

## The socio-economic impact of cultural itineraries: The Way of Saint James and other pilgrimage routes

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Economic, social and territorial thinking has notably evolved to turn the pilgrimages and cultural trips that follow an itinerary into new subjects of analysis and reflection. Pilgrimage was initially a classic concept linked to a specific religious practice and a traditional set of beliefs but it now attracts and mobilises tens of thousands of people around the world who have a wide range of attitudes towards pilgrimage (Coleman and Eade, 2004; Lois González, 2013). It can involve groups of men and women who, regardless of their beliefs, political or ideological positions, decide to start a journey to reconnect with nature, the landscape and enjoy new life experiences. All this can involve slow and patterned mobility, where people take their time to travel (Greenia, 2014). This particular mobility benefits some industries, such as those related to sports and trekking activities, increasing sales of clothing and footwear, driving the demand for high energy food in addition to the physical preparation. In fact, it represents a new form of collective behaviour rooted in contemporary societies, which seeks to break with the stressful urban everyday life and daily routine, in favour of resting and reconnecting with sensory experiences as well as having time for reflection (Lois González, Castro and Lopez, 2016; Urry, 2000). The sociological notion of the tourist gaze reaches its full dimension here. Furthermore, cultural itineraries favour local development processes in populations located along a line, an axis that must be travelled slowly (Pileri and Moscarelli, 2020; Urry and Larsen, 2011). As a result, they benefit many peripheral and declining rural territories, promoting their economic diversification, and generating employment and wealth.

The concepts of 'pilgrimage' and 'pilgrim' have changed completely in recent times. An old road or route to a city or a sanctuary, or a network of localities linked by tradition, history or an important cultural product, can be the main reason to walk, cycle or travel quietly through a territory that is not very crowded (Lois González, Castro and Lopez, 2016; Morinis, 1992). Reinterpreted cultural itineraries and pilgrimage present an opportunity for spaces that have suffered urbanisation and economic concentration processes to become attractive, and the attractions of the places can be immediately translated into profitability (Fernández, Fernández Méndez and Riveiro, 2021). For their part, contemporary pilgrims are mostly urban, professional and relatively educated. By walking they seek to disconnect from their daily lives, reconnecting with the world of experiences, rest and peaceful pleasure. They are no longer sinners in need of forgiveness but hedonistic people who try to break with the stress and pace of today's world (Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Eade and Sallnow, 1991). As in the past, the pilgrimage route is a metaphor for life, and the completion of the itinerary or the Way implies liminality, a rite of

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passage from one period of existence to another. Likewise, *communitas*, meeting other people and feeling like a member of a group with similar concerns who have decided to break with the monotony of daily life (Turner, 1974; Turner and Turner, 1978).

In this contemporary renaissance of pilgrimage routes or in the creation of the *Cultural Itinerary* brand, the Way of St. James has been the first unquestionable example of the new meaning that this cultural product has acquired in the West and, more specifically, in Europe. Its recovery, or at least its rescue from oblivion, was thanks to a series of mainly religious (the vindication of the Church for the masses) and political decisions (firstly, by the Franco regime and then by democratic Spain in need of European support), that made it relevant again (Lois González, 2013; Lopez, Lois González and Castro, 2017). However, the determining element was the decision by the Autonomous Region of Galicia to promote tourism in a highly competitive environment. The Xunta de Galicia ended up by delimiting the Way, erecting a complete network of public hostels and launching a promotional campaign for the rather original and unprecedented *Xacobeo* destination (Pichel-Pichel, 2004; Xunta de Galicia, 1996). It created a modern cultural itinerary, with important symbolic recognition by United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Council of Europe. It also established a remarkable framework of institutional collaboration with the central government and the city of Santiago de Compostela, which resulted in the creation and consensual operation of the Santiago Consortium (aimed at the rehabilitation and beautification of the city) (Lois González and Santos, 2015; Turismo de Santiago de Compostela, 2004). Parallel to Galicia's initiative, other Autonomous Regions in need of improving their tourist attraction and distinguishing themselves abroad, also undertook campaigns to attract pilgrims. This involved reviving their heritage and improving the Way's surroundings, from Navarra or Aragon to Castile and Leon and Asturias passing through La Rioja, the Basque Country and Cantabria.

The example of the Way has led to axes of local and tourist development based on a line. This model has not only materialised in the Jacobean route, but in the mountainous prefecture of Wakayama in Japan, the Kumano Kodo, in Mexico with the Camino Real de la Tierra Adentro, in Sweden and Norway with the route to the Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim and, of course, in Italy with the Via Francigena. The activity of these routes supports the economic life of multiple, often old and declining localities creating business opportunities and forming a fairly original path towards development and wealth generation (Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Pileri and Moscarelli, 2020). The Way of St. James has resurrected dying villages and towns in León, Palencia and Lugo, and has served as a model in Tuscany, Lombardy, Queretaro and the vicinity of Koyasan. In addition, it is not only a question of activating the economy, since it revives social life, and intervenes in the conservation and improvement of heritage.

