

RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN DIFFERENT GEOGRAPHIC AREAS IN SPAIN: THE TOURIST PROFILE

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Religious tourism has emerged in many regions as one of the most important products of tourism. And the number of visitors in religious destinations is experimenting a reappearance worldwide (Digance, 2003; World Tourism Organization, 2008), in places associated with almost all the religions (Reader, 2007). Nevertheless, and though there is an increasing number of studies related to religious tourism, the researches on this area continue being scarce (Cánoves y Blanco, 2011; Millán et al., 2012; World Tourism Organization, 2008). And with regard to the demand, the lack of statistics and qualitative and quantitative information continues being a challenge (Lanquar, 2008; Triantafillidou et al., 2010). The aim of this article is to make known the profile of the tourist in religious destinations in Spain, identifying common features in them.

It is considered to be religious tourism the one motivated partially or exclusively by religious reasons (Rinschede, 1992). In this theme, one of the most debated issues among authors is the distinction between tourists and pilgrims. A group of authors, as for example Cohen (1992), claims that pilgrims and tourists are very different from each other, while another group, as Eade (1992), argues that it is impossible, and it does not make sense, to distinguish between both of them, because when they travel they use the same resources and services. Therefore, they only differ in terms of their devotional adherences and preferences.

In this sense, authors such as Smith (1992) have held a perspective that considers both groups within a continuous gradation ranging from the faith-based pious pilgrimage to the strictly secular tourism. Religious tourism would be in an intermediate position. Depending on the predominance of faith or the profane in their motivations and activities, we can distinguish among a traveller who is more a pilgrim than a tourist, a traveller who is as much pilgrim as a tourist and a traveller more of a tourist than a pilgrim. This broad spectrum

reflects the multiple and changing motivations of travellers, whose interests and activities could change (consciously or unconsciously) from the pilgrimage to tourism and vice versa.

Several studies have revealed that the majority of visitors to religious destinations live experiences that are placed halfway Smith's model. So they are neither devout religious experiences nor purely secular ones (Collins-Kreiner and Gatrell, 2006). However, it must also be considered that not all sacred destinations attract equally to both tourists and pilgrims (Olsen and Timothy, 2006). According to Nolan and Nolan (1992), different categories of religious destinations attract different kinds of visitors, each in search of different experiences. The continuous focus on the differences between pilgrims and tourists has also caused many researches to overlook other dimensions and factors that may influence the experiences of visitors (Collins-Kreiner, 2010), such as age, gender or social status (Sharpley and Sundaram, 2005).

The potential of religious tourism in Spain makes it necessary to study the demand. Religious tourism can be an opportunity for the development of many areas, both rural and urban. The benefits to the ecclesiastical authorities are evident: larger volume of donations and alms, reassertion of its authority, attraction of people to temples. It also means satisfaction due to the contributions of tourism and religion to the society, which not only forms good Christians, who will always be good citizens, but it also helps in the material field, given the impact that religious tourism can generate in the employment and the economy. Religious tourism, of course, like other forms of tourism, provides benefits to hospitality services because of the increase in the number of tourists. However, tourism motivated by faith also provides other specific benefits such as attracting a tourist who is more satisfied (Fleischer, 2000) and more faithful to the destinations (Shuo et al., 2009). It also provides a recovery of artisanal activities (Robles, 2001), a greater incidence in the conservation, value enhancement and improvement of the cultural heritage of the destinations (World Tourism Organization 2008), the attraction of tourists in times of crisis (Millán et al., 2010) and the promotion of a solidarity tourism which contributes to the fight against poverty and the sustainable development of mankind (Lanquar, 2008).

Spain is an important religious tourism market in both inbound and outbound terms.

This country has many pilgrimage centres and sacred character events throughout the territory that generate a lot of interest. Among them it is worth mentioning the *Camino de Santiago* (The Way of St. James), the Holy Week and the *romerías*:

- Santiago de Compostela, the place where the tomb of the Holy and Apostle James is located, is undoubtedly -together with Rome and Jerusalem- one of the main centres of Christian pilgrimage since the Middle Ages. It was visited by Pope Saint John Paul II on two occasions (in 1982, coinciding with Jubilee Year and in 1989 on the occasion of the IV World Youth Day). It was declared European Cultural Route in 1987 and World Heritage by the UNESCO in 1993.
- The Holy Week is one of the most popular religious manifestations in Spain. It is celebrated during the last week of Lent, from Palm Sunday up to Easter Sunday, in March or April. A distinction is made among Processions, Representations of the Passion, Meetings of Images and Self mortification. Processions are the most extended along the whole national territory. They represent the moments of Passion, Death and Resu-

rection of Christ with images of great artistic and monumental value. Nowadays, twenty-one of these events celebrated in commemoration of the Holy Week are declared as Fiesta of International Tourist Interest. And one of the most popular ones is the Holy Week in Seville (Andalusia).

