

Distribution and Socio-spatial Segregation of Cruise Ship Workers in Cozumel, Mexico

Distribución y Segregación Socio-espacial de los Trabajadores de Cruceros en Cozumel, México

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Abstract

The cruise industry is one of the most profitable businesses in the world having a constant growth since the 1980's. However, it is important to mention that this success has been reached in part due to the workforce in the vessels, also known as cruise ship crew members. As well as any other type of tourism, visitors cause several effects when cruises berth in ports of call. But even when there is knowledge on the impacts of cruise tourism in the destinations (mainly caused by tourists), there is a scarcity of literature in terms of issues related to the cruise ship workers on land. In addition to the above, information about their specific distribution and socio-spatial segregation according to their hierarchies and nationalities during their free time is practically null. Therefore, the aim of this research work is to point out the location of cruise ship workers in order to demonstrate if they subdivide among themselves depending on the nation they come from and their position at work when they land in the Island of Cozumel, Mexico. Findings show that there are 80 different spots visited by crew members in Cozumel Island. It has also been identified that their distribution and socio-spatial segregation on land is related to their nationalities and hierarchies at work, which means that their dynamics differ from those performed by cruise tourists, and that they have a remarkable socioeconomic influence during their free time in the destination. The latter information can be useful to emphasize that cruise ship workers play an important role in the cruise industry while visiting different ports of call. At the same time, this can mean an opportunity for local decision makers to come up with strategic plans in which cruise ship workers need to be taken into account when improving local tourism management.

Key words: distribution, socio-spatial segregation, cruise ship workers, Cozumel.

Resumen

El turismo de cruceros es uno de los negocios más rentables en el mundo, al tener un crecimiento constante desde la década de 1980. Sin embargo, es importante mencionar que su éxito se debe en gran medida a la habilidad de la fuerza laboral en los barcos, la cual es denominada como tripulantes de cruceros. Al igual que en cualquier tipo de turismo, los visitantes generan distintos efectos cuando los cruceros desembarcan en los puertos de escala. No obstante, aunque existe conocimiento de sus impactos (sobre todo aquellos causados por los turistas de cruceros), la literatura sobre los trabajadores de cruceros en tierra firme resulta escasa. Aunado a lo anterior, la información sobre su distribución y segregación socio-espacial en función de su jerarquía y nacionalidad durante su tiempo libre en puertos de escala es prácticamente nula. De esta manera, el objetivo de este artículo es identificar la ubicación de los tripulantes y mostrar si existe algún tipo de subdivisión entre ellos a causa de su país de origen y posición laboral en la isla de Cozumel. Los hallazgos señalan que existen 80 distintos sitios visitados frecuentemente por tripulantes y que su distribución en la isla está asociada a su jerarquía y nacionalidad, lo cual se puede traducir en que su dinámica en tierra difiere con la de los turistas de cruceros y que tienen una notoria influencia socio-económica en el destino. Esta información puede ser de utilidad para enfatizar que los trabajadores de cruceros también juegan un papel importante en los puertos de escala. Del mismo modo, puede visualizarse como una oportunidad para que los tomadores de decisiones locales generen líneas de acción que tomen en cuenta a estos actores del turismo de cruceros, y con ello avanzar en la mejora de la gestión en estos contextos.

Palabras clave: distribución, segregación socio-espacial, trabajadores de cruceros, Cozumel.

Introduction

The cruise industry is one of the most profitable businesses in the world and has shown a constant growth since the 1980's (Gibson, 2008). According to the Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association (FCCA, 2019), in 2018 alone, 28.2 million people in the world travelled on a cruise, which demonstrates its continual and dominant development in terms of tourism supply.

Cruise tourism is characterized by providing passengers with a pleasant and hedonistic atmosphere, luxurious cabins, as well as food and drink from different parts of the world. A modern cruise can be considered as a floating hotel since cruise tourists have the opportunity to visit various ports of call during the same journey (Dowling 2006).

Those are some of the reasons why cruise tourism has been successful as from its beginning. However, it is important to highlight that all this could not be possible without the presence of the people who work on the ships, well known as crew members (Gibson, 2008).

The Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA, 2017) reports 956,597 workers in the industry from all over the world. It is possible to find people of over 99 different nationalities in the workforce of a ship, distributed in three main categories: The first, which can be considered as the high hierarchy (and therefore, perceiving the best salaries), is formed by captains and officers who normally belong to developed countries from North America and Western Europe (specially from Great Britain and The United States). Secondly, crew staff, animators, dancers, singers and actors, who usually come from Eastern Europe countries such as Croatia, Romania and Poland. They do not have incomes such as the ones of captains or officers, but they are better paid than the ones in low hierarchies. Thirdly, operational positions, where housekeeping and maintenance are needed, is mainly composed by people from developing countries of Asia and South America. Even when they have the heaviest load of work, they have the lowest incomes in the industry (Wu, 2005; Dowling, 2006; Véronneau and Roy, 2012).

