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MASTER'S THESIS

**Stakeholders' Perceptions of Seasonality: A Grounded Theory Approach.  
Case study of Girona**

Ljubljana, July, 2018

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## AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT

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# Stakeholders' Perceptions of Seasonality: A Grounded Theory Approach. Case study of Girona

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## 1. Introduction

This chapter explains the rationale behind this master thesis.

First, the topic of this master thesis, seasonality, will be clarified, including an overview of what has been developed in the academic literature. Further, will follow an explanation of the existing gaps regarding the topic, clarifying the reason to conduct this research. The research question and the related sub questions will show how this research addresses the gaps of the literature. Finally, the structure of the thesis will be outlined.

### 1.1 Rationale

Seasonality is generally defined as “*a temporal imbalance in the phenomenon of tourism, [which] may be expressed in terms of dimensions of such elements as numbers of visitors, expenditure of visitors, traffic on highways and other forms of transportation, employment, and admissions to attractions*” (Butler, 2001, p. 6).

Seasonality has been described as one of the main issue of tourism industry, but also one of the least understood (Butler, 2001; Higham & Hinch 2002; Jang, 2004; Amelung et al., 2007). Nowadays, many destinations around the world are affected by the phenomenon of seasonality (Yacoumis, 1980; Ćorluka et., 2016), which generates similar issues only to different extents (Yacoumis, 1980).

Since several years, despite “*seasonality does not exclusively concern tourist activity*” (López et al., 2006, p.241), it is considered one of its most distinctive features (Butler, 2001; López et al., 2006). It is widely recognized that seasonality will always affect the tourism businesses, but recently, there have been several attempts hat least to reduce it (Hartman, 1986; Butler, 2001; Ćorluka et al., 2016).

Seasonality has some positive effects, especially from the environmental and the ecological perspective (Butler, 2001). Off season allows the relief and regeneration of the resources, after the overuse during peak season (Butler, 2001; Amelung et al., 2007). Moreover, the inhabitants of a place characterized by peak and off peak season, might be used to have some time of the year off and consequently, have adapted their lifestyle to this rhythm (Andriotis, 2005; Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005).

On the other side, seasonality is connected with many negative economic, social and environmental effects (Butler & Mao, 1997; Karamustafa & Ulama, 2010), such as reduction of profitability, unemployment, and overuse of natural resources (Andriotis, 2005; Karamustafa & Ulama, 2010).

Due to the universal nature of the phenomenon, substantial academic literature focused on seasonality has been developed (Baum & Hagen, 1999; Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005), but only few case studies properly analyze its causes (Butler & Mao, 1997; Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005). Despite seasonality is a topic which has been widely discussed, its exact causes in the field of tourism have not been identified yet (Ćorluka et al., 2016) and the phenomenon is generally described only as a “*major problem*”, without mentioning its positive effects (Butler & Mao, 1997, p.9).

Seasonality affects both public and private stakeholders, which consequently, respond to the phenomenon in different ways (Andriotis, 2005). In the last years, there has been the creation of several strategies aimed at reducing seasonality with the involvement of several different stakeholders (Ćorluka et al., 2016). As the effects and causes of seasonality vary according to the characteristics of a destination, the attempts made by the stakeholders to limit seasonality in a certain place may not be transferable to another (Butler, 2001; Lee et al., 2008). Moreover, as stated by Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff (2010), “*the usual practice of strategy formulation in this area, whilst often involving a sound analysis of objective performance data, largely ignores the perceptions which the businesses concerned have of the seasonality issue*” (p.395).

Indeed, currently, in the tourism academic literature there is a shortage of studies taking into consideration the different views and perceptions of the stakeholders regarding tourism development (Hardy, 2005; Kruja & Hasaj, 2010; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2016). According to Nunkoo, & Ramkissoon (2016), “*Stakeholders are often characterized by discord arising from shared use of resources and conflicting views on how the industry should be developed and managed*” (p.558). The majority of current researches are merely focused on the relationships between the different stakeholders involved in tourism (Kruja & Hasaj, 2010). Indeed, as stated by Nunkoo & Ramkissoon (2016), “*Sustainable tourism planning can be achieved if the views of key stakeholders in tourism development are understood and incorporated in the development process of the industry*” (p. 558).

In the academic literature regarding seasonality, the comparison of the different stakeholders’ perceptions of the phenomenon is still lacking (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2010). There is instead a tendency to generalize the viewpoint of all the stakeholders, underlying only a negative perception of the phenomenon (Butler, 2001; Andriotis, 2005), “*with a general agreement about the seasonality “problem”*” (Butler, 2001, p.5). Seasonality presents both advantages and disadvantages but so far, there are not many authors who have focused on both, as only the negative side tends to be analyzed (Butler, 2001; Flognfeldt, 2001; Andriotis, 2005). The truth is that the phenomenon of seasonality is very complex and generates



controversial views (Butler, 2001; Duval, 2004). According to Butler (2001), *“There is a need to determine, for instance, if this phenomenon really is a problem for all parties involved in tourism or whether it can be regarded as having beneficial effects in some situations to some sectors of the industry and communities engaged in tourism”* (p. 7).

Another of the main lack of the current seasonal studies regards urban destinations (Butler & Mao, 1997). Cities have a more diversified touristic offer compared to other destinations, such as the coast, and thus, are generally recognized as less vulnerable to climate variations and less affected by seasonality (Butler, 2001; Lee et al., 2008). Urban centers are often characterized by heritage and cultural diversity, and consequently do not depend on the climatic conditions and thus, are less prone to seasonal patterns of visitation (Butler & Mao, 1997). For these reason, so far, there is a lack of investigation in the academic literature of the different effects and impacts of seasonality in cities compared to non-urban destinations (Butler & Mao, 1997).

In order to cover these gaps, this research is aimed at studying seasonality in a urban destination, the city of Girona. The subjects of this research were the different supply stakeholders involved in tourism, and thus, potentially affected by seasonality. The aim of this master thesis is to understand the different perceptions of the selected stakeholders regarding seasonality and to thus, determine if seasonality is just considered as a general problems for the tourism businesses of Girona or if it also has some beneficial effects. Moreover, this study will try to comprehend also the effects seasonality generates for the selected tourism businesses and the consequent actions applied to tackle it.

The research follows the principles of grounded theory and was conducted through semi-structured interviews with a selected sample of tourism stakeholders. Afterwards, a SWOT analysis was also conducted, with the aim of developing a better explanation of the key findings, giving them a clearer visibility.

## 1.2 Case setting

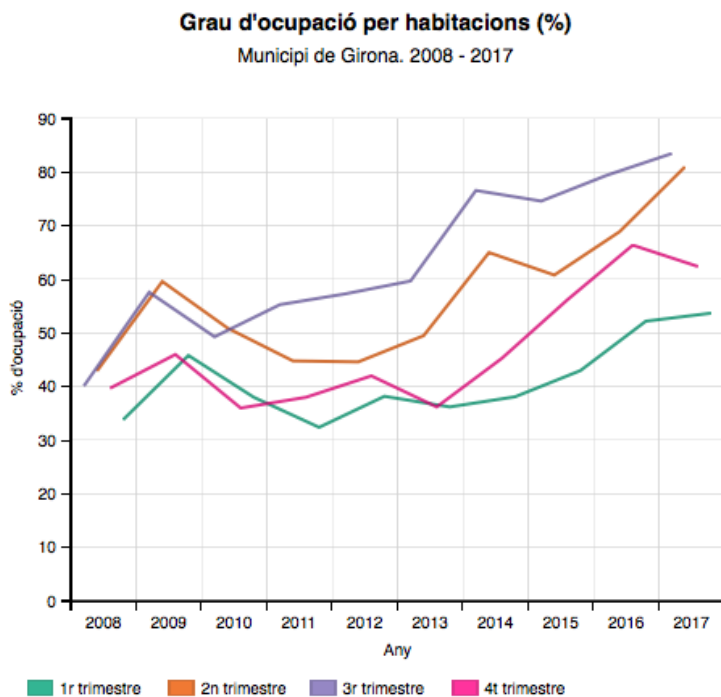
Girona is a small city with approximately 100.000 inhabitants, located in Catalonia, in the north of Spain, at one hour driving from Barcelona, 30 km from the Costa Brava and 60 km from the South of France (Galí Espelt & Donaire Benito, 2005).

In the last decade, tourism in Girona has increased dramatically, as the data collected from the “Observatori” of Ajuntament de Girona (2018) make visible. Visitors are mainly going for cultural tourism, due to the fascinating history and the medieval heritage of the city (Galí Espelt & Donaire Benito, 2005). Figure 1. below was retrieved from the website of “Observatori the Girona” and shows the average occupancy of tourism facilities of the city

during the whole year. As it is visible, visitors in Girona focus mainly in the months of July, August and September, “3rd trimestre” and one of the main reason is the proximity between Girona and Costa Brava (Galí Espelt & Donaire Benito, 2006). Indeed, according to Galí Espelt & Donaire Benito (2005), “Costa Brava has become the tourist epicentre of the territory” (p.784).

Costa Brava represents an established “coastal tourist destination” (Prat & Cànoves, 2012, p.119) with “a relatively long and varied history of touristic development” (Morris & Dickinson, 1987, p.17). The main motivations pushing visitors to Costa Brava are the amazing beaches and the pleasant weather (Prat & Cànoves, 2012). It has been demonstrated that coastal destinations are the most affected by seasonality, as relying mainly on the “3S, sun, sand and sea”, and thus, more dependent on the meteorological conditions (Ćorluka et., 2016, p.71). According to Sardá et al., (2005), Costa Brava is characterized by seasonal fluctuation in the number of tourists, as half of the yearly arrivals concentrate between June and September, because of the favorable climatic season. Consequently, even the city of Girona is influenced by the seasonal tourism patterns of demand caused by the closeness of Costa Brava (Galí Espelt & Donaire Benito, 2006).

Figure 1. Yearly occupation of the facilities of Girona



Source: Ajuntament de Girona

Nowadays, the tourism offices of the main cities of Catalonia, which are Barcelona, Lleida, Tarragona and Girona, are using the same system, in order to compare and to collect the number of monthly visitors passing to the office and the efficiency of the assistance provided (Tourism office, 2018). The number of people who visited the tourism office of Girona in the month of February 2018 overcame with a great difference the numbers of the other cities, making clear the importance the city is acquiring internationally (Tourism office, 2018).

Moreover, the tourism office of Girona conducts other daily enquiries. Through every visitor passing to the office several information are collected indirectly, such as the reason of the travel, if the tourists will stay overnight in the city and in which type of accommodation (Tourism office, 2018). Figure 7. below illustrates the results gathered in 2016 and 2017 about the percentage of overnight visitors in Girona making visible the different percentage of low and high season. The figures was provided to the researcher by the tourism office of Girona directly.

Figure 2. Number of overnight visitors in Girona, 2016-2017

**Taula pern noctacions**

**ENQUESTES PERNOCTACIONS 2015-2016**

<b>MESOS</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>DIFERÈNCIA</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Gener</b>	302	314	12	3,97
<b>Febrer</b>	434	391	-4,3	9,91
<b>Març</b>	671	471	-200	29,81
<b>Abril</b>	535	856	321	60
<b>Maig</b>	996	860	-136	13,65
<b>Juny</b>	667	583	-84	12,59
<b>Juliol</b>	819	1060	241	29,43
<b>Agost</b>	1.389	1550	161	11,59
<b>Setembre</b>	819	1350	531	64,84
<b>Octubre</b>	955	851	-104	10,89
<b>Novembre</b>	463	479	16	3,46
<b>Desembre</b>	527	769	242	45,92
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8577</b>	<b>9534</b>	<b>957</b>	<b>11,16</b>

(Font: Oficina de Turisme de Girona)

Source: Tourism Office of Girona, 2018

As aforementioned, recently the number of tourists in the city of Girona has increased drastically (Tourism office, 2018). According to Galí Espelt & Donaire Benito (2005), “Images are individual perceptions, subjective introspections that are constructed in the mind of the visitor” (p.777). When a destination has constructed its universal image, it means that

the destination is positioned and known in the “*collective imagination*” (Galí Espelt & Donaire Benito, 2005, p.777).

Barcelona and Costa Brava have already constructed a universal image and thus, are well known destinations all around the world, receiving every year thousands of domestic and international visitors (Bel, 2009). In the last years, several established but also fortuitous factors have contributed to the creation of the universal image of Girona and consequently, increased the number of visitors (Galí Espelt & Donaire Benito, 2005).

Recently, the Ajuntament of Girona has undertaken several actions in order to lengthen the tourism season and to reduce the difference among the number of overnight visitors during low and peak season (Tourism office, 2018). The main strategy applied by the municipality of the city is the creation of festivals and activities during every season of the year (Nobre, 2017). The official website of the city of Girona has a section called “Girona todo el año”, and shows all the initiatives happening every month in the city. Indeed, Girona is also known as “*Ciutat de festivals*”, due to the several events and festivals happening in every season of the year (Nobre, 2017).

Another of the main factor giving visibility to Girona recently, has been the importance acquired by gastronomy, thanks to the three stars Michelin restaurant “El Celler de Can Roca” which was nominated the best of the world (Nobre, 2017). The shooting in the ancient parts of the city of the worldwide known tv series “Game of Thrones” has also played a central role in the increased popularity of Girona as a touristic destination (Parramon & Medina, 2017).

But mostly, the increase of the connections by plane with Girona have contributed to the urban growth and the international visibility of the city (Bel, 2009). Due to the high number of flights landing in Girona, for a certain period the city was considered as Barcelona’s second airport and Ryanair has been the company opening the majority of new routes (Bel, 2009). Moreover, in 2013, the line of high speed train Ave was opened, reducing the time from Girona to Barcelona to 37 minutes and from Girona to Madrid to slightly more than 3 hours and a half (Burguès, 2013).

These initiatives make evident that tackling seasonality and trying to lengthen the tourism season is one of the priority for the Ajuntament of Girona. On the other side, the different tourism supply stakeholders of Girona might have a different perception of seasonality and might not take or take limited actions in order to reduce seasonality.

This research is aimed at understanding the perceptions of the tourism supply stakeholders of the city of Girona regarding seasonality. In the academic literature, grounded theory was

successfully applied in similar researches, and this is why it was considered a suitable method for this study (Hardy, 2005; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2016). Thus, this research had a qualitative approach and more specifically, primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, with a sample of stakeholders.

Through the interviews, the main goal was to answer the main research question and some related sub questions.

The main research question is:

***How do the tourism supply stakeholders of Girona perceive the phenomenon of seasonality?***

The sub-questions are:

***Which are the main effects seasonality exercises on the tourism businesses?***

***Which are the current strategies applied to tackle seasonality?***

### 1.3 Structure

Chapter one corresponds to the introduction. This chapter starts with an explanation of the rationale behind this research. The topic of this research, seasonality, is explained, including the gaps existing in the academic literature. The research question and the related sub questions clarify how this research will try to overcome the aforementioned gaps.

Chapter two, consists of an overview of the most important academic literature studies related to seasonality, reporting the definition of the phenomenon, the measurements which have been developed, its causes, its effects and the main strategies which have been applied by both public and private stakeholders to tackle seasonality.

