

Analysis of the Pilgrim Profile in Spain: Two Case Studies

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Abstract

Over the years, Christians participating in pilgrimages have evolved. And currently, the number of religious tourists is growing. The question is, are these religious tourists similar in all the destinations, or do they differ depending on the characteristics of each pilgrimage? This paper compares the characteristics, behaviour, motivation and satisfaction of participants in Saint James Way vs. participants in El Rocío pilgrimage, the two most important pilgrimages in Spain. Both profiles are especially determined by the characteristics of each pilgrimage. However, similarities are detected: the more religiously motivated tourists are more loyal to the pilgrimage and are also more satisfied.

Key words: Pilgrimage, religious tourism, tourist profile.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine the contention that profile of tourists visiting pilgrimage centres is particularly dependent on the characteristics of each pilgrimage. Researchers have analyzed the profile of visitors to different religious destinations. However, few studies have explored the comparison of the profile of visitors in various pilgrimage centres (Ambrosio, 2008; 2009). This paper compares these profiles of visitors by describing the results of a survey of 300 respondents participating in the Saint James Way and 1,200 respondents participating in the *El Rocío* pilgrimage, in Spain. The paper will examine their characteristics, the purpose of their visit, their pattern of behaviour as tourists and their level of satisfaction with the pilgrimage. The text begins with a brief historical review of pilgrimage in Spain, a literature review of the pilgrim tourist, an outline of the methodology, followed by a description of results and a discussion of those results.

2. Literature review

2.1. Background to pilgrimage in Spain

In Spain there are various pilgrimage centres with very different characteristics. On the one hand, *Santiago de Compostela* stands out as a major centre of Christian pilgrimage since the Middle Ages, with the tomb of St. James. On the other hand, many pilgrimages called *romerías* are held in every town, in honour of the patron saint or Virgin.

Santiago de Compostela is undoubtedly one of the more important Christian pilgrimage centres since the Middle Ages along with Rome and Jerusalem. Throughout its history, the Saint James Way has gone through many different avatars, succeeding peak periods and periods of darkness. After the Middle and Modern Ages, the Way became less important, but since the 1970's began to emerge, especially in the nineties.

The support from the government, the Pope's visits to Santiago (in 1982, coinciding with the jubilee year; and in 1989 on the occasion of the IV World Youth Day), the renewed efforts of the Church and the development of multiple associations and guilds made possible this increasing trend. In 1987, the Saint James Way was declared European Cultural Route because of its importance as a historical and cultural link in the history of Christianity and its undeniable universal value, since it is a path that is and has been traversed by thousands of pilgrims in Europe. Later, in 1993 the Way was declared as World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

In 1993, the Way began a resurgence due to its development as a tourism product. The Galician autonomous government (*Xunta de Galicia*) enhanced the value of the Saint James Way approaching it as a tourism resource, opening it to people with the traditional religious pilgrim's profile. Thus a major marketing campaign was launched to celebrate the Holy Year of Saint James 1993: *Xacobeo 93*. Sections of the route and infrastructure for pilgrims were restored thanks to this plan. In addition, all the regions where the road passes achieved a collaboration. The success was certainly spectacular, and it has been growing every year, especially in the Holy Years (when the Saint James day, July 25, coincides with Sunday). Even the global financial crisis has caused no negative effects in the flow of travellers on the Way (Millán et al., 2010a). In fact, it was estimated that *Xacobeo 2010* caused an economic impact of about 200 million euros in Galicia, with its GDP growing by 0.5% (Ulloa and Ruiz, 2010).

Regarding the *romerías*, the *El Rocío* Pilgrimage is one of the most important in Spain. More than a million people and close to one hundred different brotherhoods come from all over Spain, and even abroad, to make this annual pilgrimage to the Shrine in the village of *El Rocío*, 17 kilometres from the town of Almonte (in Huelva, Andalusia).

This pilgrimage dates from 1653, when the Virgin of *Las Rocinas* was appointed patron saint of Almonte. Originally it took place on 8 September. Since 1758, the Virgin has been known as the Virgin of *El Rocío*, and the pilgrimage has taken place on the second day of Pentecost, on Monday.

