

RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN SPAIN: THE GOOSE THAT LAID THE GOLDEN EGG? AN OLD TRADITION, VERSUS AN EMERGING FORM OF TOURISM¹

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1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to show how religious tourism, just like cultural tourism, is a form of travel and a further expression of the commercialisation of culture, or to be more precise, the commercialisation of religion and popular devotion. Heritage, in images, sanctuaries, beliefs and devotions, is related with culture, identity, religious feeling and faith, but also with the consumption of a tourism product. On the basis of this hypothesis, the cases of Montserrat, the *Camino de Santiago* (Way of St. James) and *Semana Santa* (Holy Week) in Granada share the common nexus of complementarization between religious heritage and tourism. The examples given are a form of cultural expression that has been established as a space for tourist visits-consumption with a religious and cultural meaning. The article is divided into four sections. The first focuses on the state of the question and the definition of terms. The second notes the volume of religious tourism and the difficulties with the lack of available data, the third explains the case studies as examples of the phenomenon and in the fourth we present our conclusions and future lines of research into this old-new form of tourism.

2. RELIGIOUS TOURISM: STATE OF THE QUESTION

In Spain, studies of religious tourism are few and recent (Llurdés, 1995; Esteve Secall, 2002, Cànoves, 2006, Gil de Arriba, 2006, Porcal Gonzalo, 2006, Sarasa and Espejo, 2006, Villa Diaz, 2006, Esteve Secall, 2002, Santos Solla, 2002, 2006). This

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absence of reflection is partly associated to the fact that the study of the phenomenon of religious tourism is new. It should be noted that in 2006, the journal *Cuadernos de Turismo* dedicated a monographic edition to the phenomenon of religious tourism in Spain. In most studies, religious tourism is treated as one further expression of cultural tourism and is considered one of the so-called post-Fordist forms of tourism, which has only recently come into use in Spain but that has been more widely implemented in the Anglo-Saxon world. Indeed, the issue of religious tourism has been and is studied in the Anglosphere. Recently, the journal *Annals* (vol.1, March 2006), the voice of the Association of American Geographers, dedicated its Forum section to the theories and study of religious geography (Ivakhiv, 2006; Ferber, 2006; Holloway, 2006; Proctor, 2006; Buttner 2006, Bremer, 2006). The recent book by Raj and Morpeth, (2007) shows how religious tourism is a constantly growing international phenomenon. This current state of the question marks one of the most current issues in Anglo-Saxon geography and reflects how geographers are increasingly more interested in the relevance of the religious phenomenon, mapping it, the meaning of such sites and the sense of belonging to religious communities. Although the issue of religious tourism, as such, is not reflected in the forum, an interesting and broad debate is emerging regarding the relevance of religion in the meaning of such sites.

Along these lines, we should highlight one of the recent publications in Spanish geography (Nogué and Romero, eds., 2006 *Las Otras Geografías*) which includes a chapter on the geography of religion (Albet, 2006). The journal *Annals of Tourism Research* has published several articles since 1992 (Smith, 1992; Eade, 1992; Rinschede, 1992; Nolan and Nolan, 1992) and over the last five years there has been an increase in bibliographic production in relation to religious tourism and the phenomenon of pilgrimages (Ron Amos, 2006, Andriotis, 2009, Belhassen, et al. 2008) and, more recently, on the relation, creation and consolidation of religious and cultural tourism sites (Digance, 2003).