Only one third of the whole capacity of a modern vessel is devoted to the crew, which means that cruise workers must deal with the other two thirds of people that are cruise tourists, leading, most of the time (specially for low hierarchies), to long working hours that can last from 8 to 12 hours seven days a week (Wood, 2000; Zhao, 2002; Weaver, 2005).

However, many crew members prefer working at sea to working on land because they assume their income is better as they save up by not paying for food or rent on a ship; as well as having the opportunity to travel around the world (Wood, 2000; Zhao, 2002; Henry and Thyne, 2007; Gibson, 2008).

When cruise ships berth in ports of call, not only tourists but also cruise workers, have the chance to go off the ship during their free time (Henry and Thyne, 2007). This means that cruise workers can move all along a cruise destination, having contact with local people by performing different activities (Van Broeck and Dierckx, 2011).

In spite of the fact that there is knowledge on the effects of cruise tourism when vessels are in ports of call (Johnson, 2002; Klein, 2003; Gibson and Bentley, 2006; Martínez, 2008; Brida and Zapata, 2010; Klein, 2011; Kerswill and Mair, 2015; Polat, 2015), literature related to the crew and their activities on land is scarce (Klein, 2003; Van Broeck and Dierckx, 2011).

In addition, there is a lack of geographical data regarding the places they go to during their free time on ports of call according to their hierarchies and nationalities. One of the reasons for this is that most of the time the effects caused by cruise ship workers on destinations are assumed as the same as those generated by tourists, defining both of them as passengers (Thyne, James and Lloyd, 2015; Brida and Zapata, 2010). However, it is important to point out that cruise workers can show a behaviour that differs from that shown by cruise tourists (García and González, 2018), thus leading to a different distribution when on land as well as the cause of specific effects.

Insomuch as tourism depends on physical space to be executed, it has been a field of study for geographers. Authors such as Hall and Page (2006), or Williams and Lew (2015), consider tourism as an open system in which social, economic, environmental and political contexts have influence on. Hence, it is important to understand the effects of those interactions in order to know the dynamic and structure of tourism.

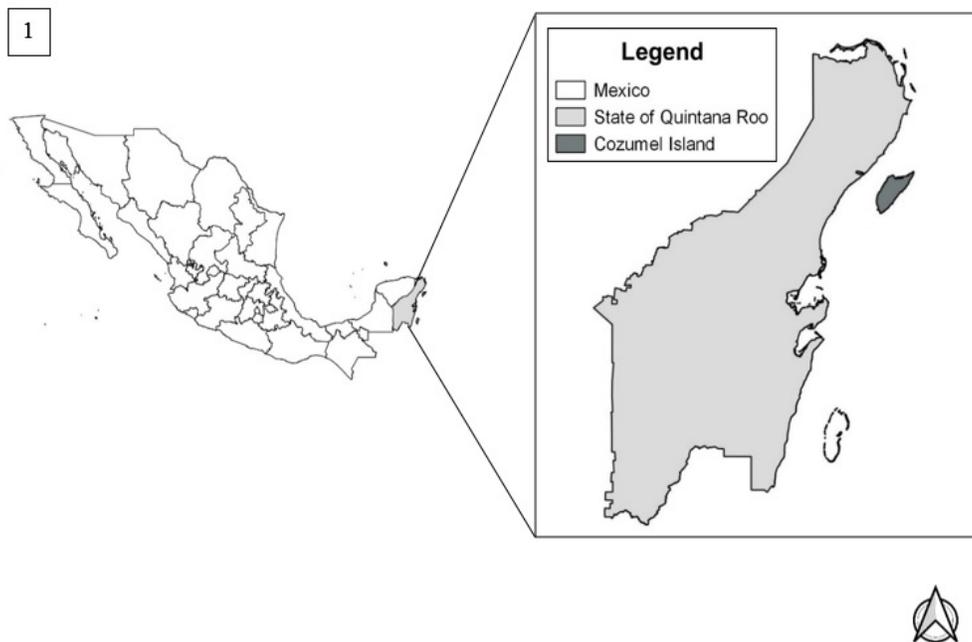
Taking the previous approach into account, the distribution of the individuals in the space of a destination can vary depending on their characteristics (Williams and Lew, 2015). Schelling (1971) argues that people tend to gather with those who share similar culture, habits and earnings; but at the same time, they exclude those who contrast with their way of living, which results in a way of self-organization within a social system. Likewise, according to Lima (2001), socio-spatial segregation can be defined as the division of social groups in the space caused by factors such as ethnicity, level of income and access to facilities. Therefore,

it could be assumed that while crew members try to exclude tourists, cruise ship workers can segregate each other on Cozumel Island owing to their hierarchies, incomes and nationalities, which is a social dynamic worth being studied.

