

# Religious Pilgrimage Routes and Trails

Sustainable Development and Management

Edited by **Daniel H. Olsen** and **Anna Trono**



CABI RELIGIOUS TOURISM AND PILGRIMAGE SERIES



## **RELIGIOUS PILGRIMAGE ROUTES AND TRAILS**

### **Sustainable Development and Management**

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## Sustainable Development and Management

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# 7

## The Camino de Santiago de Compostela: The Most Important Historic Pilgrimage Way in Europe

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### Introduction

The Camino de Santiago has achieved great significance in recent years. In international academic literature, there are abundant bibliographies that analyse this phenomenon from different disciplinary perspectives (Graham and Murray, 1997; Murray and Graham, 1997; Frey, 1998; Slavin, 2003; Tilson, 2005; Pack, 2008, 2010; Murray, 2014; Lois-González and Santos, 2015; Nilsson and Tesfahuney, 2016; Sánchez y Sánchez and Hesp, 2016). Among the most plentiful are those referring to tourism, relating it, for example, to the resurgence of pilgrimages and their new motivations. In addition, the Camino de Santiago has served as a stimulus for the recovery and creation of old and new pilgrimage routes. In a historical stage in which, at least in Western societies, religion as a cultural practice seems a thing of the past, the resurgence of the Camino de Santiago and other pilgrimage routes needs to be explained and understood from new angles.

Throughout this chapter we will develop a series of arguments which, to a certain extent, give continuity to investigations already carried out. But at the same time, we also seek to discuss some issues that in our view are not sufficiently

valued when the St James phenomenon is dealt with. The undeniable success that the Camino has had as a tourism product means that certain aspects have been avoided, such as its political dimension. The latter has been addressed by authors such as Barreiro Rivas (2009), who adopts a historical perspective to explain the emergence of Santiago in the Christian scenario, and Pack (2008, 2010), who mainly focuses on the Franco dictatorship period.

The organization of this chapter aims to provide a complex vision of the Camino de Santiago. The main official data that enable us to appreciate its evolution since the 1990s will be discussed. All figures lead in the same direction, to the growth in the number of pilgrims and the internationalization of the phenomenon. Throughout the current period, where there are statistics, a growing number of walkers have been observed. Aside from the peaks coinciding with the Holy Years, the general trend is always ascending, with German and American tourists playing an increasing role.

We will try to link the success of the Camino to various theories that have emerged in the field of the social sciences. The abundant literature that aims to explain the resurgence of religious

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tourism in increasingly secularized cultural contexts will serve as an anchor to understand much of the success of this pilgrimage route. However, as we have said, we cannot restrict the St James phenomenon to a purely tourist matter. Its visibility since the Holy Year of 1993 has precedents dating back to the late 19th century. It is necessary to understand all of this historical period to broadly assess the meaning of the Camino de Santiago today, beyond its undeniable tourism success. Viewing this from a wider perspective may also provide us with a certain foresight.

### The Camino de Santiago: More Than a Tourism Product

The history of the St James phenomenon dates to the ninth century when, on the current site of the city of Santiago, the remains of Saint James the Greater, considered one of the 12 Apostles of Jesus Christ, were found. Authentication of the discovery by the Church of Rome gave rise during the Middle Ages to a mass movement of pilgrims who turned this remote part of Europe into one of the most important places in Christendom. Turner and Turner (1978) point out that the location of pilgrimage places is never unbiased. Meanwhile Barreiro Rivas (2009) investigated the reasons for an event like that in such a remote place in Europe. For this author, beyond the strictly religious issues there were other reasons of an undoubtedly political nature.

It is easy to see that three important dates in the history of the St James phenomenon coincide with three moments of great difficulty for Christianity. First, the events related to the discovery coincide with the unstoppable advance of Islam, which from the south of the Iberian Peninsula threatened the Christian kingdoms of the continent. Second, the disappearance of the remains of the Apostle in the 16th century is contemporary with the crisis of the Church of Rome because of the Lutheran reformation. Finally, the so-called second inventio or rediscovery and authentication of the remains of the Apostle in the last quarter of the 19th century occurred at a time when the world was facing economic, cultural and social changes of huge dimensions. In this context, the Church needed to be reorganized: the 1st Vatican Council (1869–70) was the first

to be held since the one in Trento in the 16th century as a result of the Protestant schism.

Therefore, Santiago has a prominent presence whenever the Church goes through difficult times. We recall, for example, that the second inventio occurred almost in parallel with the apparitions in Lourdes and a resurgence of the pilgrimage phenomenon in Europe (Esteve, 2002). However, Pack (2008) says that the resurgence of the pilgrim tradition does not mean a return to the past, but rather it is a symptom of the new times. Referring to Spain, Callahan (1984) indicates that the 19th- and 20th-century Church was very different from that of the Old Regime, reinforcing in this way the idea of change in which Santiago also took part. Religion as part of the national identity was one component of the steps taken by Spain towards modernity, and pilgrimages had an important role throughout the Continent (Pack, 2008). Following the example of France, Pack (2008) says that Spain also wanted to promote Marian movements, although they were not successful.

In other countries linked to pilgrimages and a new popular spirituality controlled and regulated by the religious and political hierarchies, the focus was on shrines to the Virgin Mary. However, in the case of Spain this role was played by Santiago, i.e. St James. From the moment of the second inventio, there was an increase in the number of pilgrims. Rodríguez (2004) points out that at first they were sparse and local in nature; even Pack (2008) says that the interest in the rediscovery was initially more historical and cultural than religious. However, this trend slowly changed, with significant increases in the number of pilgrims in 1897 (Pack, 2010) and in 1909, the first Holy Year of the new century. In addition, on the latter date there were cultural activities in support of the Santiago event, such as the Regional Exhibition of Galicia. We begin to observe a closer relationship between tourism and pilgrimages. In 1915 *The Pilgrim and Tourist Guide* was published<sup>1</sup> (López y López, 1950), with multiple editions released in subsequent years.