Chapter three clarifies how the research was conducted. First the constructivist paradigm that was used in this research will be explained. Further the methodology applied will be clarified. The research was conducted with a qualitative approach, using the methodology of constructivist grounded theory, which will be examined in details. Finally, the limitations of the research will be identified.

In chapter four the analysis of the data is conducted. The analysis was done with a manual coding procedure, without the use of any specific software. Following the principle of grounded theory, after the coding, some core categories has been identified with the aim to answer the research question and the related sub questions. These core categories explain the stakeholders' perceptions about seasonality, the effects generated for their business and finally, which strategies they apply to tackle seasonality. Finally, a SWOT analysis will be conducted, in order to make more visible the complex situation created seasonality in Girona.

Chapter five will present the conclusion of this research. Some recommendation will be given in order to improve the current situation connected to seasonality in Girona. To conclude the limitations of the present study will also be reminded.

## 2. Literature review

This chapter is supposed to give an overview of what has been developed in the academic literature about seasonality. As it will become clear, the authors do not have the same perception of the phenomenon. First, the definitions most used in the academic literature, which are those proposed by BarOn (1975), Hylleberg (1992) and Butler (2001) will be explained. Following, the most commonly used measurements which have been developed to evaluate the phenomenon will be presented. After, the main causes leading to the creation of seasonality, the effects of the phenomenon for a destination, which can be both positive and negative and the strategies which have been developed to tackle seasonality will be presented. Finally, it will be clarified that the stakeholders involved in tourism might have different perceptions of the phenomenon which are not often considered by the authors.

### 2.1 Definition of seasonality

Many authors during the years have provided their own definition of seasonality (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2010), which often is very general and only focused on the causes (Ćorluka & et al., 2016). Thus, as a result, a general definition of seasonality related to tourism does not exist yet (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005; Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2010).

According to Chung (2009), “*BarOn is a pioneer in seasonality*” (p.83). BarOn’s definition of seasonality was: “*Seasonality implies an incomplete and unbalanced utilisation of the means at the disposal of the economy, and this is similar to the imbalance of the business cycle, where the economy is either overheated or running under full potential at different phases of the cycle*” (BarOn, 1975, p.53).

During the years, many other authors have developed their own definition of seasonality, in many cases, using BarOn’s study as a base (Chuang, 2009). According to Ćorluka & et al., (2016), some of the most accepted and used definitions are the ones provided by Hylleberg (1992) and by Butler (2001).

According to Hylleberg (1992): “*Seasonality is a systematic, although not necessarily regular, intra-year movement caused by changes in the weather, the calendar, and timing of decisions, directly or indirectly through the production and consumption decisions made by the agents of*

*the economy. These decisions are influenced by endowments, the expectations and preferences of the agents, and the production techniques available in the economy” (p.4).*

While Butler’s definition was: *”Seasonality is the temporal imbalance in the phenomenon of tourism, which may be expressed in terms of dimensions of such elements as numbers of visitors, expenditure of visitors, traffic on highways and other forms of transportation, employment and admissions to attractions” (Butler, 2001, p.5).*

Generally, many authors tend to define seasonality focusing merely on the negative effects it has on the destinations (Andriotis 2005; Higham & Hinch, 2002). *“Whether assessed in terms of lost revenue or reflected as the enforced termination of employment, there is obviously a major economic and social dimension to these (seasonal) troughs which evidently is in no-one’s interest” (Jefferson, 1986, p.24).*

## 2.2 Measurements

Due to the importance that seasonality has recently acquired, during the years, there has been the development of several statistical methods aimed at its measurement and at forecasting seasonal demand patterns (Karamustafa & Ulama 2010), more or less sophisticated (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2010). The main issue connected with these measurements is that none of them is better, as each is focused on different aspects of the phenomenon (Duro, 2016). Consequently, there is not yet a single widely accepted measurement of seasonality (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005).

Generally, the most commonly used unit to measure seasonality is to look at the number of visitors, considering the numbers of arrivals and of departures (Lundtorp, 2001). According to Nadal et al., (2004) *“Occupancy rates”* represents another widely used method to observe seasonal demand variations (p.699).

Seasonality, in many cases, is constituted by systematic fluctuations of tourists’ concentration, happening every year in the same period (Lo Magno et al., 2017). Thus, another way of measuring the phenomenon is to consider a *“seasonal index”*, which *“shows the increases and decreases of the demand comparing them to the average during the season”* (Karamustafa & Ulama, 2010, p.196). These indices consequently, allow to distinguish between high and low season and to create series patterns of visitation (Lo Magno et al., 2017).

*“Seasonal Range”*, *“Seasonal Ratio”* or *“Peak Seasonal Factor”* are some of the most common statistical measures, based on the consideration of the highest and the lowest seasonal monthly indices (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005; Karamustafa & Ulama, 2010). As stated by Rosselló

& Sansó (2017), “*“The Seasonal Range” is the difference between highest and lowest monthly indices; the “Seasonality Ratio” is the highest seasonal value divided by lowest one; and the “Peak Seasonal Factor” is the highest monthly seasonal factor* (p. 380). According to Sutcliffe & Sinclair (1980), these measures “*are unaffected by changes in the rank order of months*” (p.432). This means that, if for instance, in a determined destination, the number of visitors in a month of low season reaches the number typical during a month of high season and vice versa, if visitors in high season fell to the average of low season, by using static measure the level of seasonality would not change (Sutcliffe & Sinclair, 1980).

The “Gini coefficient” is another of the most widely used method for the measurement of seasonality (Sutcliffe & Sinclair, 1980; Karamustafa & Ulama, 2010) It was created with the aim of measuring “*the economic inequalities*”, and further “*employed as a measure of inequality between seasonal factors in any given year*” (Lo Magno et al., 2017, p.56). The value of the Gini coefficient oscillates between 1 which represents complete inequality and 0 which on the contrary, reflects complete equality (Karamustafa & Ulama, 2010; Sastre et al., 2015). One of the main characteristics of the Gini coefficient is that it takes into consideration the changes in the “*monthly distribution*” (Turrión-Prats & Duro, 2016, p.3), and therefore, this measurement is very sensitive to variations outside high season (Rosselló & Sansó, 2017).

### 2.3 Causes

Several authors during the years have attempted to identify the exact causes of seasonality in tourism, but still without developing a sufficient comprehension (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005). Seasonality is usually associated with two main causes (Hartman, 1986; Butler, 2001): one is “*natural*” and the other is “*institutional*” (BarOn, 1975, p.2; Butler, 2001), and both contribute to the creation of seasonal patterns in tourism demand (Hinch et al., 2001).

Variations in climatic conditions happening with a certain regularity in a certain destination, such as differences in the temperature, snowfall, daylight, rains... are recognized as the main causes of natural seasonality (Butler, 2001). Natural causes can not be controlled by humans (Ćorluka et al., 2016) and can be considered predictable only if they occur in the same period every year in a same destination (Hartman, 1986; Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005).

Kreutzwiser (1989, pp. 29–30) stated that: “*Climate and weather conditions... influence how satisfying particular recreational outings will be. Air temperature, humidity, precipitation, cloudiness, amount of daylight, visibility, wind, water temperature, and snow and ice cover are among the parameters deemed to be important... In summer, air temperature and humidity can combine to create uncomfortable conditions for vigorous activities, while wind and*



*temperature in winter can create a wind chill hazardous to outdoor recreationists”* (Higham & Hinch, 2002).

As stated by Amelung et al., (2007, p.285): “*Tourism is a climate-dependent industry*” and thus, issues caused by natural seasonality are difficult to overcome (Lundtorp et al., 2001), and have impacts upon the society to various degrees (Hartmann, 1986; Butler, 2001). According to Ridderstaat (2014), “*seasonality triggered by climatic conditions has been recognized in the literature as a major challenge for tourism destinations*” (p.246). Indeed, many destinations have acquired their national and international reputation thanks to their particularly pleasant climatic conditions (Amelung et al., 2007). Thus, especially businesses of a touristic destination based merely on outdoor facilities, where tourism is more dependent on the climatic conditions have higher probabilities of being affected by natural seasonality (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005), for instance, all the businesses located in coastal destinations (Ćorluka et al., 2016).

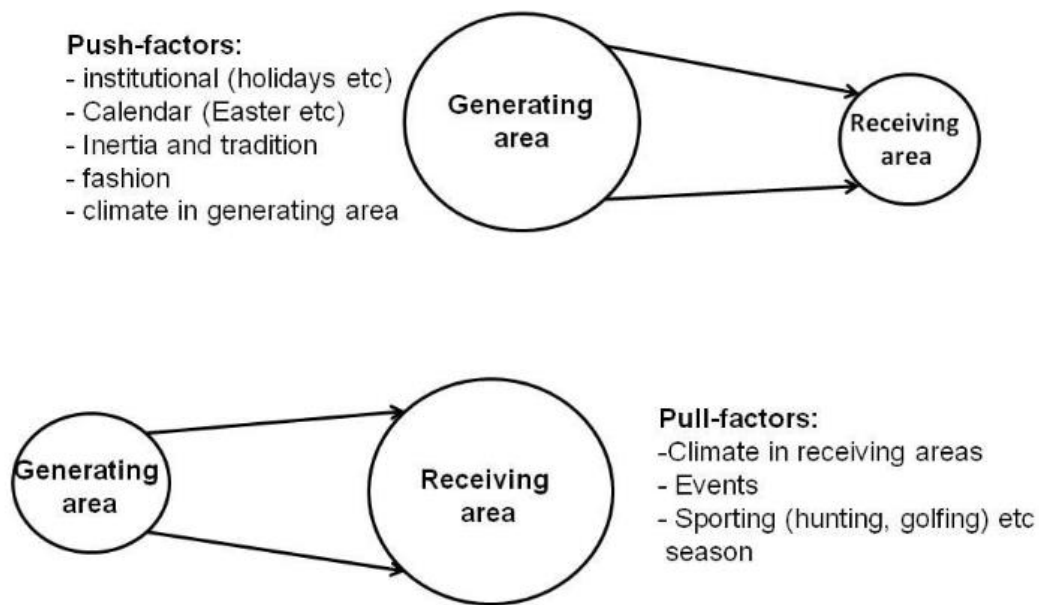
On the other side, institutional seasonality is based on human decisions and consequently, it is less predictable (Butler, 2001). Institutional seasonality reflects the social norms and practices of a society (Hinch & Hickey, 1997; Butler, 2001), which are “*religious, cultural, ethnic, social and economic*” (Butler, 2001, p.6). For instance, school and public holidays, religious and cultural festivities, such as Christmas, Eastern and all the other similar events of a society contribute to the creation of institutional seasonality (Boffa & Sucurro, 2012), which thus, influence the type and number of tourists in a destination (Lee et al., 2008). Public holidays over the years, in many destinations have acquired a longer duration, such as two weeks break for Christmas or a week off for Eastern and have become the most common form of institutional seasonality (Butler, 2001). Visitors might also concentrate in a specific period because of a particular sport event, such as the Super Bowl or the Football World Cup (Lee et al., 2008). Moreover, a destination might also become popular because of a momentary trend (Cuccia & Rizzo, 2011), for example the interest of tourists in a specific place might arise because of the shooting of a famous movie or a tv series (Parramon & Medina, 2017).

Hylleberg (1992), has been one of the pioneer in the study of seasonality (Chung, 2009), identifying various causes which grouped “*into three categories: weather*”, such as temperature and daylight, “*calendar effects*”, including all the festivities connected with holidays and lastly “*timing decisions*” (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005, p.203). Butler (2001), few years later, redefined and grouped the causes of seasonality into three different categories. The first two fit within institutional seasonality and are represented by the social pressure and the sporting season, while the third is connected with the habits of the visitors, which are difficult to change (Butler, 2001).

Nowadays, there is still a lack of comprehension of why the majority of people travel in the same season; if it is because of voluntarily decisions or because of external constraints (Butler, 2001; Lundtorp et al., 2001). In order to understand the complex situations caused by seasonality, is fundamental to consider both the “*push and the pull factors*” (Lundtorp et al., 2001, p.89). Push factors are related to the possibilities of tourists to travel, such as might be the holidays or the free time, but also to their desire to travel, for instance, unfavorable climatic conditions at home motivating to look for more pleasant weather (Amelung et al., 2007). Pull factors are related to the destinations and the natural and artificial attributes making them appealing touristic locations with the potential to attract tourists (Amelung et al., 2007).

Climatic conditions can motivate tourists to travel in a specific season and to a specific destination and thus, causing the seasonal demand patterns of a destination and thus, can be considered as both push and pull factors (Ridderstaat et al., 2014).

Figure 3. Causes of seasonality for holidaymakers – push and pull factors



Source: Lundtorp et al., 2001

Nowadays, climate change is generally accepted as another cause of seasonality (Butler, 2001; Amelung et al., 2007; Ridderstaat et al., 2014). Only very recently, the urgency of developing a better comprehension of the phenomenon has been recognized (Amelung et al., 2007), due to its several consequences on the tourism market (Gómez-Martín, 2006). As aforementioned, weather plays an essential role in the process of decision-making of tourists, and thus, it

becomes evident how changes in the climate will affect “*tourism demand patterns*” (Gössling, et al., 2012, p.36).

## 2.4 Impacts and implications

Seasonality has many diverse impacts and implications on a destination (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005), from both the supply and the demand side (Lee et al., 2008). Despite the phenomenon of seasonality affects many sectors, it is particularly difficult to be managed in tourism because “*it is impossible to store the products*” (Lundtorp et al., 2001, p.102).

One of the main outcome deriving from seasonality are the visitors’ patterns of a destination, which might be “*one-peak, two-peak or non-peak*” (Butler & Mao, 1997, pp.14-15).

Destinations with a single peak tend to produce extreme seasonality, such as it is summer in the Mediterranean destinations (Smith, 1993; Amelung et al., 2007). The main outcomes of having only a peak season are congestion, overbooking and overuse of resources, which will consequently affect the quality of services and sometimes the profit of the businesses (Karamustafa & Ulama, 2010). At the same, peak season is contra posed to a long period of off season, which is connected to a general underutilization of all the tourism facilities (McEnnif 1992). Manning & Powers (1984) added that “*Uneven distribution of use over time (peaking) is one of the most pervasive problems with outdoor recreation and tourism, causing inefficient resource use, loss of profit potential, strain on social and ecological carrying capacities, and administrative scheduling difficulties*” (p. 25).

Two-peak seasonality occurs in destinations with two touristic seasons, a main one, which usually corresponds to summer, and a minor one, generally winter (Butler & Mao, 1997; Butler, 2001). As reported by Butler & Mao (1997), some destinations in the North of Europe, such as the Alps or Scandinavia can be considered two-peak destinations as tourists “*enjoy two seasons - summer and winter*” (p.15).

Non-peak seasonality occurs merely only in urban destinations, as they can have a use all year round (Butler & Mao, 1997; Butler, 2001), as providing attractions suitable for all weather conditions, such as museums (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005). Hong Kong or Singapore are among the best example of non-peak destinations, as receiving a similar amount of tourists all year round (Butler & Mao, 1997; Butler, 2001).