1. Cozumel and the crew

The Caribbean destinations dominate the cruise market in the world, representing more than 33% of the whole number of visitors (FCCA, 2019). One of the ports that is part of the itinerary of cruise boats in The Caribbean Sea is Cozumel Island. It is located in the Southwest coast of Mexico (see Map 1). It has a current population of 86, 415 inhabitants and it is the third biggest island in the country (INEGI, 2015).

Map 1. Location of Cozumel Island



Source: own elaboration.

By the end of the second world war, Cozumel was considered as an exotic place only for adventurers (Martínez, 2008). It was until 1948, after the visit of journalist Richard Humphrey (who wrote an article for the *Holiday* magazine in which he states his great impression regarding the beauty of the island), that people started to visit the island by air and sea. That is

why, in 1971, a cruise called *Ariadne* visited Cozumel Island for the first time (Santander and Ramos, 2011); three years later, the *Bolero* trasatlantic added Cozumel as a port of call in its itinerary, and that was how the relationship between Cozumel and cruises started (Palafox and Zizumbo, 2009).

Since then, cruise arrivals have been constant on the island. The Business Research & Economic Advisors (BREA, 2018) argues that Cozumel is the most visited port of call in the world, having received more than 3,487,800 cruise travelers during 2018. As for the number of crew members visiting destinations, the BREA estimates that Cozumel Island also ranks as the favourite port for crew members with 676,300 workers who disembarked in 2018, having spent an average of \$67.24 dollars per each. While crew members spend time on the island, as they can disembark almost every week due to the route of the cruises, they can perform different activities such as having something to eat, shopping for pantry and souvenirs, getting in touch with friends and relatives, and relaxing by resting or doing leisure activities (swimming with dolphins, visiting mayan ruins, going diving, among others) (Van Broeck and Dierckx, 2011; García and González, 2018).

Even when Klein (2003) argued about the importance of inquiring about the influence of crew members during their free time in ports of call beyond economic expenditure, and in spite of the fact that Van Broeck and Dierckx (2011) stated that it is necessary to delve into the importance of the distribution and influence of the crew in a destination depending on their income, hierarchies, and culture; specific information, as well as cartographic representations related to their distribution and socio-spatial segregation, are practically null not only on the island but in any other port of call.

Therefore, the aim of this research is to show the distribution and the socio-spatial segregation of crew members in the port of Cozumel Island by pointing out the specific places they visit during their free time on the island depending on their hierarchies and nationalities. Hence, the display of evidences of the areas they go to on the island, depending on their position on the ship and the nation they come from, goes as follows.

2. Method

In aims of demonstrating the information above, from September 2014 to August 2018, data was gathered through a series of different fieldworks. Firstly, researchers went over the island

several times to observe and to identify the specific places that cruise ship workers are used to visiting when vessels berth on the island. Using a Global Positioning System (GPS), all those spots had been pointed out by identifying their names, schedules and locations.

Afterwards, informal conversations with the crew, and also with local residents, were accomplished in such spots in order to know why these visitors have the desire to go to these places and how the interaction between locals and cruise workers goes.

Futhermore, twenty crew members from different nationalities and hierarchies were interviewed while they were staying in Cozumel with the aim of knowing their opinion about the island and why they visit specific places. To do so, it was necessary to construct a script in which questions about their age, position on the ship, free time and place of provenance were included so researchers could know their profile.

Then, local business owners, somehow related to the crew, had also been interviewed. There were a total of seventeen informants who were asked about the interaction they keep with cruise workers during their free time, as well as the kind of cruise workers they assist according to their nationalities and hierarchies, average crew expenditure per day, and the percentage of crew customers they receive daily. This information was used to compare the information gathered in all those interviews made to the crew, and to analyze the information that could help to disentangle the distribution and socio-spatial segregation of cruise ship workers on the island.

All collected data allowed to create a Geographical Information System (GIS), by using the QGIS software to show the crew distribution and socio-spatial segregation through different cartographic representations. The obtained findings are shown below.

3. Distribution of cruise ship workers in Cozumel

After the quantification of data analysis, it was identified that cruise workers, during their free time on the island, usually go to 80 different locations of which 72 are located in the west of the island, 5 more in the southwest and 3 in the northwest (see maps 2, 3 and 4). Cruise workers on the island visit places with a large variation in the line of business, being restaurants, bars and piers amongst the places with greater presence of such people.

As for the west of the island, it could be shown that they go to places that are normally attended by local residents such as: shopping malls, hospitals, dental offices, fabric and

clothing stores, cyber cafes, beauty parlours and the municipal market. That is why it is common to see groups of crew members walking through downtown, just as the crewmember Bryan (Indonesia) claims:

“I usually go to eat downtown [...] I buy everyday stuff you know, sometimes when we are near downtown we buy some clothes, a souvenir, we usually buy food. [...] It is peaceful because I can walk from here to downtown and I will be ok... I feel at ease” (Bryan, housekeeping, Carnival Cruise Lines).

