

THE PRIMITIVE WAY TO COMPOSTELA THROUGH ASTURIAS. A STUDY FROM A TOURISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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The study aims at exploring the Primitive Way to Compostela through the Community of Asturias in Spain. Despite representing the origins of St. James' Way, it is still one of the most unknown roads and for this reason this study is fundamental to deepen the analysis of St. James' Way.

This analysis is carried out in several different councils of Asturias: Grado (Grado y Cornellana); Tineo (Salas, La Espina y Tineo); Allande (Pola de Allande); and Grandas de Salime. All of them are rural areas and for this reason Oviedo is not included in this analysis due to its heterogeneous nature as an urban area and the difficulties that can arise if we compare different types of territories.

One of the main research objectives is to study the most important aspects of the specific and non-specific tourism supply of the Primitive Way to Compostela through Asturias. The other objective is to identify the relationship between the different agents (public, private and civil society) involved in the development of this touristic itinerary.

The lack of previous studies and a well-defined methodology for its analysis make this research a challenging attempt in tourism research. We implemented a triangulation methodology, based on a mix of both quantitative and qualitative techniques for the analysis of tourism supply and the interrelation between the different agents in the area of study.

As far as qualitative techniques are concerned, we used an unstructured in-depth interview to explore the public agents' opinions about the road and another special sociologist methodology called Social Network Analysis (SNA) to analyze the social relationships between the agents of the Primitive road. Therefore we identified and achieved data about the tourism activities carried out on the road, the different roles played by the main agents of the road and the relationships between them.

In relation to the quantitative technique, we carried on a survey by phone to inquire the private sector to identify their main characteristics, the relation of this sector with the Primitive road and the pilgrims and the evaluation of the road infrastructures.

This research on the touristic supply of the Primitive Road based on secondary and mostly primary data sources shows the following conclusions:

- The history of the Primitive Road represents the origins of the pilgrimage to Santiago and the beginning of the French Road. However, both ways went through a completely different touristic development and increase. At present there are two different models: a very developed and quite saturated model, represented by the French Way and another model, which is still undergoing through a touristic development, represented by the Primitive way.
- Public infrastructures directly related to the Primitive Road like signposting, road surface, are in a perfect condition; the public network of hostels is quite wide, despite the need expressed by public authorities to increase it, the lack of supply is met by the other touristic accommodations.
- Although there are data of pilgrims that arrive at Santiago from the Primitive Road, there is still a lack of information. Only the pilgrims arriving at Santiago are recorded, whereas the data of the pilgrims who don't arrive in Santiago or walked the road on opposite direction aren't recorded. Moreover, the information about touristic supply is insufficient and the entrepreneurs showed a very small participation, since only 35% belong to the touristic association of the Primitive Road. The actual scenery is quite paradoxical: on one hand the public administration is carrying on plans for the marketing and promotion of the road but on the other hand there is no study on the real economic impacts generated by tourism.
- There is a network of relations between all stakeholders, even if not always efficient. The relation is stronger among those stakeholders that are directly involved in the development of the road like local public administration, local associations for residents and entrepreneurs. These are defined by Fuentes and Muñoz (2009) "basic stakeholders of a destination" those agents that are directly related to the destination. It is interesting, in addition, to analyse the actual relation between "basic stakeholders" and "secondary stakeholders" (external interest groups directly related to the destination) in Asturias region.
- The volume of small companies, both restaurants and accommodations, is quite similar. This feature reflects the current entrepreneurial tourism system which is a highly atomized system.
- During the qualitative research controversial opinions rose up: on one hand public administration stated that the hospitality sector wasn't interested in the Primitive Road and never asked about it, however on the other hand the 80% of restaurants and 70% of hotels welcome pilgrims during the year and around two thirds of establishments share out information about the itinerary and therefore promote it.
- The majority of the interviewed establishments assessed above the average the good quality of security and healthcare services, two important aspects for a tourism destination.
- Accessibility is still a problem for the destination, since the conditions of infrastructures and road access was the least assessed item.

Hence the Primitive Road is a heterogeneous itinerary (Cazaux, 2011) with a high potential for its development thanks to the special features of the towns along the way, to

the potential demand that it can arise and to its supply that showed a larger participation in the development of the itinerary.

However the research points out several lacks in the complementary tourist services like the maintenance service of the road or the marketing and promotion actions that should involve more the coordination of different stakeholders in the itinerary.

For this reason the public administration, both local and regional, should improve the current private and public coordination to carry out one-way actions for promotion or maintenance of the itinerary.

The Primitive Road should take advantage of its resources (nature, landscape, ethnological heritage, unknown places...), of its weaknesses (lack of knowledge of its demand and its insufficient visitor reception capacity) and of other itinerary problems like the French Way (mass use and acculturation...) so that it could avoid them in the future. For all this it is necessary to carry out a Plan for the Development of the Primitive Road following the model of other regional community like the Basque Country.

