

LANGUAGE TOURISM IN SPAIN AS A CULTURAL ENHANCER IN PATRIMONIAL CITIES: THE CASE OF SALAMANCA AND ALCALÁ DE HENARES

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1. THE CURRENT SITUATION

Cultural tourism in Spain is still only around 10% of the total and so has a high potential for development. To become more competitive with other destinations, cultural tourism could offer the possibility of expanding the market and creating new products that capitalize on natural advantages. This is the case with language tourism, which has a long tradition in countries such as the U.K., France or Germany.

The touristic importance of language is beyond all doubt, due to the lengthy visits of language students and the large selection of language centres spread throughout the country. The issue has been the basis of some government sponsored promotion plans, as well as several conferences and seminars on language as a touristic resource. Similarly, some university research projects have surfaced, although these are still rare.

This form of travel is known as «language tourism», although sometimes the terms «linguistic tourism» or «linguistic visits» are used. «Language tourism» has been more widely accepted and can be defined as the set of activities undertaken during trips and visits for a period of time under a year with the aim of studying and immersing oneself linguistically in a different language.

2. LANGUAGE TOURISM IN SPAIN: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND CURRENT SITUATION

There is a wide variety of centres in Spain that teach Spanish for foreigners, and which are made up of universities, official language schools and private language academies. From 2000 to 2007, the number of such centres went from 379 to 627, with a geographical concentration especially significant in Andalusia, the Madrid Region, Catalonia, Castile and Leon and the Valencia Region. The concentration is even stronger at a provincial level, above all in Madrid, Barcelona, Málaga, Valencia, Salamanca, Seville, Granada, Cádiz and Alicante.

The demand for these courses increased considerably from 1995 to 2007. Disregarding the potential demand (14 million students in the whole world), which is of great importance because the main resource for the existence of this tourism are students of Spanish, real demand has gone from 85,000 language tourists in 1995 to 130,000 in 2000 and almost 240,000 in the year 2007, with annual growth rates of between 7% and 9% from 1995 to 2000 and somewhat higher than 9% between 2000 and 2007.

The regional distribution of the demand reaffirms the importance of Andalusia in this type of tourism, with 62,500 students (26.4%). Next is Castile and Leon (45,400), the Madrid Region (38,900) Catalonia (36,700) and the Valencia Region (26,700). These five Autonomous Regions receive 88.5% of all the demand, which is an increase in participation of more than ten percentage points compared to the year 2000.

The main countries of origin of language tourists in Spain during 2007 were Germany, U.S.A., France, Italy, Benelux and the U.K. Outside Europe, the main countries were Brazil, Canada, Japan and China. In the choice of destination inside Spain, geographical factors are more important than strictly academic ones, given that the city of residence is preferred over the characteristics of the actual teaching centre.

The motivation to do language tourism in Spain is basically personal (78%), followed by academic (17%) and work-related (5%). Interest in the Spanish language and culture is the main type of personal motivation. Another characteristic of the demand is that it is made up of 71% women compared to 29% men and this tendency is mirrored in all nationalities. The main concentration of ages is from 20- 29 in which the percentage of women is even higher than the general figure of 71%.

3. PROMOTION OF LANGUAGE TOURISM AND CREATION OF CULTURAL ROUTES

Since the year 2000, various state plans have been activated for the promotion of language tourism in Spain. At the autonomic level, Castile and Leon stand out with the first and only integral plan to date: to promote the sector of the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language in the area of the Autonomous Communities. In other regions the plans have been more sporadic.

Language takes on a specific importance in those cities which have been declared World Heritage sites, which becomes an added touristic resource. Some routes, like the Spanish Language Road, try to create a cultural itinerary which consists of a series of separate elements that share one thing in common: language. On this route, Salamanca and Alcalá de Henares stand out.

4. LANGUAGE AND THE CITY. LANGUAGE AS A TOURISTIC RESOURCE IN SALAMANCA AND ALCALÁ DE HENARES

These two cities are major inland tourist destinations due to the extraordinary variety and richness of their heritage buildings. Added to this is the significant tourist activity centred around the teaching of Spanish for foreigners, which is not only done by the universities but also by private centres. More than 25,000 language tourists from 69

different countries visited the Castilian-Leon city in 2009. In Alcalá de Henares the annual figure is much more modest, at around 3,000 students, most of whom are catered for by the university, in contrast to Salamanca.

Language in Salamanca gives added value to its historical heritage and long humanist tradition. There are 20 language teaching centres dedicated to the teaching of Spanish for foreigners. No less than 70% of these private schools are recognized by the Cervantes Institute and they are all located in the historical and monumental part of the city. A large number of these schools were started between 1990 and 1999, during the most popular period of language tourism in the city. 85% of the students come from 10 countries, above all Germany and the U.S.A. There are some variations from year to year but for the most part, those are the main countries of origin. However, in Salamanca, the percentage of some non-European countries is higher (Brazil, Japan and South Korea), given their greater international renown in learning the Spanish language.

Alcala de Henares has become the second regional centre of language tourism after Madrid city and it has a series of historical resources of unquestionable cultural interest for language tourism as well as the fundamental role that the university plays in the teaching of Spanish. Whatever the case, it is vital for the city to promote this type of tourism, overcome the strong competition presented by Madrid, and increase the number of teaching centres on offer and co-ordinate the promotion of the language more effectively.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Spain should make more progress in the achievement of a new model of tourism with complementary offers based on cultural attractions. Language tourism has great potential and in recent years has grown significantly, above all in the major cities of the country and in historical urban areas, due to the greater number of teaching centres on offer, the cultural attractions and, in coastal areas, the added attraction of the beach.

The benefits are varied. At the socio-economic level, a high level of income is generated from the longer visits of language tourists compared to «classic» tourists. At the urban-cultural level, this tourism contributes to economic growth and promotes the regeneration of areas and the renovation of emblematic buildings in the long term. In addition, it re-enforces the image of cultural cities and their international renown. At the level of tourism, the benefits are also important because the language creates new opportunities for tourist diversification, increase in the use of cultural services, improvement of the urban image and a rise in complementary activities. For all of these reasons, it is necessary to promote this type of activity even more and recognize the value of Spanish as a resource for tourism, the country's economy and the regions and cities because of the strong links between language and culture, language and the city and language and tourism.