The two facets of Santiago, the touristic and the political, were a unique feature that would continue, and even strengthen with time. The relationships between tourism and politics are well documented. Zhang *et al.* (2015) say that tourism discourse carries an important political message. Tourism is an activity that has been



widely used to transmit values linked to national identity, as investigated by Palmer (1999) for England, Shaffer (2001) for the United States, Light (2001) for Romania, Kavoura (2007) for Greece and Bhandari (2014) for Scotland, among others. At the same time, as the maximum expression of the Santiago phenomenon, Holy Years can be understood as events whose significance far exceeds the originating status, whether religious, commercial or tourist, acquiring a political dimension. Clendinning (2006) points out for example that international exhibitions were used for the construction and expression of national identities. The great exhibition in Chicago in 1893 served to reaffirm the unity and progress of the American nation (Rydell, 1999). In Spain, the great events of Seville and Barcelona of 1929, were, although slightly different, replicated in 1992 and served to commemorate the discovery of America. This was one of the founding myths of the Spanish nation, along with the Reconquista, which was also completed in 1492 (Moreno, 1992).

In the case of Santiago, the union of religion, politics and tourism that emerged in the first two decades of the 20th century has been evident since the early 1920s. Pack (2008) cites the Offering to the Apostle made by the dictator Primo de Rivera in 1924 as a central point to understand the hierarchical relationship and mutual dependence between the two institutions. The Offering is an act held every 25th July since 1643 and symbolizes the mutual protection between Church and State. The 1920s also saw the first tourism posters of Santiago and the Camino. The city is represented as the Mecca of the West and the Camino as a pilgrimage route that links to Europe.

However, it was during the Franco dictatorship that the harmonious relationships between tourism, politics and religion were most clearly seen. Franco restored the privileges lost by Santiago in the years of the Republic. He made the pilgrimage to the Cathedral himself in 1938 during the civil war and was frequently asked to make the Offering to the Apostle. Like Santiago in his fight against the Muslim invaders, Franco considered himself a crusader against the infidel, in this case the Bolsheviks, appropriating the figure of the Apostle (Castro, 2012; Pack, 2010). Talbot (2016) defines the period of 1937 to 1954, in relation to the Camino de Santiago, as the part

of the celebration of Franco's victory and the exaltation of the greatness of Spain. Coinciding with the Holy Years, large pilgrimages were organized by groups linked to the regime. The city of Santiago was, along with another symbolic capital, Toledo, the first to be declared a Historic-Artistic Monument in 1940, initiating a process of monumentalization (Castro, 2012).

According to Talbot (2016), the period from 1954 to 1975, when the dictator died, was characterized by the emphasis on economic development. This is confirmed by Pack (2008), who maintains that from 1960 onwards the economy occupied a more prominent position. However, this author also states that in the 1960s the powerful Ministry of Information and Tourism, responsible for the strong rise of tourism in that period, was much more aggressive in the political use of the Camino de Santiago.

This takes us up to the democratic period and Spanish political decentralization. Pack (2010) states that this new period did not involve major changes, as ultimately, it was an adaptation of National-Catholicism to Europeanism. In fact, during the dictatorship there had already been an interest in linking Santiago with the Christian roots of the continent. In any case, in the years prior to the tourist boom that began with the Holy Year of 1993, a whole series of preparations reaffirmed the ideological character of the Santiago phenomenon. The visit of Pope John Paul II, with a strong pro-European message, and the Camino becoming the first European Cultural Route in 1987, are two of the most representative milestones. For Spain, immersed in difficult negotiations to join the European Community, Santiago was the clearest evidence of this historic and symbolic link with the rest of the continent, while at the same time Europe reinforced one of the symbols of its identity. This reminds us of the debates about the need or not to incorporate references to Europe's Christian roots in the European Constitution, giving continuity to a movement advocated by Christian democrats in the years after the Second World War.

In 1989 a political party linked to the Christian-Democrat Movement, whose leader had been the Minister of Information and Tourism in the 1960s, precisely when Pack (2008) stated that there was an aggressive political use of the Camino, won the elections in Galicia. The enormous tourism success that has occurred since



1993 often makes it easy to forget this other meaning, without which this pilgrimage route cannot be understood. Against those who considered that 1993 resulted in an excessive 'touristification' of the Camino, Tilson (2005) speaks of the close collaboration between Church and State in the Holy Year of 1999, as both institutions handled their respective areas of influence. In fact, as we have seen, throughout the period that began with the second inventio, the interests of one have tended to coincide with those of the other. Tourism sits in the middle as an activity that is not incompatible with either: for both Spanish and Galician Governments, it is a key economic sector; the Church is the protagonist while it participates and benefits economically from tourism.

In short, in this section we have sought to demonstrate that the Camino de Santiago is not simply another tourism product. A more complex reading not limited to tourism is required. Only thus is it possible to understand its success and its specific features. Although 1993 is considered the starting point from a tourism perspective, there are other motives and precedents that are indispensable for understanding its ascent. Linking its success to an intense promotional campaign or to its motivational character is, in our view, an excessively reductionist approach.

### **The Camino de Santiago in the Context of Current Tourism Motivations**

As previously mentioned, we have insisted on linking the past and the present of the Camino de Santiago with the political and religious power strategies that undoubtedly exist and have established the dynamics followed by this ancient route. However, the Camino is much more than that: walking the Camino has become a practice with a great power of attraction for thousands of people. Thus, medieval women and men were encouraged to walk the route, motivated by a strong Christian religious feeling. It was done as atonement for their sins and a path to salvation, while contemporary society seeks, in the idealized pilgrimage model, the recovery of a certain spiritual sense in life, the encounter with one's self, the complicity with others, the enjoyment

that implies the contemplation of the landscape and monuments and, in many cases, a return to a moderate religious sentiment (Badone and Roseman, 2004; Lois-González, 2013; Greenia, 2014). In any case, tens of thousands of people decide every year to walk more than 100 kilometres or 200 by bike (and sometimes more than 500 or 1000 km), in an event that has become global and that runs through various regions and towns of south-west Europe.

In fact, the data are significant (Pilgrim's Office, 1970–2015) if we review the volume of travellers who do the traditional pilgrimage, that is, those who march towards Santiago for more than 100 kilometres and decide to collect the *Compostela*, a certificate that the Church gives to those who meet that prerequisite, whether Catholic or not. Before the Holy Year (when St James's day falls on a Sunday, and history tells us that it is a special date for the route) of 1982, the total number of pilgrims over 12 months never exceeded 500. However, by 1986 (the year when Spain was incorporated into the European Community) this number had increased to 1801 and in 1992 it was 9764. With the large tourist promotion of the Camino in 1993 it reached 99,438; in the Holy Year of 1999 it was 154,613, in 2004 it reached 179,944, in 2010 it had risen to 272,135 and by 2015, while not reaching this extraordinary figure, there were 262,516 pilgrims. Therefore, the growth of the Camino in recent times has been exponential, and shows that the diverse motives for doing the walk have only grown stronger, showing a significant global projection, with an incidence on different cultural and religious societies (Lois-González and Santos, 2015). More specifically, 13 countries contributed more than 3000 pilgrims to Santiago in 2015 and, among them, four more than 10,000. The latter are Italy, Germany, the United States and Portugal, and the remaining are France, the Netherlands, United Kingdom, Canada, Ireland, Poland, Brazil, Australia and South Korea (Pilgrim's Office, 2015).