At present, from different perspectives of the Social Sciences, there is a debate on religious phenomena and from the geographic viewpoint an interesting debate has arisen that analyses the same from different paradigms. First, there have always been holy places and symbolic sites for different cultures. Second, there have always been pilgrimages (Morinis, 1983). Some significant examples are Mecca for Muslims, Jerusalem and Rome for Christians and Tibet for Buddhists. Third, for these groups such sites have gained meaning and symbolism that has made them places of worship, either through popular recognition or because the churches themselves recognise them as such. A clear example of this phenomenon is the city of Lourdes (Eade, 1992). At this point, we could say that the transformation of these sites into places of worship has turned them into places of pilgrimage and also sightseeing. Indeed, over the last 20 years, the boom in tourism products in Europe and also recently in Spain has led to an emblematic and distinctive site, if well promoted, being consumed by a broad group of tourists; who to a greater or lesser extent, arrived imbued with its religious significance. Such is the case, for example, with the *Camino de Santiago* (Santos Solla, 2002, 2006), which has experienced major revitalisation since 1993 due to the Jacobean. It has to be asked whether all of this flow of tourists are really pilgrims, dedicated Catholics, or merely further consumers of a tourism

product that is open to a new kind of consumer of spaces and places with a meaning that reaches beyond mere leisure (Aucort, 1990). In short, a new consumer of tourist products and sites that seeks to try new experiences and forms of tourism consumption. Only from this perspective of the diversification of tourism in its post-Fordist phase can we explain the increase in religious tourism; or better said, the consumption of new tourism sites with a cultural and spiritual significance. However, we should question the extent to which this religious tourism is accepted, permitted and tolerated by those people for whom the journey is not touristic but intrinsically religious. These new tensions arise in places of mass worship, where pilgrims, visitors and believers converge in their cultural, touristic or religious visits, which are sometimes controversial and polemic. We are witnessing how such places are becoming increasingly more banal and hence the boundaries between what is and is not permitted are becoming more blurred. In this regard, places of religious worship are no longer exclusive but have instead become places to visit, and if I may say so, for the consumption of tourism.

3. RELIGIOUS TOURISM STATISTICS: DIFFICULT APPROXIMATIONS

It is relatively simple to cite the number of tourists arriving in Spain. In 2009, Spain received 52 million foreign tourists (IET, Frontur Survey 2009) but determining the number of religious tourists is an almost impossible task. Data (Familitur, 2009) tells us that religious tourists tend to be middle-aged, tend to travel as a family, that more than half of them use three or four star hotels when they travel, that they tend to stay for an average of three days up to a week and that such people spend on average between 150 and 200 euros a day. However, about 25% of these tourists do not stay in hotels, but rather in the homes of friends and relatives. The activities they do, among others, include going on cultural visits (52.9%) (Familitur, 2009). We certainly know that some of these tourists attended *Semana Santa* celebrations in Andalusia, walked on the *Camino de Santiago* and visited Montserrat Mountain (the second most visited temple in Catalonia, the first being the Sagrada Familia). As for domestic tourism, data from the Familitur 2009 survey of tourism movements by Spaniards (IET, 2009) tells us that Spanish residents made 13.7 million trips, of which 91.8% were to domestic destinations, the most visited communities being Andalusia, (2.3 million trips), Catalonia (1.8 million trips), the Community of Valencia (1.4 million trips) and Castile and Leon (1.4 million trips). The main motive for these trips by Spaniards is leisure, recreation or holidays with 55%, followed in second place by visits to friends and relatives with 24.3% (Familitur, 2009). The data enables us to make very general approximations, but intuition tells us that in relation to visits to the indicated places, one of the elements attracting tourists is that of religious events, especially *Semana Santa*. In order to be more precise, we could take the reference of cultural tourism and make an approximation that could tell us the percentage of the same in relation to tourism in general. In the Familitur Survey of 2008, 9.9% of domestic leisure trips were for cultural reasons, a datum that tells us the percentage supposed by cultural tourism. However, there are no solid statistics that tell us what percentage there is for religious tourism on a domestic scale (Signispania, 2008).

