THE URBAN IMAGE OF SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA (SPAIN): A STUDY OF ITS PUBLIC, MEDIA, MARKETING AND ARTISTIC REPRESENTATION*

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I. THE CITY, A SUBJECTIVE SPACE

A city's real appearance does not necessarily coincide with the way its residents and visitors perceive it. The capacity of an urban area to project a concise and cohesive picture of itself, one that evokes something significant, is an essential factor (Amendola, 2000, p. 289). A city develops in a physical space, but is also a multimedia object -words, image and sound- and a living space for residents and visitors alike. For urban researchers, the image plays the role of a filter between man and the environment, and one of their duties must be to analyse this image and see how it compares to the real world. This becomes a process of vital importance from the very moment when the taking of decisions concerning the environment ceases to be based on the real space itself, and is based on the image held by the person responsible. The width of the gap between this image and reality determines the extent to which such decisions will be consistent and reasonable (Ponce et al., 1994).

Subjective space within the field of the subject of geography enables us to add new facets to the topics we study, enriching and deepening the authentic daily reality of human beings (Boira, 1992, p. 581). The city is not simply an objective reality shaped by landscape, urban functions and the characteristics of its inhabitants, but is essentially a space that is experienced, felt, valued and perceived differently by different individuals, through a series of mental representations and individual and collective impressions. The urban image thus acquires a symbolic nature, one that goes beyond mere space; it is, above all, the visible expression of a system of human values linked to beliefs, ideals and expectations (Estébanez, 1982).

In recent decades the world of geography has seen the introduction of qualitative analysis methods and techniques, as have all the other social sciences. These have been developed

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to enable us to understand the subjective significance of places, in our case of cities, and the principal sources they draw upon are formalised discourses of a textual or pictorial nature, together with interviews (Boira, 1996). Briefly, these take the form of written discourse (from novels or poetry to travel books, from pamphlets to essays and from old textbooks to the latest publications), image analysis (drawings, advertising, photographs, tourist leaflets), the study of mental maps (the subjective mapping of a specific space) and surveys and interviews (*ibid*.). Gil de Arriba (1994), in his thesis on the image of the city of Santander, uses such sources (in his case guidebooks, works of literature, newspaper articles and books popularising regional and local topics) as resources for generating and disseminating meaning. Our study of the subjective space of Santiago de Compostela is based on many such sources, which open up to us the media, marketing and artistic image of the city. Lastly, we will obtain the public image of this city, seeing what literature has to tell us about the historical development and shaping of the public image of this space, whilst tourist advertising and the press show us how successful its transmission has been.

II. THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA

A city is a public space, and as such both scenic and spectacular, in constant physical growth, that corresponds to the creation of appreciations and opinions that legitimise decision-making processes and specific actions (Gil, 1994). Thus, highly appreciated urban spaces become sensitive guarantors not only of the assignment of ideas, but also of interventions. The old quarter of Santiago de Compostela and, to a lesser extent, the various areas of the city devoted to leisure and culture and to the more prestigious urban functions, can be said to enjoy this status due to the fact that they form the basis upon which the city's public image is founded. Neglect and the playing down of social issues and urban reality in neighbourhoods that also form part of Santiago, those in which the majority of the population actually live, is the price that has been paid for creating the city's image. A spatially and thematically limited stereotype has been constructed in order to create a brand image of Compostela as a cultural, functional, marketing and tourist capital (as has also been the case in other cities with a significant built and intangible heritage, as shown by Galí (2005) in that of Girona, whose image is based exclusively on its *barri antic*, or old quarter, bounded by the River Onyar).

In the case of Santiago de Compostela, a series of positive, and even exemplary, initiatives designed to enhance the image of the city, based on its strong historical legacy, lie behind the creation of this stereotype. The mass media and a variety of urban agents actively promoted the old quarter as a centre of culture, linked to the efforts to boost cultural tourism and the more or less obligatory revival of what had once been a European route of pilgrimage. The aesthetic and architectural values preserved in the historical city centre were championed. Cultural heritage is nowadays one of the most undisputed aspects that define quality, from both a national and international standpoint, and even more so when the place in question is on the list of World Heritage Sites (Bernal, 2000, p. 39).

A city's media image, marketing image and artistic image combine to construct a public representation, one that is shared by society as a whole. An image that is socially imposed and collectively accepted, or at least widely tolerated (Boira, 1992b). An image that in the case of Santiago de Compostela, more so than in other cities, and within the context of a

fiercely competitive market between urban areas fighting for their share of media prestige, has produced a very specific brand: *Compostela*. A brand that, like any other, has its logos and advertising campaigns, which in this case take their inspiration from city landmarks such as the old quarter, and within it, the Cathedral and Obradoiro Square. The press, TV, radio, Internet, public and private marketing measures, cultural initiatives, tourist guides, works of art, film and literature maintain this image's common denominator; the result has been to place the postcard of the Cathedral, the reference to the Apostle and the medieval city with its stone buildings in our minds whenever we think of Santiago.