When it comes to explaining what drives tens of thousands of people to walk along the old pilgrimage route to Santiago, the motivations are multiple and complementary. In a previous study, we identified five or six causes of the contemporary success of the Camino, which we will now proceed to update (Lois-González, 2013; Lois-González and Santos, 2015). The primary



reason for doing the pilgrimage to Santiago continues to be liminal (Turner and Turner, 1978). The Camino means a transition from one life period to another: thus, numerous young people between the ages of 18 and 30 years old decide to go to Santiago in preparation for adult life, or people between 55 and 70 who have completed their working lives and are beginning life as retirees. People who have survived an illness (CETUR, 2007–2010), broken up with their partner or suffered from depression also find the beginning of a new period in life in the route to Santiago. The route, according to Turner and Turner (1978), reinforces the idea of *communitas*, to intensely live an experience with others, that is, the pilgrims they meet along the Camino. The proliferation of blogs or online groups that share memories about the experience of the journey to Santiago in various countries indubitably proves this.

On the most basic level of motivation for the journey, what attracts contemporary human beings, subjected to a fast and stressful pace of life throughout most of the year, is the slow mobility (Urry, 2000). For a few days, life moves at 6 km/h, thanks to individual effort, seeking to get healthier and dressing as a genuine walker, identifiable by others as such (Creswell and Merriman, 2013). Slow walking allows us to contemplate the landscape, rural areas and cities more calmly. The original meaning of traveller is revisited (Urry and Larsen, 2011), allowing us to perceive nature and the countryside in a much more profound dimension. In this regard, the layout of the route throughout France, crossing the Pyrenees, on to the dry and ochre lands of Castile and finishing up in the Atlantic and green Galicia, makes it possible to enjoy a vast aesthetic variety of visual environments. Ultimately, the Camino de Santiago links to the strong experiential reason for tourism in the 21st century, since the enjoyment of the place, the images, the local populations and a series of highly valued assets which have been recovered by the public authorities to exalt the pilgrimage route are all reinforced (Lois-González *et al.*, 2015a).

An issue that has repeatedly been raised is the relationship between the tourist and the pilgrim today, and several authors have addressed this (Coleman and Eade, 2004; Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Lopez, 2012; Lois-González, 2013). It is usually accepted that the contemporary pilgrim

is a type of cultural, spiritual or religious tourist with certain attributes. Thus, pilgrims choose their holidays to disconnect from their daily activities, seek a state of mental rest, enjoy the places, their gastronomy and culture, and they thoroughly prepare their journey with the help of travel maps, guides and information about the route to follow. However, the strong spiritual and perceptive dimension of the pilgrim differs from the practice of the conventional tourist who is more concerned with recreation, rest or sunbathing in places that often provide leisure and fun. In addition, the contemporary pilgrim walks, rejecting modern types of transport, and usually stays in public hostels, away from the comforts and private spaces provided by hotels, apartments or even campsites. In any case, contemporary tourism and pilgrimage respond to the same need to escape from the fast pace of their urban daily lives. The search for other regions and the contemplation of the landscape, monuments and foreign customs are common to both tourists (who are *cultural* in their motivations) and pilgrims. However, the strong degree of singularization of the latter gives them a special status as travellers in a permanently mobile society.

As we have investigated, the conversion of the pilgrim into a tourist once they have reached the destination is not uncommon. This has been noted in Santiago de Compostela (CETUR, 2007–2010; Lopez, 2012), when people who have walked for many days stay a day or two in a hostel in the city, go to the Pilgrim's Office to collect their *compostela* and visit the cathedral to attend mass, or simply take a city tour. Once these modern rites are completed they go to a restaurant, book a hotel room and decide to stay as real tourists on the outskirts of the town (Lois-González, 2013). This transformation of the pilgrim into a tourist, together with the contemporary character of both conditions, links these two closely interrelated categories. In this context, the pilgrimage is a voluntary act, seeking to encounter one's self by means of original practices, full of a certain meaning.

The spectacular increase in the numbers of pilgrims to Santiago in recent decades, along with the strengthening of contemporary motivations to do the route, has led to two complementary consequences of interest. The first is the dissemination of the Camino model in other contexts and countries where it was not present



until a few years ago. The recovery of a real pilgrimage tradition that had not previously been considered historically important is what authors such as Sánchez Carretero (2015), inspired by Magry (2015), call *caminonization*. This has happened with the Via Francigena between Canterbury and Rome, St Olav's Way between Sweden and the Norwegian city of Trondheim and the Kumano Kodo in the Japanese prefecture of Wakayama, among others (Lois-González and Santos, 2015). The second is the risk of overcrowding or saturation, which can be seen on the route to Santiago. This problem is detected especially in the Holy Years, in the holiday season (such as the month of August), and among Spanish pilgrims. In fact, having the Cathedral as the Camino's common destination, the concentration of people in its surroundings and in certain streets of the historic centre of Santiago from mid-morning until afternoon, and a repetition of behaviours during the early hours, explain unwanted saturation problems. The accumulation of people in sections of the route or in the streets of Santiago becomes a serious problem for a few pilgrims who are mostly motivated by spirituality, the recovery of time to think or the contemplation of unique places. Therefore, in recent times, actions to diversify the ways towards Santiago have been promoted. The French (Camino Francés) and the traditional Caminos remain the most popular, but the Primitive and the Northern Caminos (Camino Primitivo and Camino del Norte) have recently been declared World Heritage Sites, and the Portuguese (Camino Portugués) has significantly increased the number of users. There have also been initiatives to create new referents to continue the journey (such as the continuation of the Camino towards Cape Finisterre) at the end of the route (Lois-González, 2013). New pilgrimage spaces appear so the reasons for the Camino's attractiveness do not disappear due to mass tourism, considered undesirable in the context of recovery of the old medieval idea of a long journey on foot towards a shrine (or a monumental goal).