### 2.4.1 Negative effects

It is widely recognized that seasonality creates various negative effects, from an economic, an environmental and a socio-cultural perspectives (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005; Amelung et al., 2007).

Some of the most cited negative economic implications are the reduction of profitability, low annual return on capital and the creation of inefficient management of human resources and capacity of the facilities (Ashworth & Thomas, 1999; Krakover, 2000; İsmert & Petrick, 2004; Karamustafa & Ulama, 2010).

During off-peak season, many facilities and attractions are closed, causing under-use of resources, and especially a reduction of the level of employment and issues enhancing the productivity (Turrión-Prats & Duro, 2016). The closure of the facilities and attractions during off season represents an extreme measure to cut the costs (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005). Moreover, this massive closure tends to generate also a negative image in the mind of the visitors, with the risk to create a bad reputation of the destination (Flognfeldt, 2001).

On the other side, extreme seasonal peaks are connected with a saturation of the facilities, causing an overuse and an inefficient management of the resources (Lee et al., 2008), which as extreme consequence could negatively affect the quality of the services offered and consequently the experiences of the customers (Turrión-Prats & Duro, 2016). The continuous fluctuations between underuse and overuse of resources, affects negatively the productivity and thus, “*the profits, the attraction of investment capital*” and the retention of skilled employees (Amelung et al., 2007, p.287).

Another implication of seasonality is how dramatically affects the employment in the tourism sector (Chung, 2009). Low and high season are the main causes for widespread peak-season employment, underemployment and unemployment in off-season times (Chung, 2009). Seasonality might hinder the recruitment of skilled workers and qualified employees (Lundberg et al., 2009), as they might look for a more stable working conditions (Karamustafa & Ulama, 2010). Seasonal jobs are usually connected with ideas of limited opportunities of career growth, such as promotions and low salaries (Lundberg et al., 2009).

The negative employment situation caused by seasonality affects especially family businesses depending exclusively on tourism (Getz & Nilsson, 2004). These family businesses are forced to work no stop during peak season, due to the necessity to maximize their profits and the extreme consequence might be a “*disruption of the leisure life*”(Getz & Nilsson, 2004, p.20). As stated by Getz & Nilsson (2004), moreover, children might voluntarily decide not to take part and continue the family businesses because of the hard working conditions.

From an environmental perspective, pollution, scarcity of resources, especially water supply, and traffic congestion are just some of the main issues derived from the increase in population during the peak season (Andriotis, 2005). Unconscious tourists might damage the natural environment and the territory of a destination irreversibly (Cuccia & Rizzo, 2011; Ridderstaat et al., 2014).

Moreover, not only the environment but also the local communities might be negatively affected by the presence of seasonal visitors (Amelung et al., 2007). Some of the main issues affecting the quality of life of the locals are for example, traffic congestion, overcrowding, increment in the level of crime and higher prices (Butler, 2001; Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005). The extreme high presence of visitors during peak season might bring “*the disruption of the traditional social patterns in a community*” (Butler, 2001, p.12). Indeed, sometimes, locals can conduct a normal life only during off-season, when they are not invaded by a mass of tourists (BarOn, 1975; Butler, 2001; Chung, 2009) and especially local communities not relying entirely on tourism to make profits might consider low season in a positive way (Butler, 2001; Lundtorp et al., 2001).

#### 2.4.2 Positive effects

Despite the potential to generate some positive effects (Butler, 2001; Chung, 2009), generally, seasonality and especially low season are associated only with negative implications (Butler & Mao, 1997; Andriotis, 2005) and several studies and attempts have been aimed towards the reduction of seasonality (Amelung et al., 2007).

From a social and an ecological perspective, seasonality has some advantages (Chung, 2009). For instance, despite many employees are recruited only during high season, in many cases, during low season, locals are hired in order to do renovations and maintenance works on infrastructures and facilities, limiting the unemployment (Mourdoukoutas, 1988). Moreover, workers used to this rhythm and to have some time of the year off, might also regard the lack of employment during off season as something positive (Mourdoukoutas, 1988). As stated by Butler (2001), “*The off-season often represents the only time that the local population can operate in what to it is a 'normal' manner, and engage in traditional social and cultural activities*” (p.12).

From an ecological perspective, it is positive to give the resources some rest after the overuse of peak season, as in this way, they can be regenerated (Butler, 2001; Chung, 2009). Water is one of the natural resources suffering more stress from tourism and many destinations might even be forced to import it during peak season, when the number of inhabitants even double in some places (Andriotis, 2005).

According to Baum & Hagen (1999): *“in some destinations, the off-season has a ‘fallow’ effect on both tourism resources and the host community, allowing some measure of rejuvenation before the commencement of the next season”* (p 301).

## 2.5 Management of seasonality

As seasonality does not have a single cause, there is also no single solution (Butler, 2001). During the years, despite the phenomenon will probably be never totally eliminated, several attempts to even out the peaks and troughs have been developed by both the public and the private sector (McEnnif, 1992; Baum; 1999; Ćorluka et al., 2016).

The efforts to reduce seasonality currently, are focused rather than on the consumers, on the destinations, such as it is the creation of intensive marketing campaigns creating added value, playing on the diversification of the appeal (Butler & Mao, 1997; Baum, 1999; Butler, 2001). So far, despite several efforts, seasonality is still not easy to overcome, due to the complexity of the phenomenon (Butler & Mao, 1997).

Nowadays, the main strategies are related to *“price, product policies, and communication”*, such as marketing campaigns, implemented by both, the public institutions and the private sector (Sastre et al., 2015, p.1209). The aim, rather than overcoming seasonality, has become the extension of the tourist season into shoulder periods and the creation of a more widespread demand during the year (Baum, 1999).

*“Trying to lengthen the main season, establishing additional seasons, diversifying markets, using differential pricing and tax incentives on a temporal basis, encouraging the staggering of holidays, encouraging domestic tourism in off-seasons, and providing off-season activities such as festivals and conferences”* are some of the ways suggested by Butler (2001, p.12) in order to overcome or at least limit seasonality.

One of the most widespread method to tackle seasonality is trying to increase tourism demand outside peak season, and to do so, different approaches have been developed in many destinations (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005). One of the most common strategy is to diversify the tourism offers of an attraction (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005). The promotion of tourism products based exclusively on seasonal characteristics is nowadays recognized as one of the main causes of seasonal demand patterns of a destination (Chung, 2009).

Thus, in order to change this situation, tourism planners should focus on product and market diversification, trying to attract more segments of visitors by extending and diversifying the

season with new products suitable during the whole year (Baum, 1999). A typical example is the adaptation of ski facilities for summer activities, such as golf, trekking and so on (Chung, 2009). This marketing strategy has been successful in many cases, especially when the campaigns have been focused on attracting new markets (Baum, 1999). The main limitations of this approach is the location of the destination, its weather and its competitiveness (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005).

In order to overcome these natural factors, the most common strategy worldwide has become the creation of festivals and events (Baum, 1999; Turrión-Prats & Duro, 2016). Events and festivals vary in size and duration (Baum & Hagen, 1999) and nowadays, play a crucial role in the competitiveness of a destination (Getz, 2008). This strategy is aimed at increasing tourism demand during the off season, when the number of tourists is lower (Chung, 2009), as events have the potential to become strong motivators for visitors (Getz, 2008). Moreover, the creation of events also contributes to generate demand and attract tourists to new locations previously unknown (Getz, 2008; Turrión-Prats & Duro, 2016). One of the most famous example is the Oktoberfest in Germany, known all over the world and attracting every year thousands of visitors (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005). Sport events have also a good potential to attract tourists outside the peak season (Getz, 2008).

Market diversification corresponds to another of the most used strategy in order to tackle seasonality (Baum & Hagen, 1999). The simplest case of this strategy is the research of new demand and the attraction of a new clientele for products and facilities which already exist (Baum & Hagen, 1999). Indeed, the recognition of different visitors' motivations becomes essential (Baum & Hagen, 1999; Turrión-Prats & Duro, 2016). Currently, one of the main aim of market diversification is to attract a more diversified clientele, such as business customers or seniors, which are less dependent on climatic conditions and more flexible to travel in any season (Andriotis, 2005).

Another method used to increase the demand outside peak season has become diversification in pricing, which are kept lower during low season and higher during the peak season (Butler, 2001). This strategy is possible due to the fact that "*tourism is a price elastic product*" (Butler & Mao, 1997, p.13). For instance, cheaper prices for the accommodations or for the transportations might become strong motivators to travel in a different season (Butler & Mao, 1997).

Marketing has also an essential role, creating and making visible appealing special price offers in a destination (O'Driscoll, 1985). The goal of the strategy might be mistaken for the maximization of the profits, but in reality it is merely the increment of tourism demand in low season (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005).

The main target of price diversification are the seniors (Chang, 2009). Indeed, retired people have more flexibility to travel in low season (Chang, 2009) and might be attracted by offers such as cheaper accommodation rates or cheaper transportation tickets (Butler & Mao, 1997). On the other side, people with the necessity to travel in a certain period of time, because of holidays, habits, or other reasons, might be willing to book anyway despite higher prices (Chung, 2009).

The strategy of price diversification generates some controversies (Turrión-Prats & Duro, 2016). On one side, as stated by Turrión-Prats & Duro (2016), *“to encourage tourism businesses to apply this strategy, the governments might offer incentives”*, which can be of various types, such as tax reduction (p.3). On the other side, the strategy of lowering the prices might also be seen as harmful for the image of the destination (Baum & Hagen, 1999; Turrión-Prats & Duro, 2016).

Nowadays, the desire to have a round year business, have led to several unpractical attempts to reduce seasonality (Butler, 2001). In some destinations, it would be wiser *“to accept seasonality as a fact of life and not as a problem”* (Andriotis, 2005, p.216).

## 2.6 Perceptions of seasonality

Nowadays, there is not enough acknowledgement that the tourism businesses might have different perceptions of seasonality (Butler, 2001; Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2010). Indeed, the perceptions and the views of the stakeholders difference according to the type of tourism business in which they are involved (Duval, 2004). In a same destination, while some businesses might see seasonality as a priority and therefore, a big issue to deal with (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2010), other businesses might *“welcome reprieve from the busier peak seasons”* (Duval, p.336).

Many authors refer to seasonality only from an employment perspective, highlighting especially the negative effects of the phenomenon for the productivity and the difficulties to find jobs all year round (Krakover, 2000; Butler, 2001), due to the fact that many facilities and infrastructures close during off season or reduce the number of employees (Andriotis, 2005). Mourdoukoutas (1988), replied to this affirmation, reporting that in Greece, *“some employees choose seasonal occupations because they pay more. Others do so because seasonal occupations suit their non-market activities during their off-peak season(s), or they may lack any other occupational alternatives”* (p.315).



It becomes clear that the perception of seasonality difference according to the viewpoint considered, which in the majority of current studies is an economic perspective (Butler, 2001). Different perceptions of seasonality consequently, lead to diverse responses and strategies for tackling the phenomenon (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2010). According to Duval (2004), in a destination “*policy decisions and managerial procedures need to consider how seasonality is conceptualised (even socially constructed) by local businesses*” (p.336). The perceptions of the local businesses involved in tourism are often ignored in the current studies (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2010).

### **3 Methodology**

The following chapter will clarify the methodology used in this research.

First, the constructivist paradigm that this research follows will be explained. This research was conducted through a qualitative approach, using the methodology of constructivist grounded theory, which will be further explained, clarifying how the data were collected and analyzed. These two procedures were simultaneous processes. A SWOT analysis was also conducted, with the aim to better explain and give visibility to the key findings. The main characteristics of the SWOT analysis, making it a suitable method for this study will also be clarified. Finally, the limitations of the research will be examined.

#### **3.1 Research strategy**

The research strategy of this study is to explore the phenomenon of seasonality in the city of Girona, from the perspective of the tourism supply side stakeholders. All these stakeholders have a role in the tourism sector (Yuksel et al., 1999).

Currently, there are shortages of studies considering the phenomenon of seasonality and the different stakeholders’ perceptions (Butler, 2001; Duval, 2004). Indeed, according to Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff (2010), “*Only a few authors acknowledge the fact that there might be differences between businesses in perceptions of seasonality and thus in their responses to the issues arising from these variations in demand*” (p.396). As explained above, so far, in the academic literature there is lack in “*the extent to which tourism-related businesses and operations perceive seasonality, both from the perspective of their own operation or business and the wider geographical context in which they operate*” (Duval, 2004, p.325).

The city of Girona was chosen as the subject of this research because the author had previously worked there in the field of tourism and thus, had a particular interest in the area and was familiar with its tourism situation. Girona has a very strategic position, as it is located close to two destinations with a very strong international touristic brand: Barcelona and the Costa Brava, which thus, contribute to the creation of seasonal tourism. Moreover, as

aforementioned, there has been less investigation regarding urban destinations, as generally less affected by seasonality (Butler & Mao, 1997), and this is another reason why the case study of this research was based in the city of Girona.

The aim of this research was to cover the aforementioned gaps of the current studies of the academic literature, determining the stakeholders' perceptions regarding seasonality. In particular, the aim of this study is to understand if seasonality is perceived as a priority to deal with and a general problem for all the selected tourism stakeholders of Girona or if it is regarded also in a more optimistic way, having some positive and beneficial effects for their businesses. This study will research also the strategies applied to tackle the phenomenon by the different stakeholders of Girona.

This research will to answer a main research question and some related sub-questions. The main research question is:

***How do the tourism supply stakeholders of Girona perceive the phenomenon of seasonality?***

The related sub-questions are:

***Which are the main effects seasonality has on the tourism businesses of Girona?***

***Which are the current strategies the tourism stakeholders of Girona apply to tackle seasonality?***

### 3.2 The paradigm

According to Guba & Lincoln (1998), a research paradigm is a “*basic set of beliefs*” determining the researcher's view of the reality and consequently guiding his/her actions (p.200). The main essence of any paradigm can be summarized by the answers to three fundamental interconnected questions, which are: the ontological question, the epistemological question and the methodological question (Guba & Lincoln, 1998).

Due to its nature, this research follows a constructivist paradigm, and the responses of this paradigm to the three aforementioned questions will be explained below.

#### 1. The ontological question.

The ontological question explores which is the nature of the reality according to the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Constructivists do not believe in an objective reality, but on the contrary, are in favor of the existence of multiple realities, where each is a social construction created by the human intellect of an individual (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Mills et al., 2006). Thus, the world consists of a multitude of individual realities, corresponding to the same number of living individuals (Mills et al., 2006), despite many elements characterizing these

realities are often shared (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). The realities are dependent upon the context (Mills et al., 2006) and this is why the ontology of the constructivist paradigm is relativist (Guba & Lincoln, 1998).

Following the constructivist paradigm, this study does not believe in the existence of one objective reality of how people perceive the phenomenon of seasonality, but on the contrary, it is assumed that every individual constructs its own particular reality. These realities depend on the context, which is in this case related to the city of Girona. Thus, the researcher has a relativist ontological position, as an objective reality is denied and each participant may report different interpretations of the phenomenon observed. According to Guba & Lincoln (1998), these realities “*are not more or less “true”, in any absolute sense, but simply more or less informed and/or sophisticated*” (p.206).