Over the week before, the different Rocío brotherhoods set out from their bases in Huelva, Seville, and Cadiz, amongst other provinces, in order to get to the village of *El Rocío* by the Saturday, and to enjoy the events which run through to the Monday. The most traditional way to do the pilgrimage is on horseback, by carriage or on foot, dressed in flamenco clothing. By day, the brotherhoods advance in festive spirits, singing flamenco, while by night they camp out and organise parties around the bonfire with singing, dancing, food and drink into the early hours.

As they arrive in the village of *El Rocío*, pilgrims pitch their camps and await the arrival of the remaining brotherhoods. On the Saturday there is a parade where they present themselves with the *simpecado* (the association's standard) before the statue of the Virgin Mary, while the church bells ring. On the Sunday there are various religious acts and that night nobody sleeps, in anticipation of the weekend's most exciting moment: the "jumping the fence", when the people of Almonte jump over the fence to bring the statue of the Virgin out of the shrine and parade it around the village on Monday morning. Once the procession is over, the brotherhoods start the return journey with their minds already on next year's pilgrimage.

Santiago de Compostela and *El Rocío* are perhaps the two most important pilgrimage centres in Spain. However, *Caravaca de la Cruz* (Murcia), *Santo Toribio de Liebana* (Cantabria), *Virgin of Montserrat* (Cataluña) or *Our Lady of Covadonga* (Asturias), among others, are also other pilgrimage centres of great importance.

2.2. Conceptualisation

Smith (1992) and many others identify tourism and pilgrimage as opposite end-points on a continuum of travel. The polarities are labelled as sacred (a), and as secular or profane (e). The central area is generally termed religious tourism, distinguishing between a traveller "more pilgrim than tourist" (b), a traveller "as pilgrim as tourist" (c) and a traveller "more tourist than pilgrim" (d), depending on whether their motivations and activities are more or less predominantly faith or secular based. These positions reflect the multiple and changing motivations of the traveller, whose interests and activities may switch from tourist to pilgrim and vice versa, even without the individual being aware of the change.

Christian pilgrims have evolved over the years into tourists. So, Lanquar (2008) suggests that the profile of religious tourists in general is changing and not just the variety of their motivations.

The profile is changing towards a more international tourist, of all age groups and social classes. The stays are shorter and specialized agencies are increasingly used as well as information and communications technology.

The tourist profile has been analyzed, with more or less detail, in different religious destinations. In Christianity, authors have analyzed destinations such as Fatima (Ambrosio, 2001, 2000, Fortuna and Ferreira, 1993; Rinschede, 1988), Lourdes (Pieper and Van Uden, 1994; Rinschede, 1985), Medugorje (Bartoluci and Martinovic, 1999) , Santiago de Compostela (Millán et al., 2010b) or the Holy Land (Collins-Kreiner and Kliot, 2000; Fleischer, 2000; Triantafillidou et al., 2010); in Islam, Mecca (Long, 1979); in Hinduism, Varanasi (Singh, 2003) and West Bengal (Morinis, 1984); in Buddhism, Shikoku (Reader, 1987); in Taoism, Taiwan (Shuo et al. 2009).

However, few studies have compared the profile of tourists to different religious destinations (Ambrosio, 2009, 2008). According Rinschede (1992), organizational forms of religious tourism can be distinguished by definitive characteristics such as number of participants, choice of transport, seasonal travel, and social structure.

3. Methodology

The methodology used to explore the visitor profile consisted of field work involving surveys of the participants in Saint James Way and *El Rocío* Pilgrimage. Table 1 shows the technical aspects of the study.

Table 1. Technical Aspects of Questionnaire

	Saint James Way	<i>El Rocío</i> pilgrimage
Universe	Tourists over 18 years of age who participate in the pilgrimage	Tourists over 18 years of age who participate in the pilgrimage
Sample size	300	1,200
Sampling error	$\pm 2.10\%$	$\pm 3.67\%$
Confidence level	95 %; $p = q = 0.5$	95 %; $p = q = 0.5$
Sampling system	Simple random	Simple random
Information gathering period	2008	2008

4. Results

Table 2 summarizes the characteristics of visitors to the two pilgrimage centres analyzed. If the two profiles are compared, important differences between them are distinguishable.