### The Camino and the Pilgrims to Santiago

In Butler's terminology (1980), the Camino de Santiago has been consolidated in recent years

as a tourism product that is moving towards maturity. Not only has the number of pilgrims increased, but the markets of origin have also evolved; in addition to the Camino Francés, new itineraries such as the Camino del Norte or the Primitivo have resolutely been added to diversify and to decongest the main access to Compostela.

In addition, the tourism industry, encouraged by Central and Regional Governments through various plans in support of the Camino, has given rise to increasingly innovative services and the marketing of the route. In this process of revitalization of the Camino, the tourism industry has also benefited from tax benefits on promotion in various private sector initiatives. This has resulted in the protection and enhancement of the landscape and material aspects to improve the experience on the route.

In this section, we will focus mainly on describing and analysing the evolution of the pilgrimage to Santiago. Quantitative data will allow us to illustrate the continued growth in the number of pilgrims. We will pay attention to its characteristics, which will show the changes to which we have referred. We will see, for example, how the increase in certain markets is in direct relation to specific promotions other than those by the official channels. We will also highlight the unique character of the Holy Years, in which Spanish pilgrims and religious motivation are much more significant. At the same time, the jubilee years have an immediate positive effect, being an important step forward in the number of walkers in subsequent years.

We will refer to two main sources. The first is the Pilgrim's Office, which provides basic information about the characteristics of pilgrims who get the Compostela, or accreditation diploma. This source has two problems, the minor one being that not all pilgrims go to the Office. However, authors such as Álvarez Sousa (1999) and investigations conducted by the Centre for Tourism Studies and Research of the University of Santiago-CETUR estimate that the percentage that do retrieve the Compostela is very high (86.8% on average between 2007 and 2010) and therefore these are representative values. A second problem is that when this information comes from a source of religious origin there is a tendency towards the distortion of some issues, as is the case with the motivations.

The second source is the data from the Centre for Tourism Studies and Research of the



University of Santiago (CETUR-USC). This centre generates two types of information. On the one hand the Camino Observatory unfortunately only has figures available until the last Holy Year of 2010.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the City of Santiago Tourism Observatory has been carrying out an on-going survey for visitors to the city of Santiago, including pilgrims, since 2005.<sup>3</sup> Given the methodological rigour and the number of surveys, we understand that both constitute reliable sources and that they complement the collection of data from the Pilgrim's Office.

Focusing on these above-mentioned objectives, we will begin by showing the rapid evolution of the demand of pilgrims who arrive in Compostela. It is a constant and positive demand, which shows, on the one hand, that the number of pilgrims' spikes in the St James Holy Years but also that there is an increase in pilgrims in subsequent years. Thus, we can deduce that the Holy Years serve as a platform to re-launch pilgrimages.

As can be seen in Fig. 7.1, the Holy Year of 1993 clearly marked an upturn for the Camino in terms of the number of pilgrims. This success was preceded by activities developed throughout the 1980s that were largely related to the international visibility of the city of Santiago and the Camino (Santos, 2006). In 1993 all this previous work was supported, moreover, by the numerous actions of public and private institutions such as the opening of facilities (hostels, rural tourism houses, hotels), but above all by a strong promotional campaign (Novello *et al.*, 2013). In addition, in the city of Compostela itself, heavy investment took place to renew both the accommodation – scarce and of low/medium quality – and the range of complementary tourism services on

offer, as well as accessibility to the city (Santos, 2006). For the management of these initiatives, an institutional framework for tourism and the Santiago phenomenon was created, with the Company (S.A.) for the Management of the Camino as the referent. Thus, 1993 saw the birth of a new stage of tourism in Galicia with the Camino de Santiago as its main axis.

As shown in Fig. 7.1, and as previously mentioned, in addition to the peaks of the Holy Years, a substantially higher volume of pilgrims is recorded in the following year than in the year before the Holy Year. This confirms that the Holy Years are not only outstanding in terms of volume of walkers, but represent an incentive for the consolidation of growth afterwards. In any case, the most visible element in the evolution is the continued growth seen since 1993. This has consolidated the Camino as a stable and complex value proposition that therefore needs appropriate management tools. One of them is the Camino de Santiago Management Plan 2015–2021. Drafted by the Government of Galicia, it is a roadmap detailing the guidelines to promote the conservation and protection of the Camino for all stakeholders involved, whether public or private. The importance that the Camino de Santiago has for tourism in Galicia is that it represents its brand image. The three fundamental pillars on which it is based are: the experience of the pilgrim; the significance of the Camino; and the Camino as a strategic and structural axis of the Galicia brand.

Another feature of the pilgrims who come to Compostela is the differential growth of Spanish and foreign markets. The latter has followed an upward trend, but in a more balanced way if

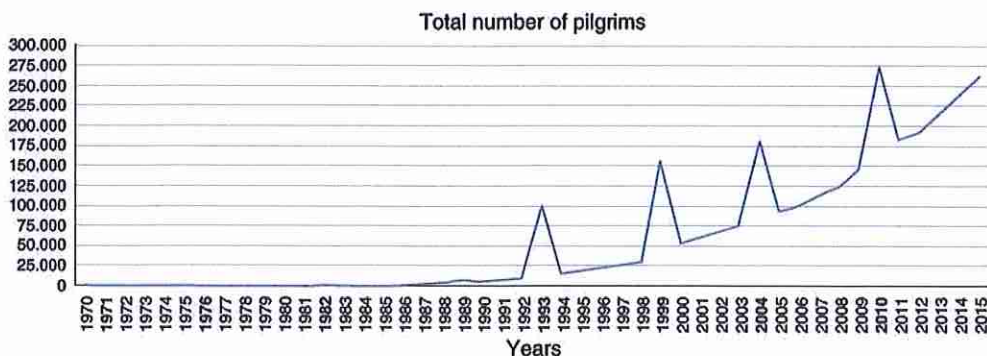


Fig. 7.1. Evolution of pilgrim numbers in Santiago de Compostela. From Pilgrim's Offices of Santiago de Compostela (2015).

we compare it to Spanish pilgrims. It is also less affected by the ups and downs of the Holy Years, as seen in Fig. 7.2. This figure leads to two conclusions: the first is that the peaks of the Holy years are very closely linked to the Spanish market, and second that the number of foreign pilgrims is growing and continuously on the rise, to the point that, in more recent years, it has exceeded the figure of the Spanish market.