## 2. The epistemological question

The epistemological question focuses on the relationship between the researcher and the world he/she will research (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). The epistemology of the constructivist paradigm is subjective (Manning, 1997). According to Guba & Lincoln (1998), “*the investigator and the object of investigation are assumed to be interactively linked so that the “findings” are literally created as the investigation proceeds*” (p.207). Constructivists are not objective researchers, as their values will influence the outcomes of any research (Mills et al., 2006). To understand the multiple individual realities surrounding the researcher, his or her personal interpretation becomes fundamental (Schwandt, 1994). “*The constructivist or interpretivist believes that to understand this world of meaning one must interpret it*” (Schwandt, 1994, p.119). The number of possible interpretations of the meaning of the participants is infinite and thus, it is up to the researcher to decide which are the most appropriate, taking into consideration also the specific context of the study (Manning, 1997).

This study was conducted through semi-structured interviews which, in the majority of the cases, were conducted face to face between the researcher and the selected participants and thus, the epistemological stance is subjective. The researcher analyzed and subjectively interpreted the collected data, with the intention to assess the subjects’ perception of seasonal tourism, and their individual reality. Thus, the researcher and the participants cocreate the understanding of the reality, and the epistemology is subjectivist, dependent on this interaction (Hardy, 2005; Jennings, 2010).

## 3. The methodological question

How the researchers find out and gain knowledge of the subjects analyzed corresponds to the methodological question (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). The methodological framework of the constructivist paradigm is *hermeneutical and dialectical* (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p.207). In

the constructivist paradigm, the researcher and the participants are closely related and their interaction influence and shape the interpretation of the reality of the researcher (Nyaupane & Poudel, 2012).

The methodology framework of this research is hermeneutical because the individual constructions of realities are analyzed and dialectical because these realities are constantly compared (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Hardy, 2008). The data of this study are interpreted and reconstructed with the researcher's perspective (Jennings, 2010). The research is conducted through the methodology of grounded theory, which will be explained below.

### 3.3 Research method

This research has been conducted using qualitative methodology. Qualitative methodology has been chosen because it allows the researcher to study the reality and it supports the process of policy formulation (Jennings, 2010). Because of its characteristics, grounded theory has been the method selected to conduct the study.

#### 3.3.1 Grounded theory

Grounded theory came into existence with the publication of the two sociologists Glaser and Strauss, in 1967 (Mehmetoglu & Altinay, 2006; Goulding & Saren, 2010; Stumpf et al., 2016). Nowadays, grounded theory represents one of the most used qualitative research method, successfully applied in several fields of study, despite in tourism research has not been employed by many authors yet (Stumpf et al., 2016).

During the years, there has been the development of several variants of grounded theory (Walker & Myrick, 2006) and a divergence of the original co-founders method has originated the debate between the Glaserian and the Straussian versions (Mehmetoglu & Altinay, 2006; Stumpf et al., 2016). The main difference between the founders Glaser and Strauss lies in the data analysis, based on diverse coding procedures (Stumpf et al., 2016).

Despite the different variants, the main characteristic of grounded theory remains the assumption that theory is grounded in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The aim, rather than describing a phenomenon, is to create theory related to a particular circumstance (Hardy, 2005; Chiovitti & Piran, 2003).

The method consists in simultaneous processes of data collection and analysis, which allow to develop inductive theory, grounded inside the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Hardy, 2005; Daengbuppha, et al., 2006; Kim et al., 2009; Jennings, 2010). According to Strauss & Corbin (1994), *“the theory evolves during actual research, and it does this through continuous*

*interplay between analysis and data collection*” (p. 273). Thus, grounded theory aims to go beyond merely inductive data (Charmaz, 2017).

### 3.3.2 Constructivist Grounded Theory

In this research, the variant of constructivist grounded theory proposed by Kathy Charmaz has been used.

According to Charmaz (2006), “*Constructivists study how - and sometimes why - participants construct meanings and actions in specific situations*” (p.130).

In this research, seasonality creates a specific situation and the interviews conducted with the selected tourism supply stakeholders try to explain their perceptions towards the phenomenon thus, the meaning it has for them and why they undertake certain specific actions.

In the constructivist variant, the theory results by an interpretation of the researcher, and thus, it depends by his or her views and opinions (Charmaz, 2006). The participants have the knowledge of the topic the researcher wants to study (Charmaz, 2006). The relationship between the researcher and the participants in this version of grounded theory is not objective, but rather subjective, and the researcher also recognizes the possibility to create involuntarily biases (Matteucci & Gnoth, 2017).

This study is based on the researcher’s interpretation of the data collected through the interviews with the sample of participants, representing the category of supply stakeholders of Girona, which are supposed to shed light on the phenomenon of seasonality. The relationship with between the author and the participants is subjective and the researcher is aware of the possibility of creating biases as a limitation.

### 3.3.3 Sampling

In grounded theory, data analysis and data collection are carried out simultaneously, and thus, sampling schemes have the potential to be changed during the development of the study (Morse, 2011). According to Corbin & Strauss (1990), “*Sampling proceeds not in terms of a sample of a specific group of individuals, units of time, and so on, but in terms of concepts, their properties, dimensions, and variations*” (p. 420).

In this study two non-probability sampling techniques have been used, more specifically, snowball sampling and theoretical sampling.

As aforementioned, the study units of this research are the tourism supply stakeholders of the city of Girona. During the time of the research, the author collaborated with the City Council

of Girona, in the Area of Tourism and Economic Development and was assigned a supervisor. The supervisor gave some suggestions to the researcher about which stakeholders would have better fit the study and forwarded also their contacts, facilitating in this way the arrangement of the interviews. In some cases, the supervisor established directly the contact with the stakeholders for the author. Moreover, some of these participants during the interviews gave to the author the contacts of other people who could have helped her with the research. Again, in some cases they established the contact for the researcher, arranging the interview. This first sampling technique corresponds to snowball sampling.

After snowball sampling, theoretical sampling was used in order to decide which stakeholders to select. *“Theoretical sampling is a purposive sampling technique”* (Kensbock & Jennings, 2011, p.492), which requires the researcher to decide which are the most appropriate study units to be included in the research (Jennings, 2010; Kensbock & Jennings, 2011). In grounded theory, the participants needs to have some connection with the phenomenon studied (Morse, 2011). Thus, the researcher needs to use its knowledge to deliberately select the people who will better answer and thus, allow to reach the goal of the study (Morse, 2011; Kensbock & Jennings, 2011; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2016).

The main characteristic of theoretical sampling is that the samples are not predetermined, but their selection *“is an emergent and ongoing process that evolves as the theory develops from the data”* (Goulding & Saren, 2010, p.71). Indeed, the number of the participants is not decided at the beginning of the research, but instead, interviews are conducted until no new information about the subject under study emerge (Cutcliffe, 2000).

According to Matteucci & Gnoth (2017), theoretical sampling is often confused with purposive sampling, but the difference is that *“theoretical sampling is not used to establish suitable selection criteria before entering the field. Instead, theoretical sampling is used to search for people and cases to further elaborate theoretical categories”* (p.50-51).

In this research, the final sample consisted of 14 participants, which were chosen to represent the different groups constituting the category of supply tourism stakeholders of Girona. The number of interviews was not pre-established, but the author decided to stop when no new information emerged from the interviews. The table below shows the groups of stakeholders and the number of participants selected for each of them.

Table 1. Sample of selected stakeholders

<b>Girona tourism supply stakeholders</b>		
<b>Subcategories</b>	<b>Entities</b>	<b>Number of interviews</b>
Tourism office	Head of tourism office	1
Hospitality sector	Hotels ****	2
	Hostels	1
	Pensions	1
Tour operators	City tour operators	2
	Cycle tour operators	2
	Food tour operators	1
Heritage cultural attractions	Coordinator of the cathedral	1
Foodservice	Restaurants	2
Transportation sector	Head of the airport	1

Source: own work

The researcher decided voluntarily to limit the selection of the stakeholders only the businesses located in the center of Girona, as being among the ones receiving more tourists, with the exception of the transportation sector.

In order to establish the contact, an email properly explaining the project and asking the possibility to have a direct interview was sent to the selected subjects. Moreover, a questionnaire containing the main questions thought for the interviews was attached to the email, in order to better show the stakeholders the purpose of the meeting and the subject under research. The email was also revised by the City Council of Girona, and was written both in English and Spanish.

### 3.3.4 Interviews & Analysis

Once the participants have been selected, the data were collected through a mixed approach.

In the majority of the cases, semi-structured interviews were conducted face to face. In two cases, the participants just filled the questionnaire attached to the email and containing the questions thought for the interviews, but had no time to meet directly with the researcher.

The interviews were conducted from February 2018 to April 2018, and were semi-structured, with a series of selected open-ended questions, as tending to encourage spontaneity and free expressions of the interviewees (Yuksel et al., 1999; Kim et al., 2009). The characteristic of grounded theory is that uses techniques in order to collect the data, such as semi-structured or in depth interviews, which include both the researcher and the participants' perspective (Martin & Woodside, 2008; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2016). In the semi-structured interviews, the researcher has already an idea of the issues on which to focus the conversation which thus, add a sort of structure to the conversation (Jennings, 2010).

The peculiarity of the interviews conducted under grounded theory is that the aim is to gather some specific information that will allow to develop the theoretical framework of the research while carrying on the interviews (Charmaz, 2006). According to Charmaz (2006), "*Questions must explore the interviewer's topic and fit the participant's experience*" (p.29).

In this research, 14 interviews were conducted until reaching the saturation point. Saturation means no longer new theoretical insights, when gathering fresh data, which thus, ensure the validity and reliability of the data (Kensbock et al., 2015). Therefore, saturation is reached at the point in which the participants do not add any new information (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003).

The time and location of the interviews was established according the participants' preferences. 9 interviews were conducted at the place where the stakeholders used to work. 3 participants preferred to meet the researcher in a public space, and chose bar in the center of Girona. Two interviews were not conducted face to face, but the participants just filled the questionnaire attached to the email, declaring to have no time to meet directly, due to the upcoming high season.

The interviews lasted between 20 and 70 minutes. In the majority of the cases, the interviews were recorded. In three cases the participants did not want to be recorded for privacy issues and thus, the researcher only took notes of the conversations and in two cases the stakeholders just filled the questionnaire attached to the email, without a direct meeting with the researcher.

The interviews were all conducted in Spanish and further translated to English.



### 3.3.5 SWOT analysis

The data collected during the interviews have been analyzed through manual coding procedure, which will be better explained in the next chapter. After the elaboration of the key findings, the author decided to conduct a SWOT analysis.

According to Zhang, (2011), *“The four letters of SWOT respectively represent: Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat. Overall, SWOT can be divided into two parts: the first part is SW, mainly used to analyze the internal conditions; the second part is OT, mainly used to analyze the external conditions”* (p.1296).

The SWOT analysis was created in 1969 (Dyson, 2004) and nowadays has become a popular tool, currently applied in many fields of study, such as marketing and business (Dyson, 2004; Helms & Nixon, 2010). The SWOT analysis is used especially by planners *“to have a clearer picture of how their strengths can be reinforced by capitalizing on the opportunities and how weaknesses can slow the development and magnifying threats”* (Ab Talib & Hamid, 2014, p. 325).

Recently, the SWOT analysis has become a significant tool to assess the tourism situation and it has been used in many case studies of different destinations, with the aim to improve the decisions in the sector (Wilkins & Hall, 2001). Thus, the SWOT analysis can help to make better decision in this case in the tourism industry and to reach the established objectives (Wilkins & Hall, 2001)

In this research, the SWOT analysis was considered a good tool by the researcher to assess the findings. The situation created by seasonality in the city of Girona is very complex and as it will be explained in the next chapter, the phenomenon generates discrepancies and controversies in the stakeholders' perceptions. A SWOT analysis in this case, was considered a useful tool *“to see the how to turn weakness into strengths by leveraging on the opportunities and realize how threats can become opportunities by using the strengths”* (Ab Talib & Hamid, 2014, p. 324).

However, it is important to remember that this research follows a constructivist paradigm and it believes in the existence of multiple realities. Thus, the SWOT analysis is connected to the interpretation of findings by the author, which is subjective.

### 3.4 Limitations

Due to the qualitative nature of the research, it is essential to mention some limitations the researcher had to deal with.

The first limitation was represented by the time, which was limited to six months, due to the fixed schedule of the master thesis program.

Another limitation of the researcher was connected with the participants. Indeed, the attempt to contact the stakeholders to participate in the research was not always successful, as they were not always prone to cooperate. In some cases, the selected participants stated to have no time for a face to face interview, due to the upcoming high season in tourism and thus, could not be included in the study by the researcher. These situations led the author to the selection of other participants, which may not have been among her first choices.

Moreover, as aforementioned, the author decided to limit the selection of the participants only to those located in the center of Girona. The reason was twofold. The tourism businesses located in the center of Girona are undoubtedly among the ones receiving more tourists, because of their strategic position in the city. The second reason is that the researcher did not have a personal mean of transport and thus, it would have been difficult to interview businesses located far away, such as in the suburb areas of Girona.

Another limitation is linked to the constructivist paradigm used in this research, which thus, makes the analysis and the outcomes subjective and dependent on the researcher's interpretation. The relationship between the researcher and the participants was subjective and thus, the author could have caused some biases during the interviews without realizing it. The subjective nature of this research might be a limitation to its use in future studies.

## **4 Analysis**

This chapter presents and discusses the findings from the analysis of the data collected during the interview. The analysis was done through a manual coding procedure at the end of which some core categories according to the interpretation of the author have emerged. These six core categories try to answer the research question and the related sub questions. Finally a SWOT analysis will be conducted

### **4.1 Data analysis**

Nowadays, there is still not a single accepted method used to analyze the data in qualitative researches, but many methods are possible, according to the authors' preferences (Mehmetoglu & Altinay, 2006). Even for the methodology of grounded theory, according to the variant selected, the analysis of the data is conducted through different procedures, but the collection of data and their analysis is always a simultaneous process (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003; Mehmetoglu & Altinay, 2006; Stumpf et al., 2016).

In the variant of constructivist grounded theory, according to Charmaz (2006), “*both data and analysis are created from shared experiences and relationship with participants*” (p.130). Another peculiarity of grounded theory is that the data collected are constantly compared (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003; Matteucci & Gnoth, 2017).

In this research, the principles of constructivist grounded theory were followed and the data collection and their analysis was performed concurrently. The analysis was done through the constant comparisons of the interviews at the same time in which the author was also conducting them. This comparison means that the first interview was compared to the second, to the third and so on, but at the same time, it also means that the second interview was compared not only to the first one, but also to the third and to all the others. This constant comparison allowed the researcher to adapt the interviews from time to time, understanding on which topics to better focus the interaction. The overall analysis of this research is based on the interpretation the author makes of the interviews.