Furthermore, some crew members go to places that are frequented by tourists if they have enough free time; those places rank from beach clubs, spas, car rentals, dolphin centres, diving equipment shops, to handcraft shops and souvenir stores, the last ones being very recurrent. Jane’s (Rumania) comments confirm the previous information:

“I always buy souvenirs and I have bought more in the last two months... I buy souvenirs of places where I have been in my life so when I get home I give them as presents to my family because I prefer to give them something from here, something specific, fortunately I have found some spices from here, clothes, especially those Mayan-like clothes” (Jane, captain assistant, Disney Cruise Line).

Some workers prefer going to the northwest of the island, specially when they are looking for a beach club in which they can relax. Their favourite beach clubs in the northwest of the island are Buccanos as well as Playa Azul.

“I like Playa Azul and Bucannos very much, I also like going to Carlos ’n Charlies’ or Paradise Beach [...] I just relax, take the sun, just have a break from work” (Bert, Photographer, Disney Cruise Line, Croatia).

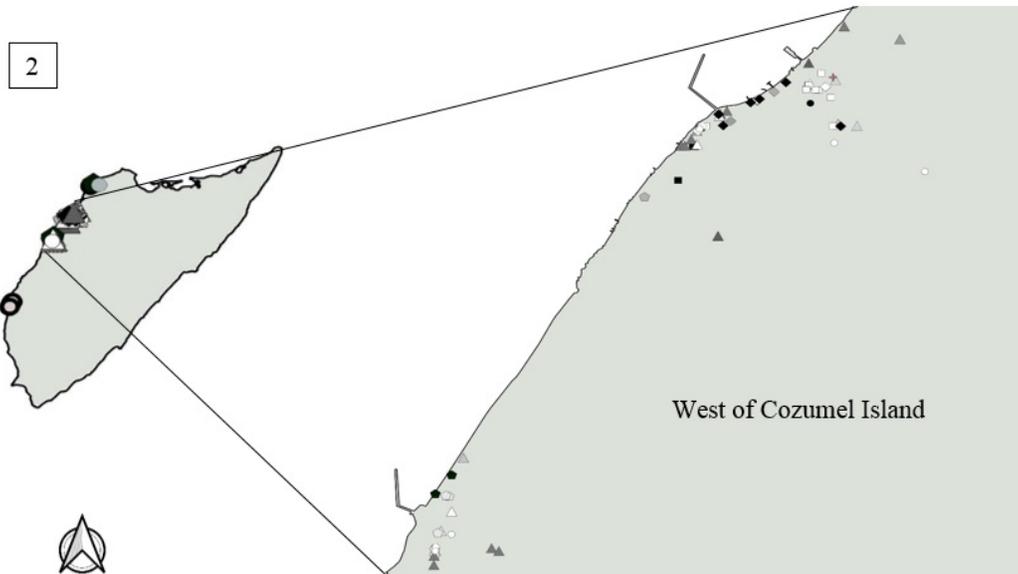
Many other crew members rather go to beach clubs located in the southwest. It is very common to find crew members in Carlos’n Charlie’s, Mr. Sancho’s, Paradise Beach, Playa San Francisco and Playa Mía, which is the most popular among them all.

“Playa Mia, yes, it is a well known beach for all the crew, there was a crew member who had been in Cozumel several years before and he told us ‘Playa Mia is the best’, so we decided to there. I also remember that everything we ate was delicious, and,

well, many of us like going to that part of the island” (Lou, Baker, Carnival Cruise Lines, Mexico).

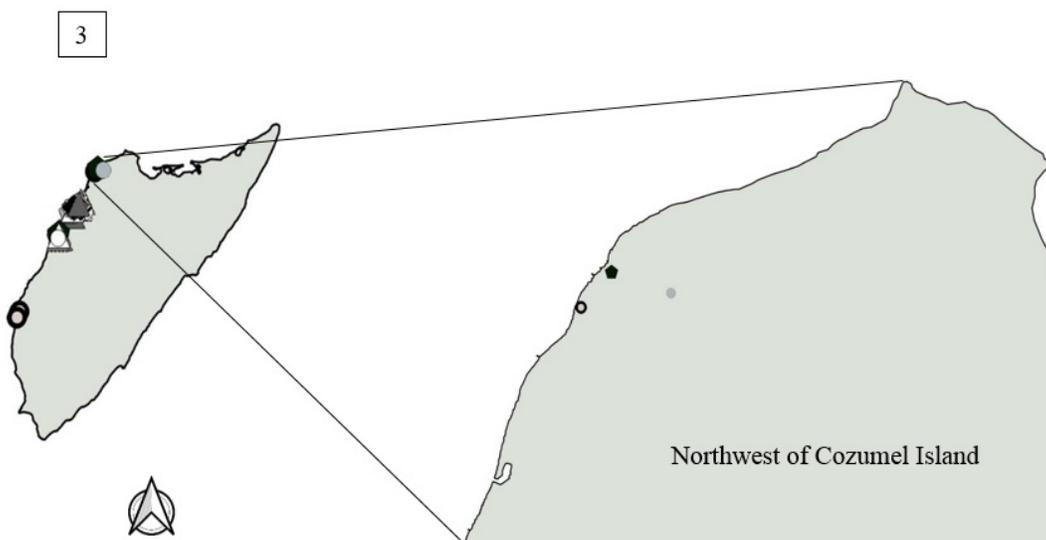
The type of business, as well as the distribution on the island can be shown below:

Map 2. Distribution of cruise ship workers in Cozumel Island according to the type of business



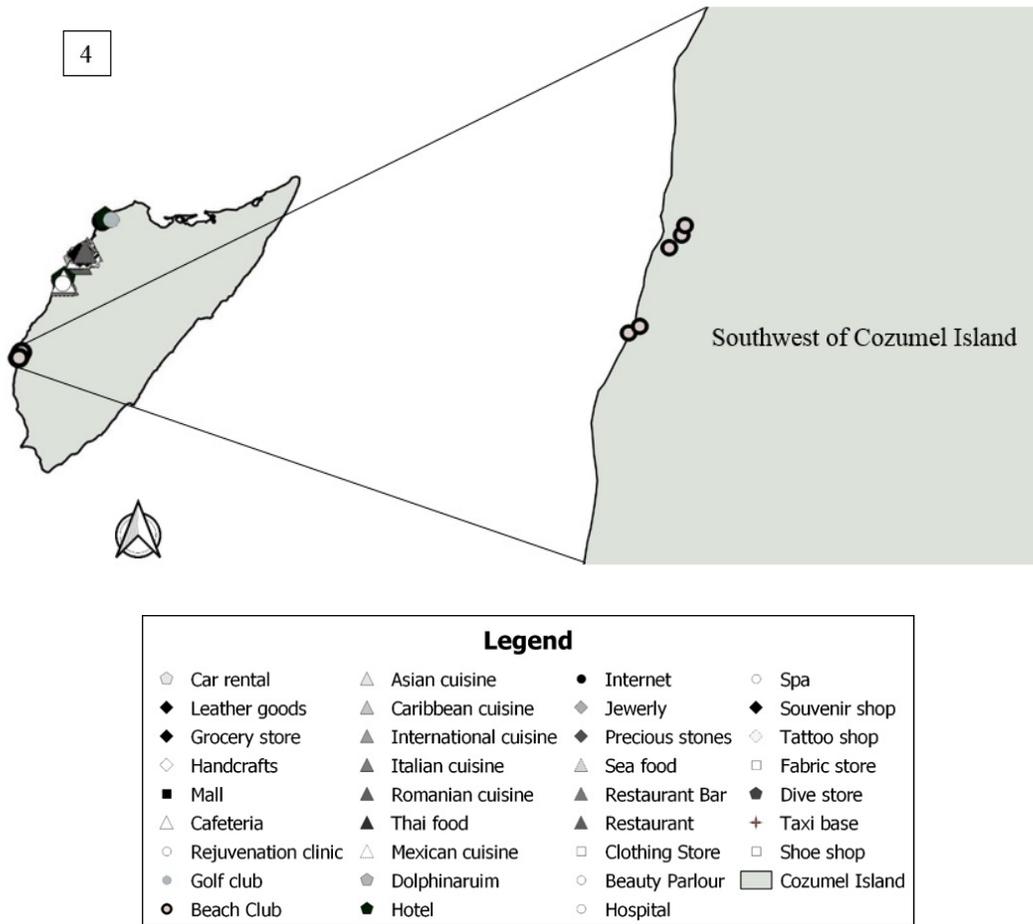
Source: own elaboration.

Map 3. Distribution of cruise ship workers in Cozumel Island according to the type of business



Source: own elaboration.

Map 4. Distribution of cruise ship workers in Cozumel Island according to the type of business



Source: own elaboration.

4. Socio-spatial segregation of cruise ship workers in Cozumel

While it is true that cruise ship workers can be found in different spots, it was identified that crew members form groups of people in the space depending on their nationalities, incomes and hierarchies.