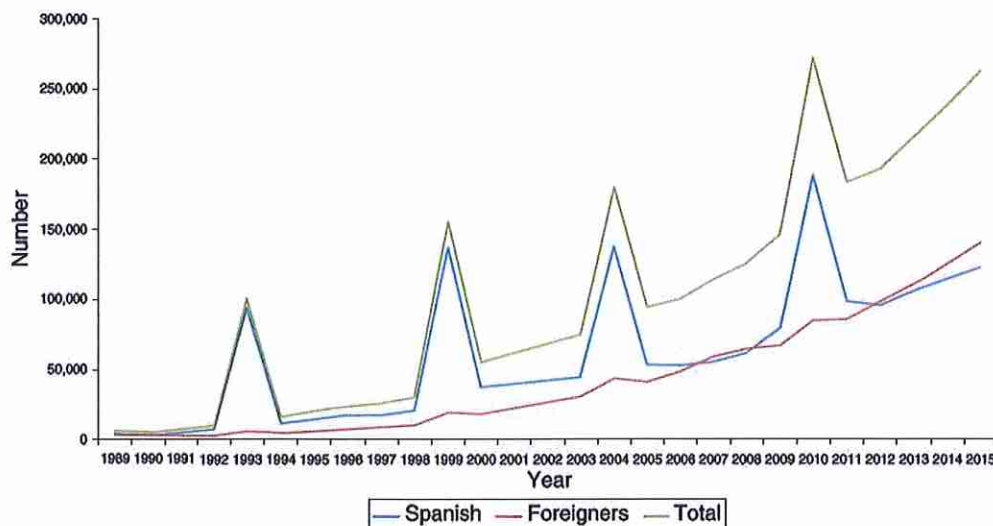
From the qualitative point of view, there is also an evolution in the composition of this foreign market. Although there are countries that have an important presence throughout the period, such as Germany, France or Portugal, the emergence of new markets that are gaining a substantial presence can be seen. This is the case of the United States, Canada, Australia, Brazil, Japan and South Korea.

These new markets, to which some European countries such as Poland should be added, show the international dimension that the Santiago phenomenon has acquired. A key aspect of diversification is that it contributes to seasonal adjustment. As we will see later, one of the problems of the Camino is the strong concentration that occurs in the central months of the year. However, some of these new markets, mainly non-European, are particularly important to the low season. This is the case of South Korea, whose pilgrims reach Santiago mainly in the first months

of the year (between 2010 and 2016, in the months of January and February South Korean pilgrims represented 24% and 15% of the total number of foreign pilgrims), per data from the Pilgrim's Office (2016), positioning itself as one of the first foreign pilgrim markets in Compostela.

A singular element when analysing the evolution of some foreign markets is the importance of dissemination channels beyond the traditional forms of promotion. We refer, for example, to cinema and literature (Lois-González *et al.*, 2015b; Lopez *et al.*, 2015). In fact, according to data from the Observatory of the Tourist Demand Profile at Santiago de Compostela (CETUR), 21% of interviewed pilgrims said they found out about the Camino de Santiago through films or literature.

The role played by these two media channels, as well as social networks, has been significant in spreading the Santiago phenomenon (Lopez, 2013; Ogden, 2016), and is a determinant factor for many pilgrims doing the Camino in some markets. In Europe, we highlight the actions of the German comedian Hape Kerkeling and the filmmaker Simon Reeve, as well as popular bloggers who have helped promote the Camino de Santiago. Kerkeling's book, *Ich bin dann mal weg: meine Reise auf dem Jakobsweg* [I'm Off Then: Losing and Finding Myself on the Camino De Santiago] (2006), has sold over 3 million copies, and



**Fig. 7.2.** Comparison of the evolution of Spanish and foreign pilgrim numbers in Santiago de Compostela. From Pilgrim's Offices of Santiago de Compostela (2015).



the effect of this on the German market has been quite noticeable, as shown in Fig. 7.3.

Another European case is that of the three-part documentary by English writer and traveller Simon Reeve for the BBC in December 2013. The success of this show has also been reflected in the increased numbers of English pilgrims who have arrived in Santiago since then, from 3758 in 2012 to 5417 in 2015 (Pilgrim's Office, 2016).

Cinema and literature have also been key to the growth and development in some emerging markets. After his pilgrimage to Compostela in 1986, the Brazilian writer Paulo Coelho published the book *Diary of a Magus*, which caused many of his compatriots to follow his example and turned Brazil into one of the main pilgrim markets of the American continent. Another case worthy of analysis is the United States, where the publication of books and the shooting of films and television series have resulted in an increase in the number of people interested in the Camino de Santiago. Thanks to the publication of Shirley MacLaine's book *The Camino: A Journey of the Spirit* after travelling the Camino, the film *The Way* by Martin Sheen and Emilio Estevez and the programme made in Compostela by the famous journalist Oprah Winfrey for her TV channel on the Camino de Santiago, the number of American pilgrims has increased considerably, from 2028 pilgrims in 2004 to 13,670 in 2015 (Pilgrim's Office, 2016).

However, the most noteworthy case is South Korea. This country went from an insignificant volume of pilgrims, just 18 in 2004, to become the main Asian market, reaching 4073 in 2015 (Pilgrim's Office, 2016). This considerable increase in pilgrim demand is due especially to the book *A Woman Walking Alone*, by Kim Nan Hee, written in Korean, which has sold over 50,000 copies. Subsequent publications by other Korean authors such as Kim Hyo Sun, Byun Jeong Augustine and Nam Goog Moon have also helped to spread the Santiago phenomenon (Lois-González *et al.*, 2015).

The impact of both cinema and literature in spreading the Santiago phenomenon has thus been important in popularizing the Camino in traditional markets. However, this role has become decisive in emerging markets such as the United States, Brazil and Korea. Filmmakers and writers have become true advocates of the Camino de Santiago, providing a high degree of trustworthiness both in their testimony, as well as their recommendations.