Coding was the pillar of this analysis, and was done without the use of any coding specific software. Following the constructivist grounded theory principles, three types of coding have been employed: initial coding, focused coding and theoretical coding.

According to Charmaz (2006), “***Initial coding*** should stick closely to the data. Through comparing data with data, we learn what our research participants view as problematic and begin to treat it analytically” (p.47).

As a first step, the researcher translated the interviews from Spanish to English and transcribed them on a separate document. The translation was not always easy, as some forms of the Spanish language might not have a corresponding form in English. The content was read several times and in the cases in which the participants did not give the permission to record, the author went through the hand notes many times. This reading procedure continued until the researcher felt very familiar with the content of the interviews. The data were then broken down in smaller parts and compared, looking for similarities and differences. The author opted for a paragraph-by-paragraph coding, instead than a line-by-line or sentence-by-sentence coding. Thus, initial codes were assigned to every paragraph of each interview. This procedure served to assign preliminary code labels to the data. In some cases, the initial codes the author assigned were the same.

***Focused coding*** was the next stage of the analysis. In this case, the researcher needs to decide which initial codes are the most significant and make “*most analytical sense to categorize the*

*data*” (Charmaz, 2006, p.57-58). The aim of focused coding is to compare and classify the initial codes into some categories (Torabian & Arai, 2016).

The researcher worked on the documents collecting all the previous codes she had identified and these codes were categorized on thematic similarities, which it means that similar codes were clustered together into same categories and subcategories (Saldaña, 2013).

Finally, the last coding procedure of this research was ***theoretical coding***. According to Saldaña (2013), “*Theoretical coding functions like a umbrella that covers and accounts for all other codes and categories formulated thus far in grounded theory analysis*” (p.223). The main purpose of theoretical coding is to create the so called “core categories”, which link together the categories and subcategories defined in the previous phase of focused coding (Saldaña, 2013), “*integrating them into a proposed theory*” (Berdychevsky et al., 2013, p.72).

The core categories the author established in this research may have the same name of some codes identified during the initial or the focused coding or the author could deliberated have decided to assign new names.

## 4.2 Findings

The six core categories which have emerged from the coding procedure will be explained below. The findings are presented without the names of the participants, using instead numbers to identify them and thus, ensuring their anonymity.

The perceptions of seasonality highlighted by the participants were diverse and contradictory. Some of the stakeholders interviewed identified seasonal tourism as a big issue for their businesses and thus, a priority to deal with. At the same time, seasonal tourism was also identified in a more positive way, as having some beneficial effects for the tourism businesses.

Some core categories will be presented, including the economic, environmental and social problems connected to seasonality highlighted by the participants. These core categories confirm the studies developed in the academic literature about the tendency to generalize the perception of the stakeholders about seasonality merely as something negative. The strategies the participants apply to tackle the various issues of seasonal tourism will also be reported inside the core categories.

In this research, other core categories will be presented, making evident the contrasting perceptions regarding seasonality expressed by the participants. These core categories diverge

from the studies of academic literature, as the stakeholders highlight a more positive view of seasonality, which is usually not presented by the authors.

The core categories which will be presented try to answer the research question and related sub questions of this research, exemplifying the different stakeholders' perceptions about seasonality, the effects of the phenomenon for their tourism businesses and the strategies they implement to tackle it. The findings will be then discussed in the light of the academic literature section.

#### 4.2.1 Economic lost & business instability

This core category highlights the perception of the participants of seasonal tourism as a factor creating economic lost and business instability.

In Costa Brava, almost all the tourism facilities are extreme seasonal businesses, which close every year from November until the beginning of March, as remaining open would be too costly as too few customers are around during those months. As aforementioned, coastal destinations are more affected by the phenomenon of seasonality compared to urban destinations (Ćorluka et al., 2016).

In Girona, the situation is not so drastic. Some of the businesses interviewed remain open all year round, despite the amount of work being quite low during some periods, due to fewer customers. Still, other businesses decide to close, but only for a couple of months, usually January and February. As mentioned in the literature review section, this closure has many negative consequences, such as inefficient use of resources and an unstable employment situation (Turrión-Prats & Duro, 2016). In many cases, instead than a complete break from the activities, many businesses in Girona apply a reduced working time.

The closure of the businesses and the stop of the activities or the application of a reduced time were indicated by the stakeholders interviewed as a negative consequence of seasonality, creating economic loss and instability for their businesses.

As participant 9 underlined:

*“The stronger seasonality is, the more the economic loss will be. Due to the current conditions, we are forced to remain closed during four months in winter, from November till the end of February”.*

Interviewer 14 was even more resolute supporting the above statement:

*“We spend three months without working and this represents a big issue. The consequence is that in summer, starting from Eastern we work no stop, without a single day off. We need to gain the more we can, enough to survive during the winter. We call this: the ant effect”.*

All the interviewers being part of the hospitality sector indicated economic loss as the main consequence of seasonality, due the low occupancy rates registered in some months of the year. As participants 11 explained:

*“During winter all the hotels of Girona see their occupation affected. We are all forced to lower the prices and to offer some convenient packages or other similar incentives if we want to attract tourists during this period of the year”.*

The closure of many tourism businesses during a long period of the year, might create not only economic instability, but also difficulties to retain full-year workers (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005). In many cases, skilled employees might voluntarily decide to leave the tourism industry, looking for more stable conditions, not being willing to work only few months of the year (Karamustafa & Ulama, 2011). Consequently, uncertain working conditions is one of the main consequence of seasonality which tends to create **employment instability** (Karamustafa & Ulama, 2011).

The stakeholders part of this research confirmed this vision, stating:

*“Currently, there are no incentives for hiring permanent employees. For example, the amount to pay for the social security could be reduced during low season as an incentive. This could help the tourism businesses to hire more personnel”* (participant 9).

*“We do not like to hire somebody only for a short period and not being able to offer a contract lasting for the whole year. The consequence of seasonality is that it makes difficult to encounter a secure and stable job in tourism and thus, it also impedes to have a stable business”* (participant 10).

*“Seasonality limits and forces to structure both human resources and use of natural resources in a perfect way. It is evident that when the occupancy is not good, it is necessary to reduce the human expenses and the consequence is the reduction of the employees. Seasonality makes difficult to maintain the ideal level of human resources”* (participant 11).

The participants interviewed currently, apply different strategies in order to compensate for the economic loss and the instability created by seasonality. The strategies they implement vary according to the type of business in which they are involved. Some participants were very firm in their opinion, supporting the necessity to act towards a reduction of seasonal tourism.

On the contrary, others were not so resolute in their vision, as they do not consider seasonal tourism as a priority to deal with.

During the “off” season, when the occupancy of hotels and hostels is lower, the economic losses of the facilities are evident. Lowering the prices or offering some special packages have become the most common strategies used to compensate for this loss (Butler, 2001). This strategy is possible because “*tourism is a price elastic product*” (Butler & Mao, 1997, p.13).

**Price diversification** was indicated also by the stakeholders of this research as one of the strategies applied, especially by the ones belonging to the hospitality sector.

*“There is a notable difference in our prices between low and high season, around a 20%-25%. We use the platform of booking to publish offers when there is low occupancy”* (participant 1).

*“When the number of tourists is low, we create attractive offers and lower the prices. The offers are mainly for the weekends. The strategy works, and especially thanks to the platform booking, where we publish the offers. We would like to have a medium - high level of occupancy all year round, and especially to have more reservations during the week in low season”* (participant 5).

*“Our priority is to reach a level of occupancy of 100% all year round. In low season we try to attract the customers offering romantic packages for couples, packages for Jewish to visit the surroundings of the hotel, tasting packages including the better restaurants of the area etc.... In the worst case, and especially in the months of January and February during the week we are forced to lower the prices of our standard rooms, like also all the other hotels of Girona”* (participant 11).

**The creation of events** has become one of the most common strategies in order to increase the competitiveness of a destination and tourism demand outside peak season (Getz, 2008; Chung, 2009). In Girona, the municipality is trying to promote the image of the city as “*Girona, Ciutat de festivals*”. This marketing strategy has led to the creation of several festivals and events, with the potential to render Girona an attractive destination to be visited in every season of the year. The strategy is creating added value for the city. The goal of the municipality is to diminish the economic loss and the employment instability of tourism businesses, characterizing especially low season and at the same time, to increase the number of overnight visitors in this period.

The stakeholders interviewed had contrasting opinions regarding this strategy. Some of the participants recognized the potential of attraction of these festivals and events, as they can represent strong motivations for tourists to visit Girona and therefore, having beneficial effects for their businesses. The participants in favor of this strategy declared also that they actively take part and directly support it.

*“Girona is known as Ciutat de festivals. The creation of events and festivals is the most important strategy, it works and it is improving. The last year sometimes, many activities were happening on the same weekend, but this have been changed. In summer, many activities attract tourists which consequently do not stay on the coast, but instead in the city of Girona. Every month there is something going on. These actions are thought to increase the number of overnight visitors”* (participant 2).

*“We take advantage of the strategy of the festivals which is applied by the municipality. For example, this year, when the circus was here, we had a rates occupancy of 100%. The strategy of the festivals is good to make more direct reservations and less through agencies. We know that there are more probabilities that the customers will call directly and use less the booking platforms”* (participant 5).

*“We collaborate with the activities and the festivals hosted in the city. For instance, during the festival of the circus, the artists had free entrance in the cathedral”* (participant 8).

*“The municipality creates continuous cultural offers, such as shows, concerts, festivals... in every season of the year. This initiative brings more tourists for us and at the same time, is helping to maintain the main touristic areas safe, clean and with good infrastructures, creating a good international promotion of Girona”* (participant 11).

On the other side, some of the stakeholders interviewed expressed a different opinion regarding this strategy. Despite not denying the positive image of the city created by the events and the festivals, they did not think that the strategy was useful to attract more tourists and to reduce seasonal tourism for their businesses, as these events are only known and enjoyed by the local citizens.

*“The strategy of creating festivals and events does not have any effect for us. The festivals are more for the locals and just contribute to create a good environment in the city”* (participant 9).

*“The strategy of the municipality of Girona is positive, but it is more for the local citizens than for the tourists. Visitors do not come to visit Girona because of the festivals”* (participant 12).



*“The strategy of creating festivals does not influence our business. They promote the city, and this is something positive, but we should adapt us to these festivals in order to take advantage of them”* (participant 14).

Despite some support to the strategy of creation of events and festivals, all the strategies towards the reduction of seasonal tourism which have been mentioned by the stakeholders represent individual actions and differ according to the businesses in which they are involved. Currently, there are no forms of collaboration among the various tourism stakeholders of Girona, despite the reduction of seasonal tourism is the same objective they have. This lack of collaboration was mentioned by the participants as an issue, which might affect the final effectiveness of the strategies they apply.

*“El plan estratégico de turismo en Girona 2022”*, translated *“The tourism strategic plan of Girona 2022”*, will try to change the current situation. This new plan will involve more tourism stakeholders and represents the first attempt to create a collaboration among all these tourism actors. The new tourism strategic plan was indicated by the participants as a good opportunity towards the reduction of seasonal tourism in Girona.

*“It is important that the new strategic plan will favor the cooperation among the various tourism entities, such as hotels, transportations, restaurants etc.... This collaboration will contribute to reduce seasonal tourism”* (participant 4).

*“We are currently working in the tourism strategic plan 2022. This plan will try to create a collaboration among many stakeholders involved in different businesses of tourism, such as the airport, the tourism office, the museums, the cathedral, the local guides... with the final goal of reducing seasonal tourism”* (participant 7).

*“Currently, there is a lack of collaboration among the tourism businesses of Girona, and the cathedral itself can not reduce seasonal tourism. For us it is fundamental a collaboration with the other stakeholders. For the first time, we have been involved in the tourism strategic plan of Girona 2022. Just like us, in this plan there are many other stakeholders involved for the first time. This collaboration can contribute at the achievement of the reduction of seasonal tourism”* (participant 8).

#### 4.2.2 Sporadic high peaks of visitors

Sporadic high peaks of visitors were identified by the participants of this research as one of the main negative effects caused by seasonality. This core category highlights a negative

perception of the participants towards seasonality and includes several economic social and environmental issues that were underlined in connection to these peaks.

It is widely recognized that isolated peaks of tourism generate unsustainable impacts for a destination, such as over-use of natural resources, increase of the pollution and saturation of the facilities (Lee et al., 2008), which negatively affect both the locals and the visitors (Turrión-Prats & Duro, 2016). During peak of tourism, the quality of the services is lowered and also the satisfaction of the customers might be affected (Turrión-Prats & Duro, 2016).

As the participants stated:

*“High peaks of visitors during high season generates issues of noise, pollution and agglomerations”* (participant 2).

*The problems caused by seasonal tourism affect especially the ancient area of Barri Vell. In summer, due to the increased number of people, there is a lot of garbage on the streets and a lot of noise bothering the local citizens”* (participant 9).

The participants, especially the ones belonging to the hospitality sector were even more resolute about the negative vision of high peaks of tourists and they shed light over one of the main issue threatening their business: the *touristic apartments*.

Many owners of apartments in Girona have started to take advantage of the increase of tourism in the city. Rent their properties to tourists has become a way for local owners to make more profits, as tourists are usually willing to pay higher prices. The main consequences connected to touristic apartments are difficulties for locals of Girona to find places to rent and also a general increase of the prices. Moreover, when the properties are rented for tourism purposes, the economic value of these estates increase, and in most of the cases the apartments become too expensive to be rented by the local citizens.

As the participants reported, the theme of touristic apartment is very recent and controversial, and is concerning both the local citizens and the tourism businesses of Girona.

*“High peaks of visitors affect especially the ancient neighborhoods of the city. In Barri Vell, the locals complain of the loud noises and of the issue of touristic apartments, where the value of the estates is lost, as they become too expensive to be rented by the citizens”* (participant 5).

*“One of the main issue created by peak of visitors is represented by the touristic apartments. In winter these apartments are empty, and thus, the local enterprises of the area have problems to maintain good businesses. The apartments become too expensive for the citizens,*

*and thus, even the local shops have started to close, due to the fact entire areas were empty, leaving there only seasonal shops. These apartments moreover, creates problems of noise of the neighbors. In a hotel there is more control, while in these apartments it is impossible to know the number of people who are inside”* (participant 9).

*“In the neighborhoods where there are many touristic apartments, the consequences during high season are the loud noises and the feeling to never have peace. Touristic apartments generate a general increase of the prices”* (participant 11).

**Groups of visitors** were identified by the participants as another of the main problems during high peak of tourism. Currently, in Girona there are no regulations regarding groups organized by tour operators, agencies or similar entities and the main issue is linked to the groups coming by bus. During low season, the number of visitors and buses is manageable, but during peak season or in occasion of special events or festivities, which generate a notable increase in the number of tourists, these groups represent an issue for the city. Several stakeholders emphasized the necessity of creating some regulation for these organized groups of tourists.

*“One of the main problem of Girona are the groups of visitors. We should have some regulations for the parking of the autobuses, maybe creating a sort of rotation method, allowing them to park for two hours and then leaving the place to others”* (participant 2).