Table 2. Distribution of participants in Saint James Way and *El Rocío* pilgrimage by different variables

Variable	Categories	Saint James Way (%)	<i>El Rocío</i> pilgrimage (%)	Absolute value of the difference
Sex	Male	58,3	42,4	15,9
	Female	41,7	57,6	15,9
Age	0-12 years old	0,9	1,00	0,1
	13-18 years old	8,3	4,2	4,1
	19-35 years old	32,9	41,1	8,2
	36-65 years old	52,2	44,3	7,9
	More than 65 years old	5,7	9,4	3,7
Level of education	No education	2,6	3,1	0,5
	Primary education	27,8	36,9	9,1
	Secondary education	63,4	51,7	11,7
	Higher education	6,2	8,3	2,1
Marital status *	Single	67,2	27,6	39,6
	Married	25,4	46,8	21,4
	Divorced	2,3	13,2	10,9
	Other	5,1	12,4	7,3
Income level *	Less than 600 €	5,3	1,2	4,1
	600- 1000 €	27,7	4,3	23,4
	1001- 1500 €	38,9	14,8	24,1
	1501- 2500 €	25,4	13,4	12,0
	More than 2500 €	2,7	66,3	63,6
Place of origin	Spain	73,2	84,6	11,4
	European Union	20,1	12,3	7,8
	Other	6,7	3,1	3,6
Length of stay	Less than 24 hours	0,01	0,3	0,3
	One day	1,3	4,5	3,2
	2 - 3 days	25,8	34,6	8,8
	More than 3 days	72,89	60,6	12,3
Average total and per diem tourist expenditure *	Less than 35 €	75,6	0,4	75,2
	36-50 €	14,3	3,6	10,7
	51-75 €	7,8	28,9	21,1
	More than 75 €	2,3	67,1	64,8
Companion *	Alone	64,8	4,1	60,7
	Relatives	8,6	13,6	5,0
	Friends	14,9	73,6	58,7
	Others	11,7	8,7	3,0
Motivation *	Only religious	40,6	56,7	16,1
	Religious and other	50,8	26,1	24,7
	No religious	8,6	17,1	8,5
Satisfaction of accommodation services *	Satisfied	45,2	89,6	44,4
	Unsatisfied	54,8	10,4	44,4
Repetition of the pilgrimage	Yes	78,3	86,2	7,9
	No	21,7	13,8	7,9
Overall satisfaction	Satisfied	87,2	90,2	3,0
	Indifferent	11,7	3,4	8,3
	Unsatisfied	1,1	6,4	5,3

* Participants in Saint James Way and *El Rocío* pilgrimage are distributed significantly different at 1%.

In most of the variables there was a significant difference between participants in Saint James Way and *El Rocío* pilgrimage. The most relevant differences between the two profiles are identified in income level, marital status, average daily expenditure, company, opinion about the accommodation and motivation. These differences are mainly due to the specific characteristics of each pilgrimage. In the pilgrimage to *Santiago de Compostela*, most participants are single (67.2%) and make the trip alone (64.8%). On the contrary, participants in *El Rocío* are married (46.8%) and made the trip accompanied by friends (73.6%). The *El Rocío* Pilgrimage is a manifestation of popular piety which is organized in brotherhoods. The brothers held the event in a friendly atmosphere, strengthening their bonds of brotherhood. By contrast, the Saint James Way provides a context more conducive to reconnect with the faith and live spiritual experiences in a more individual, autonomous and independent way. On the other hand, in general, visitors to *El Rocío* have higher incomes (66.3% exceed 2,500 euros / month) that visitors to *Santiago de Compostela* (38.9% earn between 1,000 and 1,500 euros / month).

This is because the pilgrimage to *El Rocío* usually involves an expenditure of more than 800 euros, given the amount of necessary preparations for the journey. The costs are mainly focused on the stroller with oxen or horses for the road, their ornaments, the hotel or house rent, food or a catering service, the *short suit* for men or the flamenco dress and accessories for women, the pipers and drummers. The pilgrimage to *Santiago de Compostela* is much simpler. Its participants do not need so much preparation and usually stay in hostels. Thus, the expense incurred for this pilgrimage is usually much smaller, not exceeding 35 euros per day (75.6% do not spend more than this amount). This makes this pilgrimage more accessible to lower social classes.