4. THE CASE STUDIES: MONTSERRAT MOUNTAIN IN CATALONIA, THE CAMINO DE SANTIAGO AND SEMANA SANTA IN GRANADA

4.1. Montserrat Mountain in Catalonia

Montserrat Mountain is the site of the Monastery of Montserrat. It is an emblematic site of religious and cultural meaning, as well as identity. It is a clear example of the increasing binomial of cultural tourism with a religious orientation. In other words, visits and trips are made for religious and cultural reasons. Tourism, understood this way, promotes knowledge of our rich cultural heritage and visits to places of religious significance. The Monastery is a place of broad significance in what we understand to be religious tourism and has conserved values of Catalan distinctiveness, associated to culture, language and identity (Garay y Cànoves, 2009). Therefore, in the case of Montserrat, we could say that visitors are not exclusively pilgrims (Ostrowski, 2002) but bring together a large group of tourists that are attracted by symbols of identity, religious visits, the majesty of the mountain and even traditional excursions in the area. The space around the mountain is imbued with cultural and religious meaning. Barely an hour's journey from Barcelona, it is one of the most visited places by both domestic and international tourists. The Holy Mountain of Montserrat presents a clear meaning; in the Catalan language, Montserrat means 'serrated mountain' («Mont» is mountain and «Serrat» is serrated), in other words, its limestone forms protrude like a saw-shaped mountain. As for visits to the Mountain, we can distinguish four different types: tourists, local visitors, excursionists and religious visitors. Tourists are people that stay at least one night in a place and in this case the Monastery offers accommodation and tourism infrastructure. Local visitors are common and include anything from school groups to cultural groups, who visit the site during the day. It is also common for Montserrat to be used for outdoor pursuits like hiking and rock climbing. But the most relevant group to the site are religious visitors. The relevance of the phenomenon of Montserrat is that the site and the ways it is used perfectly complement the different uses. Montserrat can be considered an example of a religious site that is open to a dynamic use of leisure, culture and spirituality. Tourism is an important source of income that can be used to care for and boost this rich social, cultural and religious heritage. Montserrat is an example of the touristic valuation of an emblematic space, which unites identity, the charisma of an inherent Catalan culture that is the home to Catalonia's most profound sense of identity and the cradle of its language and most of all is one of the most recognised religious symbols of Catalonia. Tourism is almost a clear consequence of this whole crossover between elements and maintains the cycle of devotion, culture, identity and the site itself.

4.2. The Camino de Santiago in Galicia

In recent years, the *Camino de Santiago* has become one of the most successful tourism products not just in Spain but also in Europe, where the name is now an identifiable brand. The word *camino* crosses borders and is associated with the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela (Santos Solla, 2006). The holy year of 1993 represented the consolidation of

the new tourism product that Galicia had been pursuing. From that moment on, the *Camino de Santiago* became an emblematic product. Along with an intense promotion campaign, actions were implemented to improve and signpost the different routes, providing them with a good accommodation infrastructure (hostels, country houses, hotels and catering establishments). And along with this touristic catalyst for the *Camino*, the tourism structure of Santiago de Compostela was also improved, promoted by heavy institutional support from the Xunta de Galicia.

At present, the *Camino* is a showpiece and a symbol of identity, which has consolidated tourism not just in relation to Holy Years and the actual pilgrimages, but also to Galicia and the city of Santiago de Compostela as destinations. Today it is clearly a consolidated tourism product in its own right, in which the landscape, culture, traditions, cuisine and the sensations and experiences along the *Camino* are united with religious meaning. The *Camino* has become an icon that is explained by the way it overlaps with religious phenomena and is related with the transversal elements of a broad group of consumers which include challenge, personal achievement and the adventure implied in managing to complete 100 km (on foot, horse or bicycle) and getting to Compostela. The case of the *Camino* shows how a place's identity is constructed through symbols and when these are widely accepted by a large group, a tourism product is created that caters for a wide variety of users. The *Camino* relates many symbols and each pilgrim, visitor, hiker or tourist adopts their own, includes them in a rucksack of experiences, and gives those experiences a single meaning. This is perhaps the success of the *Camino de Santiago*, like that of Montserrat Mountain, in that religion is merged with cultural, personal and tourism elements, and each person adopts their part of the whole.