Finally, cultural itineraries and especially the Way of St. James are associated with concepts that today have been revalued. These concepts encourage the good management of an economy that is more respectful of the environment while promoting a collective feeling of quality of life and wellness. Also, the routes are a healthy travel option, since it implies exercising and is seen as having very limited risks of disease or infection. In addition, these are sustainable axes by definition. The routes have been maintained for generations, for centuries, without noticeable changes. They are also usually associated with landscapes that are quite consistent with bioclimatic conditions, well-ordered and neat spaces. Finally, the itineraries maintain ancestral ecological balances, and their degradation would mean a significant loss of attractiveness for the route and, to a certain extent, lead it to a crisis (Creswell and Merriman, 2011; Maddrell and della Dora, 2013).

This special issue includes a total of twelve articles of diverse origin and authorship, with a majority of texts referring to Spain, and with outstanding contributions made from Italy and in one case from Germany. Although the researchers come from a variety of academic backgrounds – economics, geography, sociology, anthropology, political science and urban planning – they all agree on analysing the socio-economic impact of cultural itineraries and pilgrimage routes.

The importance of the Way of St James has meant that most of the articles included in this issue analyse different questions related to the route. Five articles consider the whole Way of Saint James or the pilgrims arriving to Galicia for their analysis. Rossella Moscarelli examines the amount of public

funds used to relaunch the Way over the years and also discusses the impact of tourism on the economic development of the territory. Iria Caamaño Franco and María Andrade-Suárez analyse the construction of the image of the Camino de Santiago and the Xacobeo based on their examination of its media coverage in the Spanish press. The results of this study underline that the cultural, tourist and post-secular dimensions of the route are highlighted by the media.

Noting that the COVID-19 has altered global relations, territorial balances and mobility, Lucrezia Lopez and Rubén C. Lois González examine the impacts of COVID-19 on the Way of Saint James, making interesting reflections about the future of the route in the post-COVID 19 era.

Mainly focusing on the arrivals of pilgrims to the Galician region, the article written by Manuel González-Gómez and Xerardo Pereiro examines the flow of pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela, who set out from Portugal, as well as the international tourist flow to Galicia. They underline that the number of international pilgrims arriving to Santiago has increased in the last few years and note the importance of pilgrims from the Portuguese route. Pere Mercadé-Melé and Jesús Barreal Pernas use latent class model analysis to segment the international tourists with religious motivations who arrive to Galicia. This analysis distinguishes six groups of tourists with significant differences in their length of stay and daily expenditure, helping touristic companies to create different market niches depending on the tourist profile.

Two additional articles focus on two other routes which comprise the Way of Saint James – the Nós Way and the St James' Primitive Way in Asturias. Noelia Araújo Vila, José Antonio Fraiz Brea and Diego Rodríguez-Toubes Muñiz examine the motives that lead tourists to undertake the Nós Way of St. James and the role played by tourism consumption. They found that leisure is the main motivation for undertaking this Way. Marta Magadán Díaz and Jesús I. Rivas García assess perceptions of the economic and social impact of the St James' Primitive Way in some towns within the region of Asturias. They show that the route enhances awareness of the heritage, wealth and tradition of the localities and also find that more cultural events were taking place in the towns crossed by the route.

Although the analysis of the Way of Saint James plays a key role in this issue, researchers have also paid attention to other different cultural itineraries in Spain and Italy. Francisco José Morales Yago focuses his research on the Caravaca de la Cruz and Levante Way. This route crosses the region of Murcia and is considered the first cultural spiritual route in Spain. This researcher highlights the potential of Caravaca de la Cruz as a tourism destination, pointing out some actions to consolidate the city as a solid destination. In a similar study, Ana Moreno-Lobato, José Manuel Hernández-Mogollón and Elide Di-Clemente examine the potential of the Emperor Charles V network of cultural routes as a tourism destination, underlining the higher level of involvement by the private sector in the promotion of these routes.

As for cultural itineraries in Italy, Anna Trono and Valentina Castronuovo point out the role played by the Via Francigena del Sud route in conserving and enhancing cultural and landscape heritage in Puglia and Campania. They also explore the role of the itinerary in promoting economic activities and local products and highlight some challenges involved in consolidating the route. Gavino Mariotti, Maria Veronica Camerada, Salvatore Lampreu and Silvia Carus also explore the touristic potential of religious routes, focusing on the Way of Santu Jacu, which crosses the Italian region of Sardinia. They underline the role of the route as an instrument for promoting sustainable and responsible tourism which respects local cultures.

Finally, Mariano P. Barbato examines the relationships and the power bias within the triangle of place-makers, merchants, and pilgrims in two pilgrimage destinations: Rome, during Pope Francis' Jubilee and Altötting after Pope Benedict XVI's resignation.

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