Regarding the reasons for the pilgrimage, we identify the major manifestation of religious motivation in the pilgrimage to Santiago. 40.6% of the participants have exclusively religious reasons. 50.8% mixture religious motivations with other motives, including cultural, social, sporting.... Only 8.6% have no faith-related reasons. In the pilgrimage in honour of the Virgin of the *Rocío*, cheerful and festive, 17.1% of the participants are not motivated by faith, but for leisure or social reasons. However, 56.7% are pilgrims with purely religious reasons. Finally it is interesting to note the differences in satisfaction with the hotel infrastructure. Most visitors to Santiago de Compostela (54.8%) are dissatisfied with accommodation services, due to poor maintenance and cleaning of some shelters, but mostly due to their scarcity. While 89.6% of the visitors to *El Rocío* are satisfied with the hotel infrastructure, because most of them are housed in Brotherhood homes, with relatives or rented houses, making little use of hotels.

To identify more differences and similarities between the two profiles of visitors, a bivariate analysis was performed to determine significant associations between variables. First, for each profile, the relationship between the motivation of the trip and the other variables was analysed (Table 3), detecting that both profiles have only an association in common. In both cases the motivation is associated with repetition of the trip. When the reason for the trip is religious, pilgrims repeat the experience, whereas if the motivation is not religious (e.g., cultural) they would not repeat because they already know the place and prefer to visit a different place on the next trip.

Regarding the differences between the two profiles, we note that for the pilgrimage to *Santiago* motivation is associated with age and with the company for the trip. On the one hand, older visitors have a religious motivation higher. On the other hand, the more religiously motivated visitors make the journey alone, perhaps because when the pilgrim seeks a personal encounter with God does not need the company of others. On the contrary, in the pilgrimage to *El Rocío*, motivation is associated with income. The higher the income level, the lower the religious motivation.

Table 3. Bivariate analysis between the reason of the trip and other variables

Saint James Way			<i>El Rocío</i> Pilgrimage		
Variables related	χ^2	df	Variables related	χ^2	df
<i>Repetition of the pilgrimage / Motivation</i>	20,2	2	<i>Repetition of the pilgrimage / Motivation</i>	15,4	2
<i>Age / Motivation</i>	32,4	8	<i>Income / Motivation</i>	58,9	8
<i>Company during the pilgrimage / Motivation</i>	17,2	6			

Note: χ^2 : chi-square statistic. Variables related for $\alpha = 0.05$. df: degrees of freedom.

Secondly, we explored the relationship between the overall satisfaction experienced on the pilgrimage and the other variables (Table 4). This analysis identified both profiles have two significant associations in common. In both cases the overall satisfaction is associated with motivation and satisfaction with the hotel infrastructure. On the one hand, the more satisfied pilgrims are those who make the journey only for religious reasons. And on the other hand, dissatisfaction with the trip is primarily due to dissatisfaction with the hotel infrastructure. In the case of the Saint James Way, this is due mainly to a shortage of shelters. In the case of the pilgrimage to *El Rocío*, this is due to the excessive price of houses for rent, as the price rises up to 6000 € for a stay of 3 days.

Regarding the differences between the two profiles, overall satisfaction of participants in Saint James Way is associated with sex (men are more satisfied than women) and with the place of origin (visitors coming from other countries are more satisfied). While overall satisfaction of visitors to *the Rocío* is related to income (the higher the income level, the greater the degree of satisfaction, mainly because when the visitor has a higher purchasing power, he / she tends to stay in the best hotels, eat in top restaurants or hire the best catering services..., without looking both in price, valuing more the quality of the service) and to company during the pilgrimage (the visitors most satisfied are those travelling with friends rather than family, becoming the act of pilgrimage in an act recreational, lively and with great social projection).