If film and literature have been unique channels for the popularization of the Camino de Santiago, there are other means which, though considered traditional, never cease to show the values of the Santiago phenomenon. We refer to the Associations of Friends of the Camino de Santiago, of which there are 317 spread over

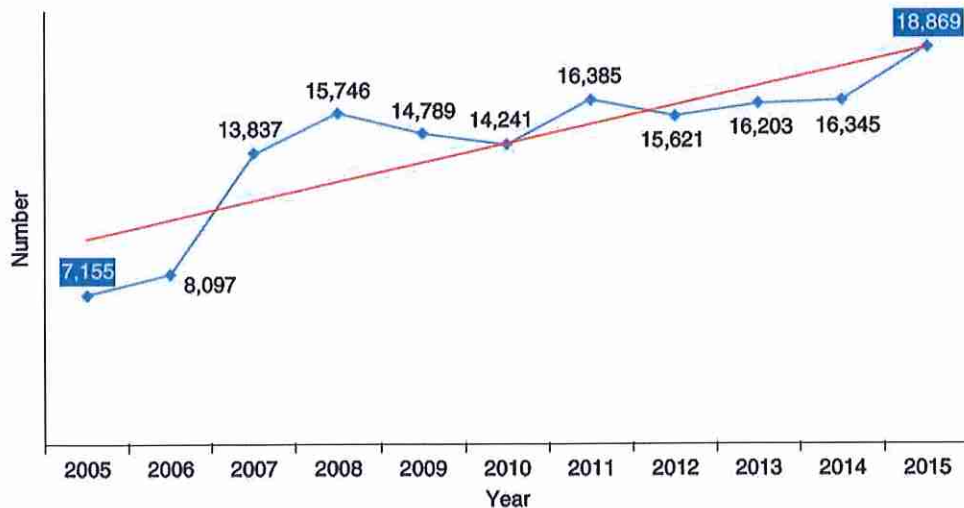


Fig. 7.3. Evolution of German pilgrim numbers in Santiago de Compostela from 2005 to 2015. From Pilgrim's Offices of Santiago de Compostela (2015).



30 countries in five continents, all disseminating Santiago culture. The Associations of Friends of the Camino de Santiago consist of groups of pilgrims or old pilgrims who join in towns or regions to promote the Santiago route. The first of these associations was founded in Paris in 1950 by some great scholars of the Santiago phenomenon: Jean Babelon, Georges Gaillard, Jeanne Viellard and René de La Coste-Messelière. Later, in the 1980s, associations dedicated to helping future pilgrims appeared in major European countries. Today the growth of Santiago associations is unstoppable.

These associations are centres of promotion; many of them do research and are places where pilgrims gather. Their function is to assist and train future pilgrims as well as spread the Santiago phenomenon. Some of the associations have large numbers of members, although some of them are beginning to have generational problems, as in the case of the Dutch Association. Thus, various measures have been carried out to encourage and involve new generations in developing the Santiago phenomenon.<sup>4</sup>

Regarding the distribution of pilgrims to Santiago during the year, as mentioned above, one characteristic of the demand is its high seasonality, as reflected in Fig. 7.4. High seasonality is a common characteristic of tourism, with significant implications (Butler, 1994). This fact is

similarly replicated in Santiago de Compostela, as the greatest concentrations of both visitors and pilgrims occur during the summer period, i.e. from June to September, peaking in August. This high seasonality causes a double problem. On the one hand, the strong experiential character of the Camino de Santiago makes overcrowding a particularly sensitive issue that directly affects the satisfaction of the pilgrim. On the other hand, the coexistence in the urban space of Compostela's pilgrims and common visitors means for the latter a stark contradiction to their motivations. This can cause at least two other singularities: the conversion of the pilgrim into a tourist and levels of satisfaction slightly lower than those of other visitors.

Finally, Fig. 7.5 illustrates the similarities in the behaviour of common visitors and pilgrims when they arrive in the city of Santiago de Compostela. This figure shows that the Pilgrim at the end of the Camino is transformed into a tourist, adopting similar behaviour to the conventional visitor, even financially (Lois-González and Santos, 2015). However, the data from the Tourism Observatory of Santiago warns of slightly lower satisfaction levels than those of the tourist, probably because of a sudden change in their condition as travellers. Blom *et al.* (2016) demonstrate that the desire that many pilgrims show to continue their way towards Finisterre is related to