- *Romerías* are celebrated in every town to honor the Patron Saint or Virgin of the area. Here the atmosphere is festive, cheerful and full of colorful. The most noteworthy is the *El Rocio* Pilgrimage, which was declared Fiesta of International Tourist Interest in 1980, and which also received the visit of the Pope Saint John Paul II in 1993. This pilgrimage is held in the village of El Rocío, located in the municipality of Almonte, Huelva (Andalusia). It takes place on the second day of Pentecost, so the date is variable, and it may be between May and June.

This research has been carried out using data from a fieldwork done in 2008 in three different religious manifestations: The *Camino de Santiago* (300 surveys), The Holy Week in Seville (725) and the *El Rocio* Pilgrimage (1200).

Each questionnaire consisted of four blocks. A first block concerning the socio-demographic profile of the tourist (genre, age, level studies...). A second block on the characteristics of the trip (days spent, expenditure made,...). A third block referring the driving motivation to do the trip. And, finally, a block on the opinions, evaluations and satisfaction of the trip and the places visited.

The question is; how are these religious tourists in the different geographical areas of Spain? Are there any similarities among them in the different pilgrimages and sacred events, or are they completely different depending on the characteristics of each destination?

The results of this paper support the suggestions of Nolan and Nolan (1992) that different categories of religious destinations attract different types of visitors, in search of different experiences.

Nevertheless, the results show that there are differences and similarities among them. The principal differences, which are mainly explained by the particular characteristics of each pilgrimage or event, are identified in the marital status, level of income, the average daily expenditure, the company during the trip, its duration, the motivation and the satisfaction with the accommodation services.

In general, the *Camino de Santiago* is a journey with a more propitious context to reconnect yourself with the faith. It is also more accessible to people with lower income because, in spite of the fact that the trip takes longer, the expenditure necessary to make this pilgrimage is not very high (75.6% of visitors do not spend more than 35 Euros/day). And, as Lois and Santos (2015) assert, most people who make the pilgrimage mix religious motivations with tourist motivations.

The *El Rocio* pilgrimage and the Holy Week are popular religious manifestations organized within brotherhoods; in which brothers celebrate the event in a familiar and friendly environment. In the case of the *El Rocio* pilgrimage, it has a cheerful and festive atmosphere. Although the trip is usually shorter than that on the *Camino de Santiago*, it is not so accessible to people of lower income, mainly because of the high costs which are involved to prepare the pilgrimage (67.1% of visitors spend more than 75 Euros/day). Perhaps because of its festive character, it is where a higher percentage of non-religious motivations appears

(a 17.1% of people are not motivated by faith). The Holy Week of Seville, which commemorates the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, takes place in a sober atmosphere of seclusion. It is in this case where greater religious motivation appears (only 2.3% of people go for other reasons). In the case of Seville, it can also be said that at this time, it is less accessible to lower social classes, mainly because hotels tend to raise their prices on these dates (46.2% of the visitors have an average expenditure higher than 75 Euros/day). This causes the duration of the trip to be shorter.

With regard to similarities among the three profiles, it is verified that tourists with higher religious motivation are more satisfied with the trip and more faithful to the destinations. This is consistent with the contributions of Fleischer (2000) and Shuo et al. (2009). Fleischer (2000), who analyzes a sample of tourists who travel to Holy Land mainly formed by Catholic Christians and Protestants, points out that those who come to the region motivated by the religion obtain a higher level of satisfaction than the tourists who come for other motivations, especially the Christian pilgrims of Catholic character. And, similarly, Shuo et al. (2009) shows that tourists moved by the faith are more faithful to the destinations. From a practical perspective of management, as religious motivation is an important determinant of the repetition of the visit, the data on the volume of firm adherents within a population may be useful as an indicator of the number of potential visitors. A further consequence is that the management of visitors, even the most devout, will require activities which have some recreational character, like going to restaurants, shopping...

Another similarity among the profiles is that non-satisfaction with the travel is associated with dissatisfaction with the hotel infrastructure. In this sense, Kresic et al. (2013), when analyzing the satisfaction of the tourist in the context of Medjugorje's peregrination (in Bosnia Herzegovina), identified that accommodation and catering facilities are hybrid attributes which should be assigned a higher priority on the strategies to improve the overall experience of tourists. These attributes contribute to the overall experience to a more or less constant ratio; that is to say, an increase / decrease in the performance of these attributes of the destination (according to the perception of tourists) produces a proportional increase / decrease in the level of the overall satisfaction. Therefore, it is necessary to dedicate resources and necessary efforts to ensure that accommodation services are properly directed in each destination. It is extremely important to understand the variables that determine the tourist dissatisfaction, especially in a highly competitive environment with informed and demanding tourists.

Globalization has opened religious tourism to a marketing process, transforming it into a commercial product which was not that of its originally intended purpose. Therefore, institutions wishing to promote visits to sacred destinations can take into consideration these findings to design more effective marketing plans. In addition, as trips for religious reasons are increasing, the design of an effective marketing plan can always help to develop this type of tourism market, in line with a strategic plan for sustainable development at local level with all stakeholders.