Table 4. Bivariate analysis between the overall satisfaction and other variables

Saint James Way			El Rocío Pilgrimage		
Variables related	χ^2	df	Variables related	χ^2	df
Motivation / Satisfaction	21,7	4	Motivation / Satisfaction	23,8	4
Hotel infrastructure / Satisfaction	36,7	2	Hotel infrastructure / Satisfaction	32,6	2
Sex / Satisfaction	11,6	2	Income / Satisfaction	24,8	8
Place of origin / Satisfaction	19,3	4	Company during the pilgrimage / Satisfaction	46,9	6

Note: χ^2 : chi-square statistic. Variables related for $\alpha = 0.05$. df: degrees of freedom

Third, the relationship between socioeconomic variables and travel characteristics was analyzed. In this case, no association in common to both profiles was detected (Table 5). Specifically, with regard to the profile of the visitor to Santiago, we did not detect any significant relationship between variables. Regarding the profile of the visitor to *El Rocío*, two significant associations were identified. First, the association between the average daily expenditure and the duration of the pilgrimage: as the visitors spend more days, their average daily expenditure increases, primarily in accommodation and catering. Second, the relationship between the income level and the average daily expenditure: the higher the purchasing power, the higher average daily expenditure, as the visitor chooses hotels and restaurants of higher quality.

Table 5. Bivariate analysis between socioeconomic characteristics and other variables

Saint James Way			El Rocío Pilgrimage		
Variables related	χ^2	df	Variables related	χ^2	df
			Average daily expenditure / duration of the pilgrimage	56,9	9
			Income level / Average daily expenditure	44,7	12

Note: χ^2 : chi-square statistic. Variables related for $\alpha = 0.05$. df: degrees of freedom

5. Conclusion and Implications

Pilgrimage is probably as old as religion itself and is consequently the oldest type of tourism. Over the years, Christians participating in pilgrimages have evolved. And currently, the number of religious tourists is growing. The question is, are these religious tourists similar in all the pilgrimage centres, or do they differ depending on the characteristics of each pilgrimage?

This paper gives a brief description of the history of recent Christian pilgrimage in Spain and of the evolution of pilgrims to tourists. It was shown that Christian pilgrimage is not homogeneous. The profile of tourists visiting pilgrimage centres is especially determined by the characteristics of each pilgrimage. It presents an empirical analysis, using a survey of tourists at *Santiago de Compostela* and *El Rocío*, which compares the characteristics, behaviour, motivation and satisfaction of both profiles (visitors to *Santiago* vs. visitors to *El Rocío*).

There are differences and similarities between the profile of those participating in the pilgrimage to Santiago and the profile of those participating in the pilgrimage to *El Rocío*. The main differences are found in marital status, income level, average daily expenditure, company during the pilgrimage, motivation and satisfaction with accommodation services.

In general, the Saint James Way is a journey with a context more conducive to individual reconnect with the faith and is more accessible to lower income people because, although the trip is longer, the expense necessary to make the pilgrimage not is high (75.6% of visitors spend no more than 35 euros a day). The pilgrimage to *El Rocío* has a friendly and cheerful atmosphere and although the trip is usually shorter, is not as accessible to people of lower income, largely due to the high cost to prepare the trip (67.1% of visitors spend over 75 euros a day). Regarding the similarities between the two profiles, it is found that the more religiously motivated tourists are more loyal to the pilgrimage and are also more satisfied. From a practical management perspective, as the religious motivation is an important determinant of repetition of the visit, 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 devoted, will require some activities that provide recreation, such as shopping, restaurant, etc.

Another similarity between the profiles is that dissatisfaction with the pilgrimage is associated with dissatisfaction with the services of accommodation. However, in the case of the Saint James Way, dissatisfaction is largely based on the lack of shelters; and in the case of the pilgrimage to the Rocío, dissatisfaction is related to the high price of accommodation. Understanding the variables that determine visitor dissatisfaction is extremely important, especially in a highly competitive context, with informed and demanding visitors. The identification of such variables is useful in the management of marketing planning for the destination. Managers must devote resources and effort to ensure that accommodation services are addressed properly.

Once we have gone into the tourist profile, the next step is to design appropriate service packages. In addition, as religious tourism is increasing, the design of an effective marketing plan can help to develop the market for this type of tourism.

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