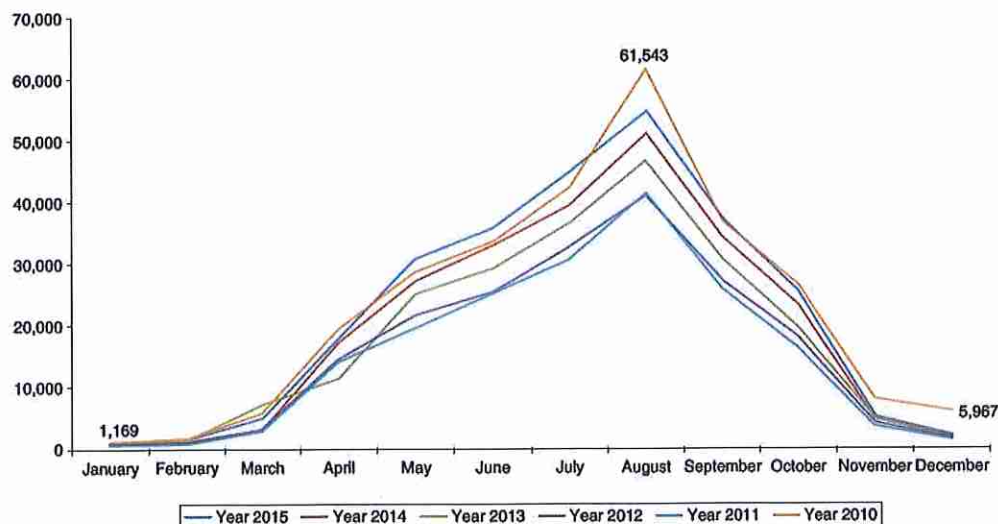
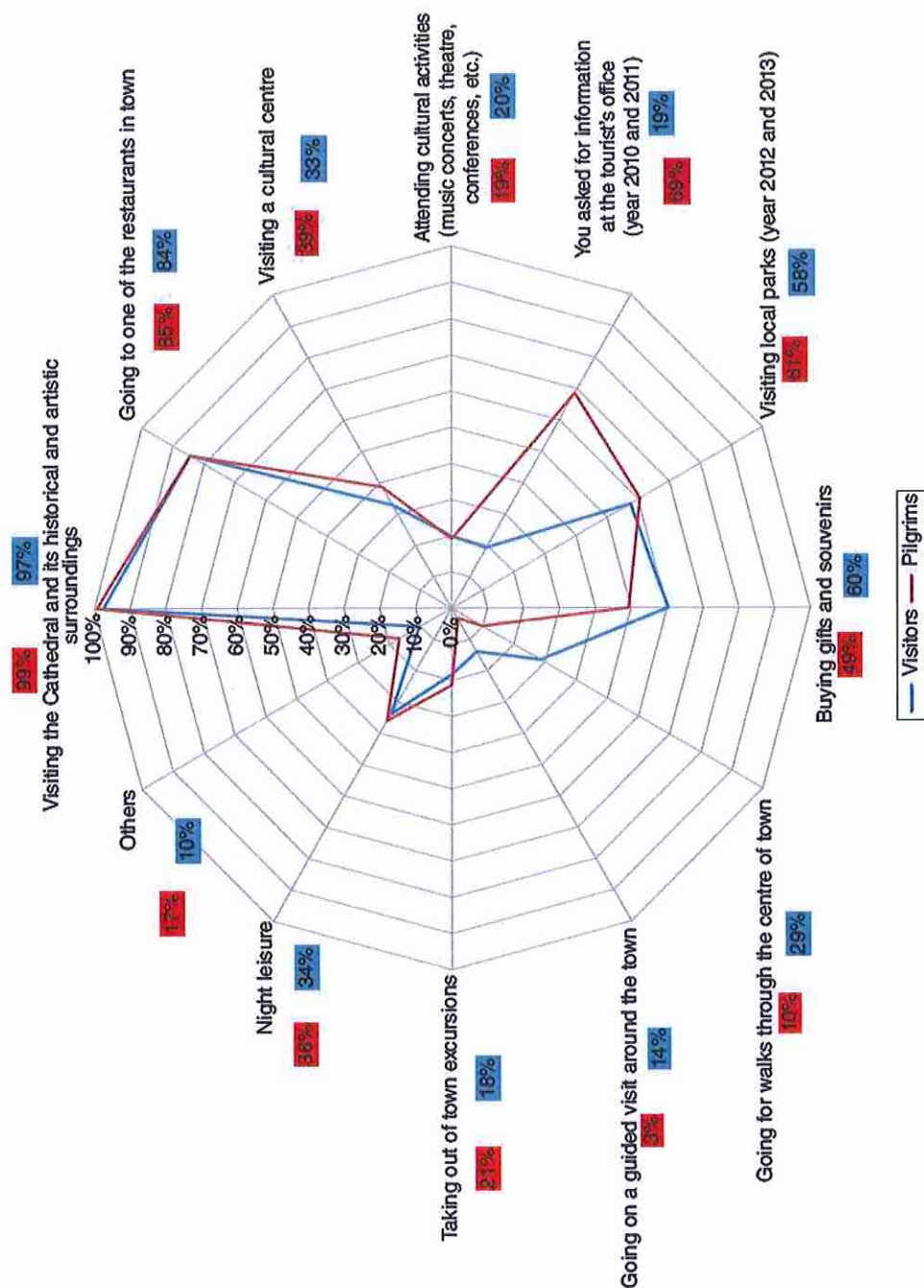


Fig. 7.4. The seasonality of pilgrims arriving in Santiago de Compostela (Year 2010–2015). From Pilgrim's Offices of Santiago de Compostela (2015).



**Fig. 7.5.** Activities performed by pilgrims and tourists in the city of Santiago de Compostela (2010–2013 average). From CETUR (2007–2010). Authors' own presentation.



the excessive tourism pressure in Santiago, which does not correspond to their motivations as pilgrims.

### Conclusion: Challenges

We have seen throughout these pages that the Camino de Santiago is much more than a tourism product. It has a political-ideological aspect which is essential to understand in order to have a complete vision of the Santiago phenomenon. In any case, we have also seen that from the tourism perspective, the data is compelling and often confirms, almost without doubt, its success. This is measured by the growing number of pilgrims who travel the different Caminos each year, but also by the internationalization of the demand, the incorporation of the tourism industry and, ultimately, the complexity that it has acquired over time. In addition, it has become a world reference for religious tourism, although the spectrum of motivations cannot be reduced to that alone.

Traditional challenges for tourism policy evolve around four points: the low spending generated by pilgrims; the balance between tourism and religious perspectives; overcrowding on the main routes; and the coordination of steps taken by the different administrations involved. Obviously, this is a reductionist view, since the complexity of the phenomenon would require a broader and more inclusive analysis. In this section, we will focus on these four diverse aspects.

The first challenge is clearly tourism, particularly concerning the profitability of the Camino de Santiago. Authors such as Santos (2006) have shown the low levels of spending by pilgrims. Based on surveys such as those carried out by the Observatory of the Camino de Santiago, as well as a study by the Spanish Federation of Friends of the Camino and other approaches that are reported in specialized forums and websites, the average expenditure is around 30–40 euros, clearly inferior to the average tourist. We also observe, at least in Galicia, that the regressive demographic trend of rural municipalities crossed by the Camino has not changed in recent decades. Their declining and ageing populations ([www.ige.eu](http://www.ige.eu)) reflect their weak economic dynamism.

However, there are positive elements, although there are no studies that confirm all our

claims. One of the most striking issues in recent years is the intense marketing of the Camino de Santiago.<sup>5</sup> This pilgrimage route is now generating important commercial activity that includes means of transport, accommodation and other services such as luggage transfer. At a local level, we find several localities along the routes with a greater concentration of pilgrims that act as nodes, generating important commercial activity with the proliferation of a multitude of small businesses, such as Sarria, Palas de Rei, Arzúa and Melide.

It is also interesting to point out that beyond the economic benefits generated, the pilgrim adds value. This aspect has been tested in multiple investigations of the Camino de Santiago. Cosmopolitanism, in relation to the idea of being a citizen of the world, is a prized value and readily associated with pilgrims. Similarly, the pilgrim may be related to the romantic traveller. These concepts confer different meanings on the localities through which pilgrims pass and make them the focus of tourism attention.

However, despite these advances, from a strictly economic and tourism perspective, there are still many aspects to develop. Tourism spending is certainly one of them and not an easy issue to deal with. Public hostels are an inherent element of the Santiago tradition which helps reduce one of the greatest expenses: accommodation, although pilgrims are increasingly turning to commercial establishments. The same applies to tourism-related purchases: the need to reduce the weight of the backpack does not stimulate this type of additional cost. Similarly, the time spent in places where they stay overnight is very short: those who stay overnight at public hostels only extend their stay due to exceptional reasons. However, even the time spent in the final destination is very short, often less than a day, as evidenced by data from the Tourism Observatory of Santiago.