Cruise workers from Asia and South America are usually found in restaurants and bars offering food where they belong next to the piers of Puerta Maya, SS International and Punta Langosta. It is also common to find crew members from Philippines, Indonesia, Peru and Mexico eating in the Municipal Market. Low hierarchies crew members usually spend time on places located in the west of the island for three main reasons. One is that they can easily find food from their hometown as there are specialised restaurants in Asian and South

American cuisine such as Fu-Lin, Chi Asian Cuisine, El Calamar and El Abuelo Gerardo. Another reason is that as they belong to the low hierarchies, their incomes are limited and they cannot afford to frequently go to places located further from the pier. They also do not have much free time because of the load of work, leading to an average of 4 hours of free time on the port. This could be demonstrated by the local informants that were restaurant owners and managers in the west of the island at the time they were asked about the nationality of their main customers.

”They are mainly from India and The Philippines, I consider that most people working in cruises belong to those nationalities [...] working hours on the boat are not easy at all, sometimes their schedule is switched and they have to work at night, not all of them get a good salary, most of them start working in cruises because of the economic situation in their countries” (Joaquin, Restaurant Owner, El Oasis).

”They normally come from India, Ecuador and Peru [...] what they really want is to spend some time relaxing, they always ask us if they can go to the other side of the island, and how long it takes to go there, but no more; they never fulfill their desire, because they only stay for a couple of hours, they have very little time” (Ceci, Restaurant Manager, El Calamar).

Crew staff, musicians and actors also go to specific places in Cozumel. It is common to find cruise workers from Romania, Croatia, Poland and other countries of Eastern Europe in tattoo studios (such as: Mayan tattoo and Empire Tattoo), a place named Rejuvenation clinic and to Spa Amy to take care of their image, in restaurants such as Dracula and Rock n’ Java in downtown and in car rentals (called Shark Rider, I wanna Rent, Pelicanos and Sol y Mar) where they can rent cars which they frequently use to go to beach clubs including Playa Mía and Carlos’n Charlie’s located to the southwest; which shows that they have the opportunity to pay for more services on the island and to go to places that are distant from downtown; and also that they have more free time in comparison to the crew from Asia and Latin America.

”We have a lot of crew members as customers when they are off of the ship [...] europeans, americans, a lot of... I can’t exactly remember this country... Poland! They come a lot from Poland, most of them are Polish, we identify them because of the way they speak” (Jonathan, Car Rental Manager, Sol y Mar).

"When the vessel berths in Punta Langosta, we are generally full of crew members, as you can see right now [...] those who perform shows, singers, artists, dancers, we have a lot of them in here" (Francisco, Restaurant Manager, Rock n' Java).

Regarding the captains and officers spending time on the island, it could be identified that they usually come from countries of North America and Western Europe and that they prefer more exclusive places, that is why they constantly go to beach clubs located in the southwest of the island, where according to local residents, they don't like to be disturbed by anyone else.

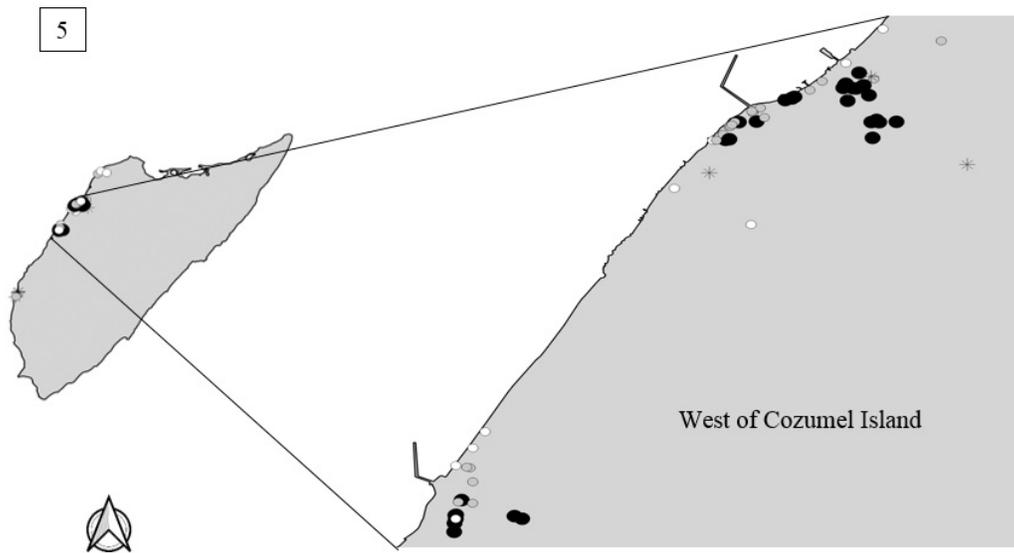
"They come from The United States, Denmark, everywhere [...] Some of those who come here are almost 'untouchable', some of them have very good positions in the ship, and you can see it! captains, officers, I have two pals that come here every two months, but those dudes don't like to be disturbed, they are very special" (Marco, Manager, San Francisco Beach Club).

