

Creating new forms of **consumption** along the Portuguese Camino de Santiago

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Objectives | As tourism is expected to grow by an average of five percent annually up to 2020, destinations worldwide are increasingly competing for these tourists and the growth potential associated to tourist's spending. Even though social and political instability, terrorist attacks, global warming and low, or actually stagnating economic growth face many countries throughout the world, are putting some people off from travelling, the global picture is clear – segments of the market are travelling more and more every year. The tourism industry is proving once more its resilience and adaptability to international instability. Whilst the economic crisis will to some extent affects the lower income segment of the market, which may opt for 'staycation' alternatives, the same cannot be said with regard to middle and upper class segments. Short-term predictions and forecasts help the tourism industry to understand and prepare product development and marketing planning to increase the competitiveness of the destination. The main question often asked about short-term future of tourism is what could critically affect our products or markets and how can destinations adapt themselves to meet those challenges and actually face them?

This research/communication starts by analyzing the concepts of religious tourism and pilgrimage and the various definitions put forward in an increasing body of literature already published. Tourism related to religious sites and festivals, pilgrimage or spirituality is a long established and extremely important sector of the tourism market. For specific sites, such as the major pilgrimage sites of the major world religions, religious tourism may be the primary activity of a city or region. Pilgrimage sites provide an important underpinning to the basic tourism product not only at the pilgrimage destinations, but also along the routes, which often attract those not travelling directly for religious purposes (Richards and Fernandes, 2007). Findings in many studies indicate that the number of tourists travelling purely for religious reasons is relatively small. Richards and Fernandes argue that a new approach is needed for analyzing religious tourism, based on data, which gets away from very narrow official statistics.

From the conceptual orientation and theoretical view, the field opens up to in-depth inquiry into the impact of pilgrimage routes on regional tourism development. This paper analyses the particular case of the pilgrimage route of the Portuguese Camino de Santiago. Recent research results demonstrate the importance of leisure/recreation as the motivation for the pilgrimage, thus suggesting that pilgrims may be looking for new forms of consumption (Fernandes *et al.*, 2012).

Methodology | This study was conducted employing a case study approach. Within the case study, data collection was undertaken by means of a face-to-face questionnaire survey to pilgrims doing the Portuguese routes to Santiago. The face-to-face interviews was opted for as this approach was thought more likely to assist in obtaining answers to meet the proposed objectives. The questionnaire has 24 questions divided into four categories: motivations, consumption patterns, satisfaction and profile.

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The interviews were carried out between the months of April and May of 2011, during the middle of the week (Wednesdays) and during the weekends (Saturdays and Sundays). The questionnaire was translated into Spanish, French, English and German languages. Altogether 204 pilgrims were interviewed. Some pilgrims refused to be interviewed. Reasons for refusal included lack of interest and my only concern is the pilgrimage. A database was established using the SPSS data entry and analysis program. An initial frequency analysis was undertaken for each variable on the questionnaire in order to check the consistency and validity of the data and check for any data errors. Subsequently, the areas to be explored were identified and a descriptive analysis was conducted of the differences between the respondents.

Given the short period of time to complete this study thus the need for facilitating the data analysis, the survey was comprised of essentially closed questions, where respondents were asked to choose from a fixed number of options and a few open questions. Closed questions included all possible answers and the respondent was asked to choose one of the answers. In addition to closed questions, the questionnaire includes open questions where respondents were invited to provide information in free text format. Responses to open questions were used to corroborate answers to closed questions. Closed questions were considered to be efficient because data was easily collected, coded and analysed. In one of the questions, the answers were placed on a scale of alternatives for measuring respondents attitudes toward the satisfaction with the pilgrimage route. Open questions acted as a "safety net" and helped the researcher to identify issues not covered by the closed questions, either by elaborating and explaining some of the findings from closed questions, or identifying new issues. Respondents could also take the opportunity to ask for clarification or information about a specific issue or voice concern about the research.

All interviews were conducted at the crossing point between the towns of Valença in Portugal and Tuy in Spain. Most Portuguese routes come together in the town of Valença, more specifically at the river Minho through the Eiffel bridge linking to Tuy and Santiago de Compostela thereafter. Exceptions are the pilgrims coming from the interior of the country, who continue their journey to Santiago throughout the "Camino de la Plata", joining it in the Spanish city of Orense.

Main results and contributions | Findings of this study are consistent with Murray & Graham (1997) that the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela invokes a complex set of apparent contradictions and tensions, which permeate the behavioural patterns of overlapping market segments and distinguish between tourist and pilgrim. The management challenge lies in balancing personal, sacred and spiritual (but not necessarily religious) with the external and secular in a context that is easily capable of superficial commodification.

The importance of leisure/recreation as the motivation for the pilgrimage suggests that pilgrims may be looking for new forms of consumption. This survey asked respondents to indicate on what and how much they spent during the pilgrimage. The questions did not take into consideration the increasing role of leisure in society and how it may induce new forms of consumption. However, interviewing pilgrims about their consumption patterns is an extremely sensitive issue to question directly respondents about, be it about their behaviour during the pilgrimage or their lifestyle patterns to establish general trends of behaviour. Still, further research is recommended directly to pilgrims.

It is also recommended that the expansion of pilgrimage and religious tourism research include the role of entrepreneurs operating tourism businesses along the pilgrimage route, particularly in the face of new forms of consumption and production in the tourism sector. It is suggested that to better understand the consumption patterns of pilgrims, it is necessary to research the entrepreneurship and skill base of the micro operators in the tourism sector and their readiness to meet the new forms of consumption patterns based on the previously mentioned increasing role of leisure in society. In any research involving the collection of primary data the adoption of an appropriate and robust methodology is critical in terms of the reliability and integrity of the findings. In this research, the technique employed to survey the selected populations was of prime importance. As the research progressed, it became clear that the survey instrument used (face-to-face interviews) was particularly appropriate given the specific socio-demographic characteristics of the sample.

Limitations | Certain limitations were identified, mostly due to the short period of time for carrying out the field work. The fact that the data collection and analysis were carried out in a very limited period (two months) resulted in a relatively small sample of 204 respondents which does not allow this study to extrapolate the sample to the population, making only a descriptive study. This study should be viewed as a starting point, or a pilot study, and a second phase should focus on collecting data during an entire year, on different days of the week, in holiday and working periods and increase the sample in order to perform an exploratory analysis of the results, which could be used for generalization purposes.

Conclusions | Although there are several studies about pilgrims of the Caminos de Santiago, especially done by the pilgrims office in Santiago de Compostela, this study differentiates itself from others, mainly because it contributes to the knowledge of the pilgrim consumption patterns. Whereas other existing studies are more focused onto the pilgrims profile, their route options, and their motivations, this research is focused, besides these three elements, also on the economic impact that those pilgrims represent economically along the Portuguese route. Results make clear that the consumption pattern and consequently the economic impact of pilgrims along the Portuguese route to Santiago de Compostela are minimal. Evidence indicates that as a result of the lack of proper planning and management of the route, tourism has been found to lead to economic disbenefits and not contribute to improve the quality of life of the residents in the communities along the route.

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