This is how a brand image providing access to the market is constructed in the mass media. A vision based on the city's multifunctional, historical and cultural nature. An image that takes reality and moulds and manipulates it, the end product being a partial, highly positive and biased subjective representation: the recreation of the best possible image, one that sacrifices social reality, living conditions and urban entropy. We have seen how, from different spheres, as portrayed in official and private websites, the image of Santiago de Compostela in the Internet is very similar to the media one. Both make constant use of landmarks such as the Cathedral, references to culture and leisure, views of the old quarter and information about the city's service-based functionality.

This representation is directly related to the marketing efforts invested by a variety of urban agents from both the public and the private sector with the aim of placing Santiago at the top of the league table of cities whose old quarters are home to a rich and varied cultural heritage (Campesino, 2000). The city, in fact, stands head and shoulders above other Galician and Spanish cities for the particular attention paid by its authorities to the construction of a brand image with a strong power of attraction. In addition to the mass media themselves, a wide variety of urban marketing tools is used to promote Santiago and create its public image: tourist publications, advertising campaigns, travel guides and a wide variety of promotional activities.

A city's marketing image is a specific and premeditated selection chosen from amongst all its possible images (Galí, 2005, p. 19). In the case of the construction of the urban brand image *Compostela*, one element stands head and shoulders above the rest as the key focus for promoting the city: the Way of St James and its final destination, Santiago, around which an exemplary image-creating activity has taken place in recent years. The result is one of Galicia's leading tourist resources and an identity for the city that revolves around the significance of the Way in cultural and leisure terms. The use of culture as a marketing tool for the city (in the form of a never-ending succession of activities) has developed in association with the Way of St James, whilst the aesthetic and architectural values preserved in the old quarter of the city have been preserved and championed.

Furthermore, an urban area as closely connected to culture and art since its very beginnings as is Santiago de Compostela, and with such a persistent concern for urban marketing and the creation of a brand image, must logically enjoy a richly endowed artistic perception. Architects, sculptors, musicians, novelists, film directors, painters, poets and other artists down the ages have drawn their inspiration from Compostela, set and produced their work in the city, or simply perceived it in their own unique way, which subsequently reflected in their output. The book and film image shape a single public image of Compostela, based on its history and heritage, one that attracts visitors and is used by the city in the cut-throat urban competition that characterises our age of globalisation.

A city's inhabitants, however, may feel themselves marginalised in their own home town as a result of the enormous influx of visitors and the masses that flock to the leisure and cultural activities organised within it. In addition, the transformation of certain spaces into tourist spots can turn areas such as the old quarter, which for the moment continues to be a space in which people can lead their daily lives, into seasonally occupied landscape sites. Of the city as a living space, the city experienced by its inhabitants at first hand from the moment they awake until the moment they go to sleep, there remains precious little in the public image of Santiago. The success of the image of Compostela, the image that attracts visitors in their hundreds of thousands, has been achieved at the cost of ignoring its very life, of concentrating on its tourist and heritage functions, sidelining its status as a human settlement.

Santiago is not merely a city for pilgrims or the focal centre for a constant succession of cultural and leisure activities; and is, of course, much more than the final destination of the Way of St James. It is also, amongst other things, home to thousands of undergraduate and postgraduate students, the centre of regional government in Galicia, a world-class centre for medicine and health, a space under construction, like any other city, and the hub of a sizeable district where agriculture, dairy farming and cattle breeding still play a major role in the economy and in which many manufacturing, industrial and service companies are active. These urban functions contribute experiences, feelings and perceptions that have little or nothing in common with those of the public image of Santiago. What is more, the excessive weight given to the tourist function can lead to serious sustainability issues in spaces as fragile as the old quarter of a city (Troitiño, 2007).

Nevertheless, and although the sense of place of each and every inhabitant of Santiago owes something to these other spaces that are part of their lives, the Compostela brand outweighs any individual perception. An example of this is provided by a perceptive study performed on a sample of university students (Fumega, 1993), young people who divide their time between lecture rooms, libraries, photocopy shops and the places they go to in their free time; they are alien to the rhythm marked by the Holy Year and its activities, but nevertheless singled out the old quarter as the most positive focal point for daily life and the Cathedral as the landmark that best condensed the spirit and identity of the city of Santiago, and consistently represented the old quarter as bigger than it really is in their mental maps, locating it in a more privileged position than it in reality occupies on the map (*ibid*.). If we turn to the mass media for information on how visitors perceive the city (interviews with pilgrims and tourists, be they ordinary people or celebrities, are a frequent feature in the media), the identification of Santiago as a whole with its historical quarter is even more one-sided.

In short, a brand, a public image (that of *Compostela*), has engendered a subjective space, experienced as well as merely perceived, that is highly symbolic and exceptionally well disseminated as a result of the city's proven and outstanding ability to market itself. This stereotype defines the city's public representation, and thus López (2010, p. 44) is able to demonstrate that in Italy Santiago is identified as a religious city, a sacred place famous for being the final destination of the Way of St James or home to the Cathedral (a fact that the author herself describes as a façade, with little resemblance to reality (*ibid*., p. 46)). In a society where the image is greater than reality itself, Santiago de Compostela is constructed in the minds of inhabitants and visitors alike through the medium of its landmarks, its heritage, its history and its cultural and tourist functionality.