Gathered data from residents also confirm that they are devoted to leisure activities such as diving, parasailing and playing golf, which means that these categories represent those with the highest incomes and the freest time, having more opportunities to visit different places on the island for a longer time. They also go to gourmet restaurants where they usually look for specialities and international food, being *La Casa del Habano* one of the most preferred by them.

"Well, I used to work in a place called "La casa del Habano", where all officers used to go, even the man who sails the vessel used to be there, those people who earn lots of money. The chief was there, that guy even was carrying his golf stick set, he used to go to the golf course and then he was back, you know, that kind of guys who live pretty good" (Marco, Manager, San Francisco Beach Club).

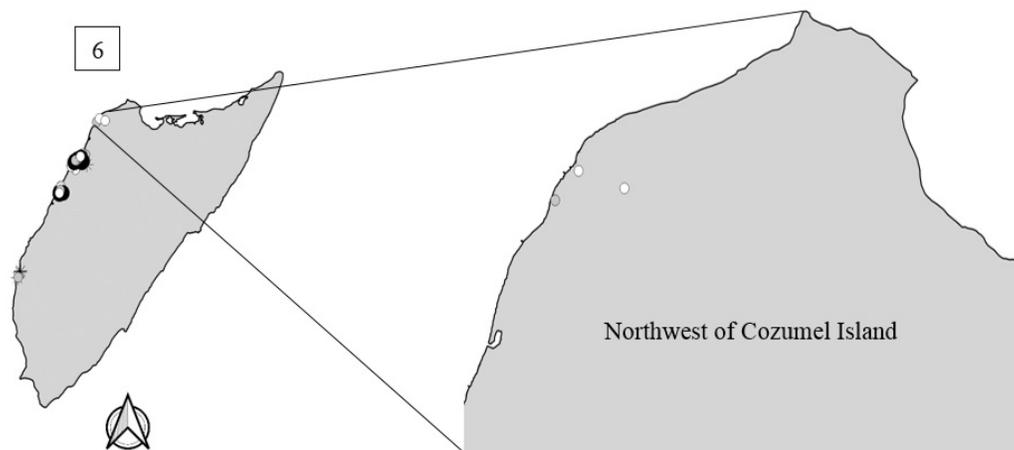
To have a better idea of the socio-spatial segregation of crew members on the island, the following maps (see maps 5, 6 and 7) illustrate the places they go to according to their position on the ship.

Map 5. Distribution of cruise ship workers in Cozumel Island according to their occupation on the ship



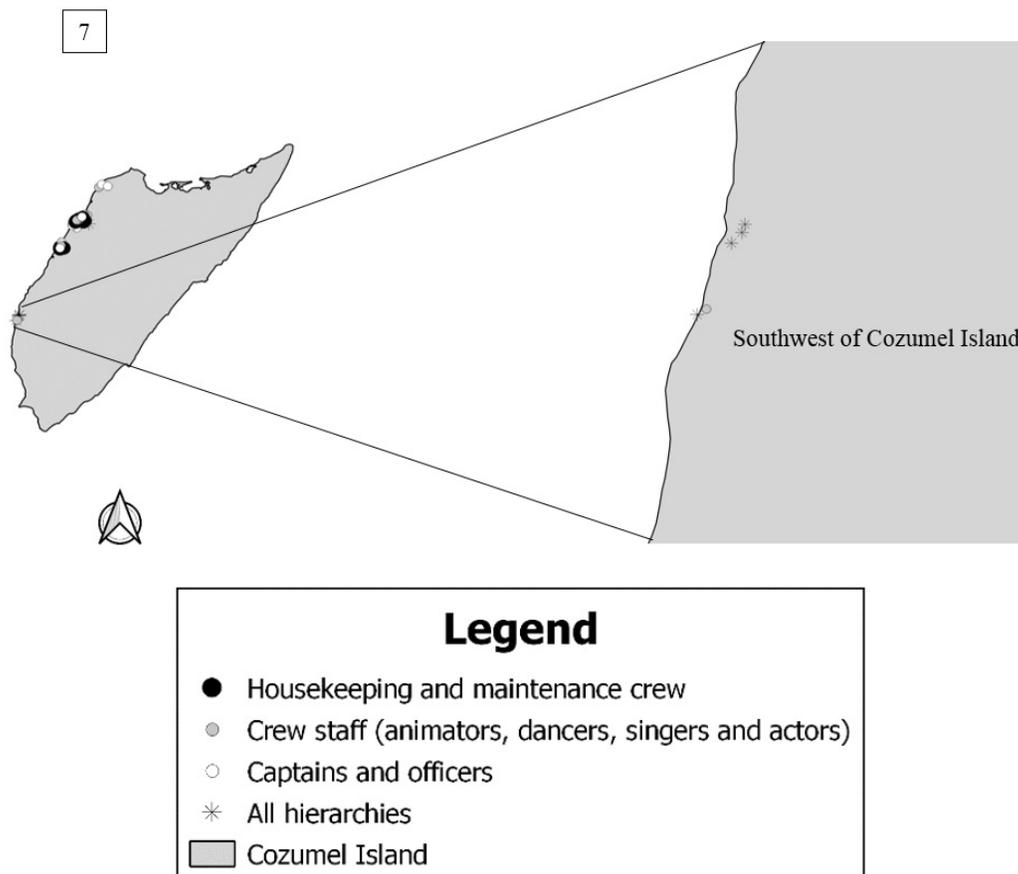
Source: own elaboration.