The second challenge we refer to is the balance between tourism and religious perspectives, although we believe that this is a minor problem. As we have seen, the coexistence of Church and State is a constant in the Santiago tradition, and harmonization of their interests suffers only minor disruption. For example, in 1975 the Bishop of Santiago spoke of the risk of confusing tourism with pilgrimages (Rodríguez, 2004). Dunn (2016) delves into the debate over the 'real'



pilgrims and Murray and Graham (1997) deal with criticism of the route's excessive commercialization, although they conclude that tourism and pilgrimage are not incompatible. Indeed, as we have already indicated, the Church is actively involved in the business generated by tourism and pilgrimages.

The reaffirmation of the religious character of the Camino de Santiago is evidenced primarily during Holy Years, and the Church does not want this religious sense to disappear in the intermediate periods, especially when these are long. For example, in the prolonged period between the Holy Years 2010 and 2021, the Church of Santiago, with the active support of the regional government has developed a strategy to keep the attention to religious issues alive, organizing commemorative events that have virtually zero impact on the number of pilgrims and tourists ([www.ine.es](http://www.ine.es)). These include the 800th anniversary of the consecration of the cathedral in 2011; the 1200th anniversary of the first inventio in 2013; the Franciscan Jubilee in 2014; and the extraordinary opening of the Holy Door in 2016. These are all events that pilgrims and the public have demonstrated little interest in.

A third challenge we refer to is overcrowding. So far, both the Church of Santiago de Compostela and the Galician Government have noted the constant growth in the volume of pilgrims. As happens with statistics on tourism, the success of a destination is measured in figures, in this case the number of walkers. However, the special features of the Camino de Santiago should compel further reflection on this issue. If, as we have seen, the motivations of the pilgrims are linked to notions such as contact with nature or spirituality, it is easy to see how overcrowding could become a major problem. As one of the causes of more and more pilgrims continuing the way to Finisterre, Frey (1998) and Blom *et al.* (2016) cite precisely the disappointment with the excessive tourism pressure on the traditional routes, as well as the city of Santiago.

Despite the many changes that have occurred over the past few decades, spatial and temporal concentration is still prominent. During summer, from June to September, the Camino Francés sees the highest values (65.6% and 65.8% in 2015 respectively). Seasonal adjustment is a complex goal, although diversity in terms of the pilgrims' places of origin can facilitate a better

redistribution across the months. For its part, recognition of the Northern and Primitive routes as World Heritage sites, as well as aspirations by the Camino Portugués to become one, will certainly help to promote these ways and to alleviate the heavy burden on the Camino Francés. In this area, there are therefore multiple options for overcoming the challenge of overcrowding.

Finally, we will reflect briefly on the last of the classic challenges, administrative coordination. In Spain, tourism and cultural and heritage policies in general are the responsibility of the Autonomous Regions. Considering that the recognized routes cross all Spanish Peninsular regions, this means that there are 15 administrative territories involved, each of which has different priorities and strategies when it comes to the planning and management of the Caminos. In addition, there are interests at state level, not only for Spain but for Portugal and France, the latter with its own regional competencies in the field of tourism. These different culture and tourism priorities and strategies can have at least two additional elements: political rivalries between the different territories and a certain supremacy of Galicia over the others, as it considers itself the central core of the Santiago tradition and the place where the remains of the apostle lie.

The Council of Saint James (Consejo Jacobeo) is the body responsible at a Spanish national level for coordination of the various Autonomous Regions. It can be said that their role is not important, to the extent that, in practice, most involved regions (apart from Galicia) are located inland and are therefore unconnected to the Sun and Beach model, and see the Camino de Santiago as a good opportunity for the development of tourism. In this sense, they have developed measures for the protection and promotion of the pilgrimage routes. The lack of conflict and the existence of a coordinating body do not mean that it is effective, however. The resolution of problems, such as overcrowding, necessarily requires greater commitment from all territories.

These four challenges which we have mentioned, while important, still leave space for others, although some of them may be very subtle. We have previously seen that, from the historical point of view, the Camino de Santiago has always been linked to the future of the European continent. This prompts us to think that the challenges faced by the Camino cannot be analysed in terms



of motivation and tourism management alone. Its success or failure is very much related to other matters of greater importance that too often tend to be forgotten by the responsible authorities,

blinded as they are by spectacular tourism growth. We focus perhaps too much on trying to explain the results in terms of tourism without taking the deeper issues into account.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The first edition of this guide was published in English in 1911.

<sup>2</sup> The study of the Camino de Santiago Pilgrim Demand Profile (from 2007 to 2010) was carried out by CETUR in collaboration with the Institute of Tourism Studies (IET – Galicia). The methodology was based on a survey of pilgrims who used one of the eight ways to reach Santiago de Compostela in the years 2007–2010. Technical specifications for these surveys are: Geographical area: Santiago de Compostela; Dates: from January to December; Number: 3149 surveys performed; Confidence level: 95.5%; Estimated error: (+/–) 3.5%.

<sup>3</sup> The report on the profile of the Santiago de Compostela tourist demand is produced annually by CETUR. The report concerns Universal Visitors over 18 years of age. Geographical area: City of Santiago de Compostela. Sample size: annual average 1840 surveys. Annual error given by quarterly errors: (+/–) 2.28%. Procedure of the sample: Simple random, dividing the sample size into work periods (quarterly and weekly) Field work: Data collection performed in different Places of Tourism Interest in the city following the sampling plan.

<sup>4</sup> The Netherlands Genootschap van Sint Jacob Association (in the Netherlands) is 30 years old and has 13,000 members. Aware of the ageing problem of the members of the Association, on 4 April 2016 its president Mr Bol met with the Education Counsellor of the Spanish Embassy in Benelux in order to find ways to tackle this problem. The main proposal was to cooperate with Secondary Education teachers of Spanish interested in the Camino so they could teach students about the Camino supported by volunteers from the Association. Another proposal was for teachers at the Spanish section in Amsterdam to develop a teaching unit about the Camino de Santiago. (Information courtesy of the Department of Education in Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg of the Embassy of Spain – report on the meeting with the Netherlands Genootschap van Sint Jacob Dutch Association of Santiago on 4 April 2016.)

<sup>5</sup> There are many companies that sell the Camino de Santiago. Some examples are: [www.macsadventure.com/camino-tours](http://www.macsadventure.com/camino-tours); <http://caminoways.com>; [www.tee-travel.com](http://www.tee-travel.com); <http://wisdomofthecaminotours.com>

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