*“We need some regulations for the groups of visitors, especially during high season. These groups create a big problem. The municipality of Girona should regulate the entrance and the parking of the autobuses around the center. A sort of rotation method of parking should be created, allowing the autobus to park for a couple of hours and then leaving the spot to others, avoiding in this way problem of congestion in the center”* (participant 3).

*“High peaks of visitors generate problems of cohabitation with the locals. The issue is mainly due to the groups coming by bus. They create problems of pollution and it would be good to create a better distribution of the autobus. The solution is a better forecast of tourism”* (participant 8).

**Temps de Flors** is a festival happening in Girona at the middle of the month of May and lasting 10 days (Ayuntamiento de Girona). During this period, the street of the city are decorated with flowers and several private gardens and patios usually not accessible are also adorned and opened to be visited (Ayuntamiento de Girona).

As aforementioned, the municipality of Girona is trying to lengthen the tourism season, through the creation of events and festivals in every season of the year (Tourism office, 2018).

Temps de Flors represents the best success of this strategy. Recently, the festival has acquired international reputation, becoming a symbol of Girona and attracting every year thousands of visitors (Ayuntamiento de Girona). Temps de Flors has a double effects. On one side, it represents a good window of visibility for Girona and its tourism businesses, but on the other side, the extreme high number of visitors during these days, create several problems for the city and its inhabitants such as, traffic, overuse of natural resources and congestion especially in the center.

The stakeholders interviewed expressed very discordant opinions about Temps de Flors. Some assumed an economic perspective and consequently asserted the potential of the festival, highlighting positive aspects. For instance, participant number 11 gave the merit to the Temps de Flors of generating more visibility for the city and thus, supporting the creation of the international reputation of Girona.

*“Temps de Flors clearly represents a reason for the tourists to come back”* (participant 2).

*“Thanks to Temps de Flors, nowadays Girona is a city much more recognized internationally, and for this, we receive more tourists than in the previous years”* (participant 11).

*“Temps de Flors and the strategy of creating festivals and events followed by the municipality of Girona creates a sort of necessity for the people to travel. The festival has increased the number of visitors and thus, has contributed to improve the situation of seasonal tourism in the city”* (participant 13).

On the contrary, other participants identified Temps de Flors as one of the major problem affecting the city for several reasons. These participants assumed a viewpoint more as local inhabitants of Girona than merely as tourism businesses.

*“During the 9 days of Temps de Flors we make good profits, but at the same time, the festival represents a big stress before and after. We do know what Temps de Flors really pays off. Even a small mistake creates several problems”* (participant 2).

*“Tourists coming during Temps de Flors encounter Girona so crowded that will never decide to go back. For this reason, the advertisement of Temps de Flors recently, has been reduced”* (participant 3).

*“Entrepreneurs try to absorb the seasonal peaks of tourism. In the case of Temps de Flors, every single business wants to promote itself and thus, the city collapses. The mobility of the*

*city is reduced because there are too many people and the situation for locals becomes unlivable” (participant 8).*

*“During Temps de Flors there are so many visitors that they block our daily work. The streets of Barri Vell are so full that we can not pass with the truck and deliver our catering services” (participant 10).*

*“During Temps de Flors, 350.000 tourists come to visit Girona in three days. It would be much better to have this number more distributed throughout the year” (participant 14).*

Recently, increasing tourism demand outside the main peak season and thus, the creation of a more widespread distribution of visitors has become a priority for the supply stakeholders of destinations affected by seasonality (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005). Generally, the main target able of creating tourism demand in different season are the seniors, due to fact that have more flexibility to travel (Chung, 2009). Even other segments of tourists such as business’ customers are less subjected to external factors such as the weather and thus, represents a good investment to attract (Lundtorp et al., 2001). Indeed, business travelers in many cases, not only attend conferences and meetings, but take the chance to visit the surroundings for pleasant purposes (Lundtorp et al., 2001).

The stakeholders interviewed in this research apply different strategies in order to reduce sporadic peak of visitors and instead, having a more widespread tourism demand. The goal of their strategies is to lengthen the tourism season of Girona.

**Market diversification** has become one of the most applied strategies worldwide to increase tourism demand, though the extension and diversification of the products offered in a destination (Baum & Hagen, 1999). As already mentioned, the municipality of Girona is committed with the creation of events and festivals in every season of the year and this strategy represents a good opportunity for the stakeholders to receive more visitors during low season.

As stated by participant number 13:

*“The most important thing is to create something capable of attracting visitors in the territory during winter”.*

The stakeholders of this research confirmed that the main targets of market diversification are the tourists such as business’ customers or seniors, with more flexibility to travel.

*“We are trying to create campaigns in schools or cultural programs for associations of seniors during low season” (participant 2).*

*“Tourism in Girona has evolved and recently the city has acquired a reputation as destination optimal for urban tourism and city breaks. The hotels of the center are focused on business customers coming to take part to conferences” (participant 7).*

As it was recognized by the stakeholders of this research, locals represents another potential market to exploit for their businesses, especially during low season. Indeed, **local citizens as customers** can help to reduce the negative effects caused by seasonality, especially by low season for tourism businesses, giving a use all year round to the facilities of Girona. As the participants witnessed, the demand coming from the locals allow to limit the economic loss during off season, and also to experiment different activities that can be proposed to the tourists later on, as in summer, due to the high amount of work would be impossible to offer something new.

*“Our customers are also the locals. We have a cycling club and people can decide to become members. We organize excursions and competitions with the goal to create a community. We want to integrate our business inside the city of Girona. It is necessary to offer a good variety of activities in order to retain loyal customers” (participant 6).*

*“We organize different activities in summer and in winter. During summer we are more focused of the tourists. In winter we have local citizens as customers. In winter we can also change and try new activities” (participant 10).*

*“We promote visits in the city which are thought for the locals. We adapt the visits and try to work more with the local citizens” (participant 14).*

### 4.2.3 Bad reputation

This core category highlights the perception of the participants connected with the risk of the creation of a negative image of the city and consequently a bad reputation in the collective imagination.

High peaks of visitors are contra posed to off-peaks in low season, during which, as aforementioned, many tourism businesses decide to stop their activities (Turrión-Prats & Duro, 2016). Apart from the issues of economic loss and inefficient use of resources, off-peaks are connected to another issue, which is risk of bad reputation a destination might acquire in the collective imagination (Flognfeldt, 2001).

During low season, from November till the beginning of March, in Costa Brava almost all the tourism businesses completely stop the activities. The situation in Girona is better compared to the coast, as urban destinations are less affected by seasonality (Butler & Mao 1997). Instead than a complete closure and inactivity, during low season, many tourism businesses of Girona opt for a reduction of the working time. Therefore, as mentioned by the participants, the risk is that the visitors might find everything closed if they are not informed about the different working time of low season, and return home with a negative image of the city in mind.

*“The offer of the city during low season is not the same. In winter, many shops are closed or have a reduced working time as there are less tourists and this can create a bad reputation of Girona”* (participant 2).

*“A negative consequence of the fault of demand during low season is the sad air of the city, especially during February and March, which are the months with less visitors”* (participant 4).

*“A problem caused by seasonality is the reduction of working time during winter, like for example in the museums. The touristic offer is not the same in low and high season, and this create issues for the visitors and it might give a negative impression of the city”* (participant 7).

The marketing strategy of creating the image of Girona as “Ciutat de festivals”, is the main action applied to tackle the risk of bad reputation during low season, as offering some entertainment in the city despite the closure of some attractions.

#### 4.2.4 Girona is a plan B

According to the participants, Girona has to accept that it in some cases constitutes a plan B of Barcelona and of the Costa Brava. The closeness of these two destinations with such a strong international brand have been mentioned as causes accentuating seasonal tourism in Girona.

It is widely recognized that seasonal tourism represents a major issue for coastal destinations than for urban destinations (Ćorluka et al., 2016). Costa Brava, as it was already explained, is more subjected to seasonal fluctuations of tourism than Girona, but due the proximity between this two destinations, Girona is also influenced by these fluctuations of demand (Galí Espelt & Donaire Benito, 2006).

The interviews with the participants, demonstrated that the closeness between the coast and Girona has a double effect. According to the participants, despite Girona has developed its own brand of tourism and does not rely exclusively on visitors coming from the coast. Though, the extreme tourism fluctuations of the coast were considered as affecting also the city of Girona. Costa Brava represents an established tourism destination since the 60s (Morris & Dickinson, 1987) and thus, as stated by the stakeholders, as Girona is a more recent touristic destination it can become a plan B for people going to the coast.

But Girona is located also very close to the city of Barcelona, around 90km, which corresponds to one hour driving. Barcelona has recently become a destination with problem of mass tourism, due to the excessive number of visitors. According to the participants Girona might also become a plan B of people going to Barcelona.

*“In summer, when it rains, the guides of Girona work a lot. Girona is a plan B of Costa Brava. They were not able to sell the province. Girona must accept that is a plan B of Barcelona or of the Costa Brava and learn to create a better promotion”* (participant 8).

*“Barcelona has a double effect: Girona grows as a touristic destination because of the proximity with Barcelona, but at the same time, Girona does not grow enough because of Barcelona. Catalonia suffers from the centralism of Barcelona. Girona can constitute a plan B of people going to Barcelona”* (participant 9).

*“In Catalonia, one of the most famous brand since the 60s is Costa Brava. Recently, even the brand of Barcelona has become global, attracting thousands of visitors. The coast keeps being an important destination for sun and beach tourism, which is enjoyed more in spring and summer and thus, suffers problems of seasonal tourism. Girona is not so famous yet compared to Barcelona and the Costa Brava”* (participant 13).

The recent cancellation of flights landing in Girona and thus, making more difficult the transportation to the city was indicated as the main cause contributing to make Girona a plan B.

The proximity of Girona with these two destinations was indicated by the stakeholders interviewed as both an advantage and a disadvantage. The participants interviewed recognized the potential of Girona of being considered a plan B.

The city was recognized as a good opportunity to **reduce seasonal tourism on the coast**. As aforementioned, almost all the tourism facilities of the coast close during winter, while in Girona, in many cases, businesses do not stop, but just reduce the work time. As reported by



the participants, during low season, visitors mainly stay overnight in Girona, as more facilities are open, but still have the possibility to undertake daily trips to the coast, helping to reduce seasonal tourism.

*“Girona can help to decrease seasonal tourism in Costa Brava. Girona offers types of tourism available all year round, such as sport tourism and gastronomic tourism. The cheap flights landing in the airport have been a main factor. There were people coming from Madrid, renting a car and going to the coast to decide where to stay during summer”* (participant 3).

*“Small tour operators like us operating in Girona represents opportunities to reduce seasonal tourism in the city and especially in Costa Brava”* (participant 9).

*“Many of our customers decide to realize tours around Barcelona and Costa Brava, no matter if high or low season”* (participant 11).

On the contrary, during summer, in most of the cases, visitors staying overnight on the coast decide to undertake at least a day trip to the city. **Daily visitors** are a consequence of the closeness with the coast and were indicated both as an advantage and a disadvantage for the businesses by the participants. Participants considering daily visitors as an advantage were especially the tour operators organizing different visits in the city, and thus, potentially increasing the number of people taking part to their tours.

For instance, as stated by participant number 2:

*“The closeness of Costa Brava represents an advantage, as there are more people coming and we can do more activities. For example, if we need 15 people to do some activities, only with people staying in Girona we would not reach it, but with the visitors coming from the coast it is possible”* (participant 2).

*“In summer, if there is a rainy day, a big mass of visitors from the coast come to discover Girona, and this allows us to do more activities and make more profits”* (participant 14).

Contradictory statements came from other participants, especially by the stakeholders belonging to the hospitality sector, due to the fact that these daily visitors in most of the cases decide to go back to the coast, thus, do not stay overnight in their facilities, and do not create any profits.

*“There are not enough transportations between the coast and Girona. The closeness of the coast is an advantage, as Girona becomes more attractive, but also a disadvantage, as people staying overnight on the coast do not stay overnight in Girona”* (participant 1).

*“Girona has created its own brand of tourism, but there is a certain amount of visitors from July to September due to the presence of the coast nearby. These visitors are recognizable as they come just to have a walk, but in many cases do not spend money. The fault is of the campaigns of the last years, which did not promote the culture of Girona, but sold more a walk in the city and an ice cream. This creates a problem, as there are more visitors in the city but less in the museums”* (participant 8).

*“Tourists staying on the coast just go to Girona for day trips, or for a walk, but do not generate any income, they do not pay any entrance in museums or other places. The proximity between the coast and Girona is not an advantage”* (participant 9).

#### 4.2.5 Good not to have pressure all year round

This core category highlights a more positive perception of seasonal tourism expressed by the participants. Indeed, according to the stakeholders interviewed, seasonality has also some beneficial effects for both the territory and the locals, as it allows them not to have the pressure caused by tourists all year round.

Destinations constantly overwhelmed by visitors are connected to several issues, such as the inefficient management of the businesses, dissatisfaction of the customers and scarcity of resources, especially the water supplies (Andriotis, 2005). Moreover, even the quality of lives of the locals is affected; tourists generate problems of a general increase of the prices, traffic congestions, decrease of the security and many others (Butler, 2001; Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005).

Following, some statements made by the participants highlighting positive aspects of seasonality.

*“Currently, seasonality does not represent a problem. It is good not to have the pressure of tourism all the time, for example Temps de Flors is oppressive. Seasonality is good as it avoids Girona to become like Barcelona”* (participant 1).

*“It is good not to have so many tourists all year round. This makes the situation more livable and pleasant for the locals. Moreover, the city is not ready from the point of view of the resources to receive constantly a large number of tourists”* (participant 5).

*“Seasonality is not a problem in Girona. Maintaining a high level of tourism without the adequate facilities would be a problem, as it is already for the people living in Barri Vell*

*during high season. The priority are the local citizens and it is good for them to have period with less tourists” (participant 8).*

*“It is good for a city and its inhabitants to enjoy some time of peace during some months of the year. If Temps de Flors would last 365 days then many citizens of Girona would move to live somewhere else” (participant 11).*

*“Seasonality has a positive aspect. It is good for the citizens, as they can breathe during off peak periods” (participant 10).*

From these statements, it becomes clear that seasonality is also considered a positive factor, allowing the territory and its inhabitants to have some rest from the pressure caused by tourists. Moreover, as reported by the participants, off season avoids Girona to become a destination subjected to the stress of having visitors all year round, such as it has become nowadays Barcelona.

#### 4.2.6 Time to plan and go on holidays

This core category highlights another positive perception of seasonality expressed by the stakeholders interviewed.

As explained in the literature review section, when a place is characterized by seasonality and its inhabitants are used to have seasonal jobs, they might be used to this rhythm and regard the time off during low season in a positive way (Mourdoukoutas, 1988).

This vision was confirmed also by the participants of this research. For instance, participant number 7 stated:

*“Seasonality allows us to go on holidays. If the work would be the same during all year round as it is during high season, then it would be impossible to have holidays”.*

*“We take advantage of low season to go on holidays” (participant 4).*

A part than allowing employees to go on holidays, low season presents another advantage for tourism businesses. As aforementioned, seasonal businesses that decide to close for some months, might use these off periods in order to plan for the next season and to realize some maintenance and renovations works, improving their offer before the opening of the new tourist season (Mourdoukoutas, 1988).

