotels, tourist apartments, campsites, resorts, spas and others. CEHAT brings together 51 national, provincial, regional, local and sectoral associations, and participates in numerous bodies and negotiating conferences, playing a decisive role in the representation of the sector. Among the most relevant are:

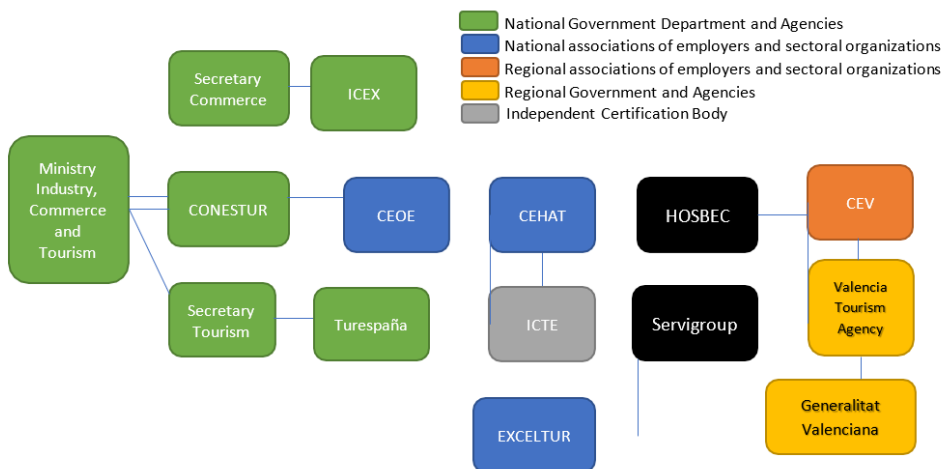
- Spanish Confederation of Employers Associations (CEOE);
- Spanish Institute for Tourist Quality (ICTE), an independent Certification Body.
- Spanish Institute for Foreign Trade (ICEX), an agency dependent of the Secretary of State for Commerce;

- Advisory Council of Spanish Tourism Institute (Turespaña), an agency dependent of the Secretary of State for Tourism;
- Spanish Tourism Council (CONESTUR), advisory council dependent of the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Tourism.

On the other hand, Servigroup is a member of the Alliance for Excellency in Tourism (EXCELTUR), a non-profit group integrated by the Chairmen of 35 leading Spanish tourist groups from the following sectors: airlines, cruises, hotels, travel agencies, tour operators, credit cards, rent-a-car, tourist hospitals, and GDSs. EXCELTUR was created in 2001, with two main purposes: promoting a better understanding of the importance of tourism in Spanish economy, and encouraging the highest degree of competitiveness for the Spanish tourist industry. Collaboration between public and private agents in tourism value chain creation is at the heart of EXCELTUR vision.

The chart below shows the central part of Benidorm Tourism Foundation relational network via private partners, and the privileged access to key decisional settings at regional and national levels.

Figure 4.5 Benidorm Tourism Foundation relational network



Questions/Tasks/Debate topics for classroom discussion

- Do PPPs deliver value for money?
- Do PPPs effectively enhance innovation and transfer risk?
- Do they provide better outcome than alternative procurement approaches? Are PPPs a win-win solution? Who wins and who loses from PPPs?
- Are PPPs just a means to expand the role of private sector into everyday life?
- What are the features of PPPs that may have a positive impact in terms of governance? How could you describe define Benidorm’s governance model?

- To what extent is the governance model a key element of resilience in the case of Benidorm?
- How could you describe Benidorm's embeddedness in local and wider policy networks?

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