Map 6. Distribution of cruise ship workers in Cozumel Island according to their occupation on the ship



Source: own elaboration.

Map 7. Distribution of cruise ship workers in Cozumel Island according to their occupation on the ship



Source: own elaboration.

5. Discussion

As it has been noticed in the literature, hierarchies of cruise workers are linked to nationalities; hence it was confirmed that high positions belong to first world countries; medium hierarchies, workers are mainly from Eastern Europe; and operative crew are native people from developing countries of Asia and Latin America (Wu, 2005; Dowling, 2006; Véronneau and Roy, 2012). Findings also demonstrate that not only on the ship (Wood, 2000; Zhao, 2002; Weaver, 2005) but also on land, low hierarchies, as a consequence of the load of work, have less free time than medium or high ones.

Many of the activities performed by cruise ship members on land identified by previous studies (Van Broeck and Dierckx, 2011; BREA, 2018; García and González, 2018) were

confirmed. However, this is the first time that the specific spots in which they spend their free time in a port of call are pointed out in terms of location on the space. Even when some of the crew members go to popular beach clubs, it is not common to find cruise tourists in Asian or Eastern Europe cuisines, the municipal market, beauty parlours, malls, or other public spaces where they can interact with local inhabitants. This helps to confirm that the activities, as well as the distribution in the space of cruise workers, are not similar to that performed by cruise tourists. Consequently, to classify cruise ship workers as "passengers" would mean that crew members as well as tourists cause the same effects (Thyne, James and Lloyd, 2015; Brida and Zapata, 2010), resulting in a limitation to determine the actions of all the subjects involved in cruise tourism. This study then contributes to assimilate the importance of the distribution in the space of crew members in ports of call by proving that they have their own particularities as elements interacting in an open system (Hall and Page, 2006; Williams and Lew, 2015).

By retaking the definition of socio-spatial segregation stated by Schelling (1971) and Lima (2001), it is shown that cruise ship workers form specific groups on the island according to their characteristics, their place of origin, and therefore, ethnicity, figure as important factors that determine where cruise workers go while they are on land. Likewise, incomes and hierarchies play an important roll in terms of acces to facilities. The higher hierarchy the crew member is of, the higher salary he or she will receive and the more free time he or she will have, which means having the opportunity of going further from the pier and having access to more activities on the island.

Hence, as the maps have shown, due to the lack of free time low hierarchies have, the higher concentration of this kind of crew members is downtown in the island; crew staff and middle hierarchies have access to going to more places, so they can perform activities that differ from those done by low hierarchies ones; whereas high hierarchies are able to pay for luxurious facilities as well as for attractions that are very distant from vessels and piers. In that sense, crew members do not only segregate themselves from tourists, but also from each other according to their hierarchies, incomes and nationalities.

The previous information also contributes in literature related to cruise tourism by emphasising that there are groups of crew members that can cause varied effects in destinations. This needs to be taken into account by local decision makers in aims of improving local tourism management and recognizing that cruise ship workers also play an

important roll in cruise tourism not only on board, but in ports of call during their free time (Klein, 2003).

Conclusions

Distribution and activities of the crew are not always the same to those performed by cruise tourists. In fact, most of the time, they go to places where it is not common to find cruise tourists and they have more contact with local people as the boats constantly arrive in the island by having the same itinerary in months.

While boats berth in the port of call in Cozumel Island, crew members go to specific places during their free time where they can fulfill their needs. However, their distribution in the space depends on their nationalities, hierarchies, incomes and free time available. Therefore, it can be assumed that there is segregation among cruise tourists, the crew, as well as themselves.

While low hierarchies prefer places next to the pier, which most of the time are for having something to eat, middle and high hierarchies have access to more complex activities that can be performed far away from downtown, something caused by the differences of free time, culture as well as the incomes perceived according to their occupations.

As far as researchers know, this is the first time that the socio-spatial segregation of cruise ship members in ports of call has been identified, representing an effort to have a better understanding of this kind of dynamics in tourism destinations. Even when this is a contribution to the literature, there are still gaps in research regarding the crew. More projects like this, in other destinations, could help comprehend the importance of cruise ship workers in the industry by recognizing the great value they have on the boat and in destinations they are visiting during their free time.

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