The stakeholders interviewed in this research confirmed these statements, reporting that during low season they have the opportunity to make plans for the upcoming season.

*“We use the months of December, January and February to plan our activities. From March on, we do not have time to have reunions and to plan”* (participant 2).

*“Seasonality is good as it allows us to do renovations and to plan for the next season”* (participant 8).

### 4.3 Key findings

According to Walker & Myrick (2006), *“Coding in grounded theory is the process of analyzing the data”* (p.550). Following the principles of grounded theory, even in this research the analysis of the data was conducted through a coding procedure. The author opted for a manual coding procedure, without any specific software.

In this case, the researcher read several times the interviews and decided to opt for a paragraph-by-paragraph coding, meaning that every paragraph of each interview was assigned an initial code. Following, the author decided which were the most significant codes and used them to develop the final core categories. Some core categories have the same names already assigned to some codes, while others were assigned new names. Moreover, some initial codes were even merged together for the creation of the final core categories.

The identified core categories try to answer the main research question and the related sub questions. The answer to the first research question is that the tourism stakeholders of the city of Girona had contradictory perceptions of seasonality, demonstrating that seasonality is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. The six core categories highlight the different participants' perceptions, which as it is evident are both good perceptions and bad perceptions.

The answer to the first sub questions consists of all the social, economic and environmental effects of seasonality mentioned by the participants affecting their tourism businesses. These effects were both positive and negative. Indeed the different stakeholders' perceptions of seasonality depended on these effects.

Finally, the answer to the second sub question is that the views of the participants and the consequent strategies they apply differ according to the tourism businesses in which they are involved. Several strategies were mentioned by the stakeholders interviewed with the same goal of lengthening the tourism season in Girona and consequently, reduce seasonal tourism.

The identified core categories suggest that seasonal tourism creates several adverse consequences for the tourism supply stakeholders of Girona. The negative perceptions expressed by the participants regarding seasonality confirmed the studies of the academic literature, in which the phenomenon is generally described as a general issue for all the tourism businesses (Butler, 2001). But in the present study, the stakeholders interviewed agreed also towards a more positive perception of seasonality, proving that the phenomenon can have some beneficial effects for their businesses and for the locals of Girona. This more optimistic perception of seasonality diverges from the researches of the academic literature, whereas as aforementioned, there is a tendency to highlight only a negative perceptions from the tourism stakeholders (Butler, 2001; Butler & Mao, 1997).

Among the six core categories which have been established in this research, four highlights a negative perception of seasonal tourism, while the last two a more positive perception.

**Economic loss and business instability** constitutes the first core category identified. This core category highlights a very negative perception of seasonal tourism expressed by the participants. As they reported, during low season, when the carrying capacity of the facilities is not fully occupied, the economic loss represents a big problem for their businesses. In this case, especially the stakeholders working in the hospitality sector considered economic loss as the main cause of seasonal tourism, as in winter their occupancy rates are not high enough. In many cases seasonality forces the businesses to close for some months, in order to minimize the economic loss.

Another negative effect the participants mentioned related to this category is the difficulty to retain yearly workers, especially in cases when the tourism businesses close for some months of the year or reduce the number of employees. According to the participants, seasonal tourism creates unsure working conditions and therefore, employment instability.

This first core category confirmed the studies of the academic literature, in which seasonal tourism is often identified exclusively as a factor big magnitude (McEnniff, 1992; Butler & Mao 1997), creating economic loss, problem of the investment in the industry of tourism and unstable employment conditions (Butler, 2001). In this case, the participants referred especially to low season, which as it is widely recognized, creates an inefficient use of the resources and thus, damage the tourism businesses from an economic point of view, lowering the productivity (Turrión-Prats & Duro, 2016). The closure of the tourism facilities represents a radical measure to reduce the costs (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005), but in some cases, as stated by the participants, due to the circumstances created by seasonality, it is unavoidable. Seasonal employment is a consequence of the closure of the facilities and one of the main

contributor of creating unstable working conditions in the sector of tourism (Ćorluka & Matošević Radić, 2014).

**Sporadic high peak of visitors** was identified as another core category expressing a negative perception of the participants towards seasonal tourism. During specific periods of the year, the city of Girona is characterized by high peak of tourism. According to the interviewees, these peaks of tourism are connected to several negative consequences for their tourism businesses, from a social, an economic and an environmental perspective. The main issues highlighted have been the touristic apartments, the group of visitors organized by tour operators, agencies or similar entities and the festival Temps de Flors. According to the participants, these three themes contribute to create problems of saturation in the city, negatively affecting not only the tourism businesses but creating also bad quality of lives for the locals.

The recent increase of tourism in Girona has led to the creation of several touristic apartments. Local owners of properties in Girona have seen the increment of tourism in the city as an opportunity to increase their profits. While before these owners were renting their estates to students or to other citizens recently, many have started to rent their properties to tourists, through agencies or by themselves, using platforms such as Airbnb, as tourists are more prone to pay higher prices. These touristic apartment represent a problem for both the tourism businesses involved in hospitality and also for the local citizens of Girona. As the participants indicated, these apartments tend to generate a general increase of the prices and thus, create hard living conditions for the citizens. Moreover, as the participants asserted, in these apartments, compared to hotels, it is more difficult to maintain the control and to know the real number of people inside. The neighbors often are bothered by loud noises. The problem of the touristic apartments was emphasized especially by the stakeholders part of the hospitality sector, as these properties represent big competitors to them.

Groups of visitors organized by tour operators or by travel agencies were indicated by the participants as one the main cause of saturation in the city, especially in the narrow streets of the center. The stakeholders interviewed, especially those being part of some city tour operators organizing guided tour in the city, identified the group of visitors coming by bus with their personal guide as an issue, blocking the circulation in the streets and thus, interfering with their daily work. Even the locals living in the center might be bothered by the big amount of tourists part of these groups. Currently, in Girona there are no regulations for the number of groups of visitors allowed, and this fact was reported by the interviewees as a big problem, especially due to the groups coming by bus.

Temps de Flors is a festival happening in Girona at the beginning of May and lasting for 10 days and represents the best success of the festival strategy applied by the municipality. Temps de Flors has recently acquired an international reputation and consequently, has contributed to increase the visibility of Girona. Nowadays, during the festival, the city receives thousands of tourists. Temps de Flors generated discrepancy in the participants' views. Some of the stakeholders interviewed identified the festival as something positive, generating a good promotion and thus, increasing the number of tourists in the city, which for them means more work. Others instead, described Temps de Flors in a negative way, due to the peak of tourists coming to Girona at the same time, which represent a big stress, interfering with their daily work and creating problems of traffic and congestion in the city. Even for the local citizens Temps de Flors might represents a stressful period of the year.

This core categories and the problems connected with sporadic peak of tourism again confirmed the studies of the academic literature. In this case, the participants referred especially to peak season, when there is a sudden increase of the number of visitors in the city. As the participants suggested, the excessive number of tourists in Girona, as in every other destination, might lead to a deterioration of the services offered and thus, a dissatisfaction of the customers (Boffa & Sucurro, 2012). Sporadic peak of visitors in the city, such as in the case of Temps de Flors, might negatively affect not only the tourism businesses, but also the life of the locals (Amelung et al., 2007). The main problems identified in connection with these peaks negatively affecting the locals of Girona have been higher prices, saturation of the facilities, loud noises and traffic which confirm the studies of the academic literature (Butler, 2001; Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005). These issues affect especially the center, the old part of Barri Vell, which has become the main touristic area of Girona.

**The risk of bad reputation** is another core category underlying a negative perception of seasonal tourism expressed by the participants. According to the stakeholders interviewed, during low season, when the amount of work is lower due to fewer customers, many tourism businesses voluntarily decide to reduce their working time. Visitors not informed might find everything closed and thus, leave the city with a bad image in mind.

This core category is connected with low season. As stated by Flognfeldt (2001), "*For the overall image of a destination closed attractions during the low seasons might create a bad reputation*" (p.115). The tourism office of Girona in this case, plays a fundamental role. Visitors passing to the office have the possibilities to be advised regarding this reduced work time or the different opening time of the attractions and thus, avoiding the risk for the visitors to encounter everything closed and leave Girona with a negative image in mind (Tourism office, 2018).

The first three core categories which have been presented are connected with a negative perception the stakeholders expressed regarding seasonal tourism and confirm the studies part of the academic literature, which tend to describe seasonality as a “*major problem in tourism*” (Butler & Mao, 1997, p.9). In order to reduce the negative effects caused by seasonality, several strategies are currently applied by the participants, which differ according to the tourism businesses in which they are involved. The strategies mentioned by the stakeholders have all been mentioned also in the literature review section, as already being implemented in other destinations of the world. The common goal of all these strategies is the reduction of seasonality and the extension of the touristic season of Girona, through the creation of a more widespread demand during the year.

Price diversification was indicted by the stakeholders interviewed, especially by the ones belonging to the hospitality sector, as one the main strategy applied to tackle seasonality. During low season, the prices are lowered and in some cases, special packages are offered with the intention to attract people to travel outside the main touristic season. This strategy aims to reduce the economic loss of the tourism businesses characterizing low season (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005). At the same time, this strategy might help to limit sporadic high peak of visitors during certain period of the year, creating instead a more widespread tourism demand. As already mentioned, this practice is possible because “*tourism is a price elastic product*” (Butler & Mao, 1997, p.13). Despite the positive outcome of the strategy, the stakeholders interviewed declared to be forced to its application, as lowering the prices is the only way currently able to attract visitors in off season.

The creation of events and festivals during every season of the year and the promotion of the image of Girona as “*Ciutat de festivals*”, represents a marketing strategy applied by the municipality of the city. The aim of the strategy is to increase the competitiveness of Girona and consequently the tourism demand outside the main peak season, diminishing the economic loss of the tourism businesses (Getz, 2008).

This strategy generated contradictory perceptions from the participants. Some of the stakeholders interviewed saw the potential of this strategy, convinced that it can create motivations to tourists to travel in a different season, and thus, represents a good opportunity to reduce seasonal tourism. In this case, they asserted to actively take part to the support of the strategy. This perception confirmed the studies of the academic literature, which tend to describe festivals and events as “*important motivators of tourism*”, (Getz, 2008, p. 403). According to Getz (2008), this strategy has become fundamental for the “*destination competitiveness*” and “*events figure prominently in the development and marketing plans of most destinations*” (p. 403).



On the other side, other participants, despite not criticizing the strategy, they do not support it, and affirmed it was positive just for the locals of Girona, as creating a good atmosphere in the city.

A diversification of the market of Girona and the attempt to attract tourists with more flexibility to travel, such as seniors, were indicated by the participants of this research as strategies aimed at mitigating the negative effects connected with both high and low season. These strategies are connected and the aim is to create a more distributed tourism demand during the year (Butler & Mao, 1997).

Creating a market suitable for the locals and having them as customers was indicated by the participants as an opportunity to maintain good levels of work during low season, without wasting the carrying capacity of their facilities. Indeed, in this way, the attractions and facilities of the cities might have a use all year round. Moreover, with the locals, as the participants indicated, it is also possible to experiment new activities that can be proposed to the tourists later on. Attempts to increase a domestic market and domestic tourism have already been implemented in several destinations (Andriotis, 2005).

All these current strategies represent individual efforts of the tourism stakeholders to limit and reduce seasonality. According to Baum & Hagen (1999), *“Tackling seasonality is one of the most common aspirations and objectives of tourism development strategy plans”* (p. 299). The participants of this research mentioned the new tourism strategic plan of Girona, which is due for the year 2022 and has among its objectives the reduction of seasonal tourism and the limitation of its negative effects. The plan will involve for the first time more stakeholders, of different tourism areas, trying to create a collaboration among these different actors. The participants interviewed expressed an optimistic view regarding the new plan, seeing a future collaboration as a good opportunity to reduce seasonality and to achieve an extension of the tourism season.

All the current efforts towards the reduction of seasonal tourism made by the stakeholders interviewed are focused on changing the attributes of Girona, trying to increase the appeal of the city for the visitors. Therefore, these strategies are focused upon increasing the attractiveness of the destination rather than on the consumers (Butler & Mao, 1997). As stated by Butler & Mao (1997), *“Many efforts have been made to diversify the appeal and attractions of the destinations, for example by lowering prices, or adding value, on the assumption that if they are made more attractive in relatively unattractive season, then tourists will come at those times”* (Butler & Mao, 1997, p.13). The participants did not mention any new strategy, but all their attempts, have already been reported in other case studies.

**Girona is a plan B** corresponds to another core category. The proximity with Barcelona and Costa Brava, two destinations with such a strong international tourism brand, as reported by the participants, contribute to increase seasonal tourism in Girona and might convert the city in a plan B. This proximity was identified by the participants as both an advantage and a disadvantage.

Due to the short distance, generally visitors staying on the coast undertake at least a day trip to Girona. The stakeholders working as tour operators had a positive opinion about daily visitors coming from the coast, as potentially increasing the number of people taking part to their activities. On the contrary, the stakeholders working in the hospitality sector had a negative perception, as daily visitors do not generally stay overnight in Girona, but go back to Costa Brava on the same day and thus, do not generate any income for their facilities. The effects that the proximity of Costa Brava generates for Girona were identified in a contradictory way.

On the contrary, the effects Girona generates for the Costa Brava were regarded as beneficial. The stakeholders supported the vision that Girona can help to decrease seasonal tourism in Costa Brava, due to the fact that its tourism businesses do not massive close during low season, on the contrary than what happen on the coast.

The last two core categories are connected with a more positive perception towards seasonal tourism. The participants highlighted some beneficial effects seasonality has for their tourism businesses.

**Good not to have visitors all year round** regards the time of low season, during which both the locals and the territory can rest from tourists. The natural resources can be regenerated after the overuse during peak season, while the locals can live with more peace, compared to when the city is full of tourists.

**Time to plan and go on holidays** represents the last core category. This core category regards a more positive perceptions of seasonal tourism expressed by the participants. Low season was identified by the interviewees as the only period during which they can plan for the next season or do some activities of renovations and at the same time, it is the only period in which they can go on holiday.

Despite it is undeniable that seasonality presents some advantages for the tourism businesses and the local citizens, not many authors so far, have focused on these positive aspects (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005). This research demonstrates that the tourism stakeholders of Girona have controversial perceptions of seasonality.

### 4.3.1 Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats

The following SWOT analysis will try to clarify the complex situation caused by seasonal tourism in Girona, creating a better visibility of the key findings.