4.3. *Semana Santa* in Granada (Andalusia)

Another emblematic place where religiousness and tourism merge is Andalusia, where *Semana Santa* (Holy Week) is a touristic and economic phenomenon of relevance to the region. Granada is an emblematic city that receives tourists all year round, but this multiplies at the time of the Easter processions. *Semana Santa* is one of the most deep-rooted traditions in the city, and is also the one that attracts the greatest number of visitors. It is structured around *cofradías* (fellowships), which are groups of people that are devoted to a particular image that represents a Virgin or Christ, generally at a particular moment of the Passion. In Granada, thirty-two *cofradías* join the procession from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday. Particularly famous internationally are the Gypsy Procession, where images are carried to the Sacromonte quarter among bonfires and *saetas* (traditional songs); the Silent Procession, where the streetlights are turned off as the procession passes by; and the Alhambra Procession, which passes through the Nasrid monument and the famous Puerta de la Justicia. *Semana Santa* in Granada is an increasingly more recognised celebration on a worldwide level, and therefore attracts many tourists whether or not they are believers, for the collective feeling and the emotions experienced end up exciting any visitor. *Semana Santa* in Granada has since 2010 been considered an asset of world cultural heritage. Domestic and international tourists are surprised by the profound religiousness and sentiment of the people that take part in the processions, what we could

call experience tourism, an event that is lived at certain time and represents a people's identification with deep-rooted traditions. The reason is a religious act, but the result is a touristic phenomenon that stimulates the local economy and is related with unrepeatable feelings and identities. Granada is evidently famous for the Alhambra, but its processions are very close behind and are a tourism product that is putting itself on the map of religious imaginary.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The article has explained the situation of religious tourism in Spain, from the perspective that it is a recent form of tourism that is closely associated to cultural tourism. On the basis of the examples shown, we consider that religious sites are increasingly being transformed into multi-functional spaces, where it is possible for a wide range of cultural, leisure and spiritual activities to be developed alongside each other. This tendency is nothing more than a reflection of the conversion of the religious phenomenon into a more post-Fordist tourism product. It also shows how it is difficult to distinguish between cultural tourists or those interested in the act itself, and religious tourists. The lack of definition of the term is evident and makes it difficult to know the ultimate and personal motivation for tourists to go to religious acts, which may be for reasons of spirituality, culture, curiosity or many other motivations.

It has also been shown how difficult it is to obtain data on religious tourism in Spain as there is no uniform statistical source, each site or religious act presents separate data and it is difficult to obtain statistics from ecclesiastic institutions. It is also evident, although we cannot demonstrate it with data, that religious movements, pilgrimages, acts and events are a considerable source of income for the places that organise them. We have shown this for the case of the Sanctuary of Montserrat, the *Camino de Santiago* and *Semana Santa* in Granada. The presence of organising bodies, tour operators and travel agents are very good examples of this flourishing form of tourism.

Although we have studied these examples of religious tourism that are related with Christian traditions, given the cultural richness of our country, in the future there is a need to look at other religions such as Judaism and Islam, and study their acts and the religious repercussions of the same. Examples of new proposals could be the resurgence of Jewish districts in many Spanish cities, for the interest they generate is an interesting but little explored subject, and the increasing phenomenon of Muslim religious expressiveness also deserves detailed study.

It is clear that religious tourism deserves detailed attention from tourism researchers. It is one further expression of cultural tourism and is related to the increasing post-Fordist tourism and diversification of the phenomenon of tourism in our country (Cànoves and Shuett, 2011). Religious tourism is related with such tangible and intangible parts of our heritage as tradition, cultural memory and sentiments. This old-new tourism has much to offer tourists that are looking for increasingly more meaningful cultural visits. In conclusion, religious tourism is not the goose that laid the golden egg, like any post-Fordist form of tourism, but instead has a promising future as a product of emerging cultural tourism.

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