Table 2. SWOT analysis

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>WEAKENESS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Temps de Flors</li> <li>- Girona is a plan B               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Girona can decrease seasonal tourism in Costa Brava</li> <li>- Daily visitors coming from the coast</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Good not to have pressure all year round               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Locals can breathe</li> <li>- Resources can be regenerated</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Time to plan and go on holiday</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Economic lost &amp; Business instability               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Employment instability</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Sporadic high peak of visitors               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Touristic apartment</li> <li>- Groups of visitors</li> <li>- Temps de Flors</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Risk of bad reputation</li> <li>- Girona is a plan B               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Girona can decrease seasonal tourism in Costa Brava</li> <li>- Daily visitors coming from the coast</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>“Girona, Ciutat de festivals”</i></li> <li>- Diversification of touristic demand               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attraction of seniors</li> <li>- Locals as customers</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Strategic plan of tourism 2022               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Collaboration</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Diversification of the prices</li> </ul>

Source: own work

As it is possible to see, two core categories have been classified as strengths: “Good not have pressure all year round” and “Time to plan and go on holidays”. These two core categories are connected with a positive perception of the stakeholders of Girona towards seasonal tourism and comprehend beneficial effects created by seasonality highlighted by the participants and this is why they appear under strengths.

On the contrary, the three core categories: “Economic lost & business instability”, “Sporadic high peak of visitors” and “Risk of a bad reputation” were classified as weaknesses. In this case, these categories are connected with a negative perception of seasonal tourism highlighted by the participants, as creating several negative impacts for their businesses, explained in the section above.

The category “Girona is a plan B” appears both as a strength and as a weakness, due to the contradictory perception of the stakeholders interviewed, which underlined both advantages and disadvantages. Even the festival of Temps de Flors, which is a subcategory of “Sporadic high peak of visitors” appears both as a strength and as a weakness, as also generated discrepancy in the participants’ views. Temps the Flors was described as having potential positive effects but also connected to the risk of having negative consequences.

The strategies mentioned by the participants have been categorized as opportunities due to their potentiality to decrease the negative effects caused by seasonal tourism. The participants expressed especially an optimistic view towards the new strategic plan of Girona 2022. This plan will try to create a future collaboration among different stakeholders of the city, including for the first time many new tourism actors. The only strategy appearing as a threat is “diversification of the prices”. The stakeholders interviewed declared to apply this strategy, but just because they have no other option to attract visitors outside peak season, they are not happy to lower the prices.

## **5. Conclusion**

Seasonality has become one of the most discussed topics for the tourism industry nowadays (Butler & Mao, 1997; Butler, 2001). Despite the creation of several strategies tackling seasonality a single accepted solution has not been reached yet (Butler, 2001).

This study is aimed at comprehending how the tourism supply stakeholders of the city of Girona perceive one of the most contradictory topic for many destinations nowadays: seasonality. This research also studies the effects seasonality has for the tourism businesses of Girona and the strategies the participants apply to tackle the phenomenon.

The subjects of this research were various participants involved in different tourism businesses, representing the category of the tourism supply stakeholders of Girona. In total, 14 interviews were necessary to reach the saturation point and the analysis of the data collected was done using the qualitative methodology of constructivist grounded theory. The data were analyzed without any specific software, just through a manual coding procedure. Finally, six core categories have emerged according to the interpretation of the data by the author, trying to answer the research question and the related sub questions.

These core categories answers the research question, demonstrating the complexity of the phenomenon and the different perceptions highlighted by the stakeholders interviewed. The answer to the related sub questions is that seasonality has different effects for the tourism businesses of Girona, some are positive and some are negative. Indeed, the phenomenon might

also have some benefits for both the tourism stakeholders and the local citizens. The various effects of seasonality mentioned by the participants are related to their different perceptions and consequently, to the different strategies applied to tackle the phenomenon.

## 5.1 Recommendations

As aforementioned, this research demonstrated that the tourism stakeholders of Girona have different and contradictory perceptions of seasonality and that several strategies are applied in order to reduce seasonality. As aforementioned, the creation of events and the promotion of the image of Girona as “*Ciutat de festivals*” represent the main marketing strategy of the municipality of Girona.

There has been several case studies reporting the success of the strategy of creating events and the consequent achievement of a more widespread tourism demand during the year (Getz, 2008). One of the current issues hindering the success of this strategy in Girona is the lack of collaboration from the other stakeholders of the city. Indeed, the municipality alone can not achieve a successful result, but it is necessary the support and collaboration from the other tourism actors of Girona. For example, the tour operators of the city could adapt their tours during the days of the festivals, including them in their itinerary. The hotels instead, could intensify the creation of special offers and specific packages, related somehow to these events. Only with a support from the stakeholders this strategy will be able to decrease seasonal tourism.

As aforementioned, all the strategies applied by the participants, such as diversifying the prices, the creation of events and the attraction of new customers through a more varied offer are all focused on the attributes of Girona, trying to increase the attractiveness of the city for the tourists, especially during off season. Nowadays, it has been demonstrated that in order to develop successful strategies towards the reduction of seasonality, it is necessary to take into consideration not only the supply side, the destination, but also the demand side, the tourists and their behaviors, such as the motivations pushing them to go somewhere in a specific period of the year (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005). As the participants of this research have demonstrated, the strategies applied in Girona towards the reduction of seasonality do not focus on the demand side. A spontaneous suggestion coming from the researcher for the supply stakeholders of Girona is not only to focus on the city and its attributes, but also to research more the demand side: the visitors of Girona. For instance, studying the profiles of the tourists and the period in which they tend to come will allow the stakeholders to develop more effective strategies towards the reduction of seasonality.

It is important to remember that Girona is located in a very strategic position. The proximity of Girona with the Costa Brava and Barcelona, two destinations with an established history of tourism, is another important factor that has to be considered if the aim is to reduce seasonality. As mentioned by the participants, Girona in some cases, can become a plan B for visitors of Barcelona or of the Costa Brava and this fact could become an advantage for the tourism stakeholders of the city. The creation of new networks of collaboration and an intensification of the existing ones between the stakeholders of Girona and the ones of Costa Brava and Barcelona comes as a spontaneous recommendation from the author. The tourism businesses of Girona and Costa Brava have the same aim of reducing seasonal tourism. On the contrary, Barcelona is not affected by seasonality, as it is a destination currently facing problems of mass tourism. In the researcher's view, the combination of different tourism products of these three destinations might create a powerful promotion to attract visitors during off season in Girona and at the same, improving the current tourism situations also of Barcelona and Costa Brava.

The table below will serve to better visualize some of the proposed combined activities with existing products in the three destinations. The existing products of Girona were mentioned by the participants and also retrieved by the official website of the city.

Table 3: Proposals of combined activities in the three destinations based on existing activities of Girona

<b>Existing activities in Girona</b>	<b>Possible networks with Costa Brava and Barcelona</b>
Ticket M6, a card with a special price to visit 6 museum in Girona	The card could include also some museum of Barcelona or of the Costa Brava
Cycle tour operators of Girona creating tours mainly in the Pyrenees and Costa Brava	These cycle tour operators of Girona could include in their itinerary also the area of Barcelona. A consequence could become the creation of a collaboration with hotels and hostels of Barcelona area, providing food and accommodations for the cyclists
The creation of events in Girona	The events in Girona should not happen on the same days when other famous events or festivals happen in the near areas of Barcelona or Costa Brava.

The attraction of different segments of tourism, especially the ones more flexible to travel, such as group of seniors	Combined tours organized for seniors including also Barcelona and Costa Brava already exist, but an idea could be to organize also activities with local tour operators of the three destinations, such as city tours or food tours. In this way, the customers could have more local and experiences.
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Source: own work

The aim of this table has been to propose combined activities in the three destinations, implementing activities already existing in Girona and improving the networks of collaboration among Girona, Costa Brava and Barcelona. The result from these combined activities might be an amelioration of the tourism situation of the three destinations, generating a more widespread tourism demand during the year. Moreover, these proposals might convince tourists to stay longer and visiting more places therefore, generating more income for the areas.

All in all, this research has shown the importance to take into consideration the different perceptions of the local businesses regarding the phenomenon of seasonality. Indeed, only with a more holistic picture of the situation created by seasonality in a destination it will be possible to develop more effective tourism strategic plans.

In the case study of Girona as it was proved, the locals stakeholders have very different perceptions regarding seasonality, which should be taken into account in the development of new strategic plan for the city. The local businesses currently apply several strategies with the same aim of a reduction of seasonality, which represent individual attempts. A stronger collaboration among the local stakeholders is necessary to obtain more effective strategies and it is what is going to be implemented in the new tourism strategic plan 2022. Further, as mentioned above, networks of collaboration could be extended also with the businesses of Barcelona and the Costa Brava or the ones already existing should be reinforced and improved.

## 5.2 Limitation and further research

As this research follows a constructivist paradigm, the findings are not generalizable. The epistemology is subjective. The research is based on the interpretation of the interviews by the author, which means that the probabilities for the author to have caused biases are very high. Although this research believes in the existence of multiple realities, its subjectivity might limit its application in other studies.

Another limitation is connected to the selections of the participants by the author. In some cases, for the researcher it was not possible to interview some stakeholders, due to their unwillingness to cooperate. The physical distance between the researcher and the stakeholders constitutes another limitation, due to the fact that the researcher did not have a personal mean of transport.

Another limitation is connected to the results of this research not being suitable and applicable for other destinations. As it is widely recognized, the effects of seasonality are different according to the nature of a destination and even the efforts towards its reduction are strictly connected to the attributes of the destination which thus, make difficult to transfer them to another place (Ćorluka & Matošević Radić, 2014). Even in this case, the outcome and recommendations of this research might not be suitable for destinations with very different characteristics compared to Girona.



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## **Appendices**

## Appendix I: Semi-structured interviews.

### Causes:

Do you consider seasonality as a main problem affecting Girona?

Which do you think are the main causes of the phenomenon of seasonality in Girona?

Do you consider the proximity with Costa Brava as a cause?

Which are the main advantages and disadvantages of the proximity between Girona and Costa Brava?

### Effects:

Which do you think are the main effects and implications connected with seasonality?

Do you think there are more negative or positive effects?

If you think seasonality has negative effects could you articulate among economic, social and environmental?

Do you think seasonality might also have some positive effects?

If yes, could be articulate among economic, social and environmental effects?

### Strategies

Are you implementing any strategy(ies) in order to tackle seasonality?

If yes, do you think your current strategy(ies) are enough to tackle the issue?

Do you think there could be improvements in the current strategy(ies)? Or do you think it is necessary the application of new strategy(ies)?

Which is the aim you want to reach with your strategy(ies)

Do you have any collaboration with the municipality of Girona in tackling seasonality?

Do you think the phenomenon of seasonality will ever be resolved?

## Appendix II: Number of visits to the tourism offices of Catalonia, February 2018


Comparison of the visits received by the tourism offices of the main cities of Catalonia: Barcelona, Girona Lleida and Tarragona in the month of February 2018. (Source: Tourism Office of Girona, 2018). Images retrieved from the official website of La Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018:

[http://empresa.gencat.cat/ca/treb\\_ambits\\_actuacio/emo\\_turisme/emo\\_informacio\\_promocio/emo\\_oficines\\_turisme/emo\\_carta\\_serveis/emo\\_indicadors\\_oficines/otgirona/](http://empresa.gencat.cat/ca/treb_ambits_actuacio/emo_turisme/emo_informacio_promocio/emo_oficines_turisme/emo_carta_serveis/emo_indicadors_oficines/otgirona/)

### Oficina de Turisme de Catalunya a Barcelona

Febrer 2018

#### Indicadors atenció presencial

Nombre de consultes presencials	880	
Temps d'espera inferior a 15 minuts	100%	
Resoltes immediatament	100%	
Temps mitjà de resposta (no immediata)	0 dies	

### Oficina de Turisme de Catalunya a Lleida

Febrer 2018




#### Indicadors atenció presencial

Nombre de consultes presencials	1.215	
Temps d'espera inferior a 15 minuts	100%	
Resoltes immediatament	100%	
Temps mitjà de resposta (no immediata)	0 dies	

## Oficina de Turisme de Catalunya a Tarragona

Febrer 2018




### Indicadors atenció presencial

Nombre de consultes presencials	312	
Temps d'espera inferior a 15 minuts	100%	
Resoltes immediatament	100%	
Temps mitjà de resposta (no immediata)	0 dies	

## Oficina de Turisme de Catalunya a Girona

Febrer 2018

### Indicadors atenció presencial

Nombre de consultes presencials	2.792	
Temps d'espera inferior a 15 minuts	100%	
Resoltes immediatament	100%	
Temps mitjà de resposta (no immediata)	0 dies	

Appendix III: Enquiry submitted by the tourism office of Girona to the visitors

Enquiry indirectly conducted by the tourism office of Girona to the visitors passing to the office.

Source: Tourism Office of Girona, 2018

Generalitat de Catalunya  
Departament d'Empresa i Ocupació

OTC a Girona-Ramblla | Exportació | Informes

Dia 7 | Mes Març | Any 2018

**Dades de la persona usuària** (\* Camps obligatoris)

Resident a GIRONA  Estranger

**Pais \*** ESPANYA **CCAA** **Província** **Municipi**

**Edat**  
 16 a 25 anys  36 a 65 anys  26 a 36 anys  Més de 65 anys

**Gènere**  
 Home  Dona  Ens / entitat / empresa

**Visites**  
 Sol  Parella  Família  Grups

**Pernoctació**  
 Pernocta al municipi  dies

**Tipus d'allotjament**

**Motiu de l'estada \*** Vacances  Contractació total o parcial per agència de viatges

**Tipologia de la consulta** (\* Camps obligatoris)

Informació local de GIRONA  Resta de l'Estat

**Informació d'àmbit municipal**  
Municipi

**Destinacions de Catalunya**  
 Costa Brava  Costa Daurada  Costa Barcelona  
 Terres de l'Ebre  Catalunya central  Pirineus  
 Terres de Lleida  Val d'Aran  Barcelona

**Serveis i recursos sol·licitats**  
 Allotjaments  Restauració  
 Comerç  Seguretat ciutadana  
 Esdeveniments  Transports  
 Oci  Altres

**Segments turístics**  
 Turisme actiu  Turisme d'esportiu  
 Turisme de natura  Turisme religiós  
 Turisme cultural  Turisme de negocis  
 Shopping  Gastronòmic  
 Sol i platja  Golf  
 Salut

**Punts d'interès**  
 Activitats i Esdeveniments  Girona 10  
 Camí de Sant Jaume  Girona FC  
 Carrers  Girona Jueva  
 Centre Històric  "Joc de Trons"  
 Ciclisme  Museus  
 Cicloturisme  Oci Nocturn  
 Circuits accessibles  Senderisme  
 Circuits d'orientació  Serveis  
 Festival de Temporada Alta  Setmana Santa  
 Fires de Sant Narcís  Temps de Flors  
 Gastronomia  Visites guiades

**Altres gestions**  
 Reserves  
 Vendes  
 Lliurament de publicacions

**Acompliment de la carta de serveis** (\* Camps obligatoris)

**Consulta \***  Presencial  Immediata  
 Telemàtica  Temps de resposta no immediata  dies  
 Correu Postal  Temps d'espera superior a 15 minuts  
 Fax  
 Telefònica

**Idiomes \***  Català  Italià  
 Castellà  Alemany  
 Anglès  Rus  
 Francès

Assessorament personalitzat