Pilgrims – Potential Peril or Promising Potential for Sustainability?
Sustainability Challenges in the Management of the Camino de Santiago

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Brief Overview

• Introduction
• Methodology
• Sustainable development for pilgrimage routes and management within it
• Major sustainability challenges along the Camino, solutions and suggestions
• Conclusion
Camino de Santiago or the Way of St. James
Highlights of the Camino: The Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela
Highlights of the Camino: Modern practices

The modern symbol of the way

Compostela
Pilgrims finishing the Camino 1985-2011 (thousand people)

Note: Archives of Santiago de Compostela (2005, 2010) and Pilgrim’s Office in Santiago de Compostela (2012)
Camino as a Tourism System

SOCIETY – regional policies

ECONOMY – Camino as a tourism product

ENVIRONMENT: - natural - cultural - social

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Camino as a SUSTAINABLE Tourism Product

Indicators of sustainable development for tourism destinations: A guidebook (UNWTO, 2004):

✓ “optimal use of ENVIRONMENTAL resources <…>, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity”;
✓ viable, long-term ECONOMIC operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation;
✓ secure respect of the SOCIO-CULTURAL authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.
METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research

- Literature review
  - Theoretical Framework
  - Identification of main sustainability challenges
- Web ethnography
  - Identification of main sustainability challenges

Discussion
METHODOLOGY: web ethnography

- also known as netnography, webnography, online ethnography and virtual ethnography approach
- application of ethnographic methods to an online context (Hine, 2000; Howard, 2002; Kozinets, 2002)
- web 2.0 platform selected – “Camino de Santiago de Compostela. Where past pilgrims share and future pilgrims learn”
- the technique is mostly exploratory and descriptive: search with keywords and manual analysis
Pilgrimage and route-based tourism delineation (Bremer, 2005):

- the spatial approach (pilgrims and other tourists occupying the same space)
- the historical approach (the evolution of relationship between religious travel and tourism)
- the cultural approach (pilgrimage and tourism as modern practices)

Ancient and modern pilgrimage: El Camino Frances (Morpeth, 2007)

On policy implications for redeveloping and promoting the Camino de Santiago for both sacred and secular uses
PILGRIM VS. TOURIST

- Pilgrimage as a type of tourism (Fleischer, 2000; Olsen & Timothy, 2006)
- Cultural tourists, ethical pilgrims and so called “true” pilgrims (Murray & Graham, 1997)
- Religious and secular pilgrimages (Digance, 2006)

**Pilgrim-tourist continuum (Smith, 1992)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pilgrimage</th>
<th>Religious Tourism</th>
<th>Tourism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Pious Pilgrim</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Pilgrim &gt; Tourist</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Pilgrim = Tourist</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Tourist &gt; Pilgrim</td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Secular Tourist</td>
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CAMINO DE SANTIAGO: Environmental context


- Camino de Santiago is a quintessential example of 'green' tourism
- rather small degradation from pilgrims flows (like footpath erosion) is reimbursed by tourism expenditure along the route
CAMINO DE SANTIAGO: Environmental context

Other problems:

- deterioration of natural and rural pathways
- negative impact on old historical buildings and streets
- water shortages, waste accumulation and land degradation
- overall contamination and commercialization of some routes (Prado, 2005)

Only 12,61% are from Galicia itself!
Solutions

• monitoring numbers of pilgrims and creation of waiting lists if necessary
• promotion of less popular trails in order to avoid high concentration of travellers
• ADEGA (the association for the ecological protection in Galicia) has published a “Best practices guide” (a brochure “Become Eco-Pilgrim”)
• environmental impact assessment
Webetnography: environmental context

- Introduction of a weight limit on backpacks/cases/trolleys (5 kilograms limit or restrict the weight of their backpack to 10% of body weight)
- Promotion of less popular routes
- Lack of public toilets in some stages of the Camino
  - Try to find the toilet facilities
  - Carry a handkerchief and wash it each evening or carry a ziplock bag for the used toilet paper
  - Please do not attempt to bury toilet paper along the Camino.
  - Please bury or burn the toilet paper
- Use biodegradable wipes
  - Choose alternative transportation modes
CAMINO DE SANTIAGO:
Economic context

- unlimited business opportunities for small and medium enterprises alike → additional source of income and tax revenue and created new job opportunities
- expansion of services and the development of infrastructure
- increase in prices for locals
- expressed dependence on tourism flow

Dependence on tourism and inflation call for establishing policies that not only encourage the development of tourism infrastructure, but also estimate the desired rate of development and limit the number of tourist establishments, according to the carrying capacity.
### Webetnography: economic context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Commercial corruption”: offer of guided tours, vending machines; cheapening of the experience, reducing the Camino to a nice trek;</th>
<th>Restriction of commercial offers along the Camino and limited use of advertising</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tradition being turned into commerce, e.g. Queimada (typical Galician drink) offered for money, etc.</td>
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<td>Economic middle term goals</td>
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<td>Artificiality of the experience</td>
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CAMINO DE SANTIAGO: Socio-cultural context

A unique experience comprising physical endeavour, cultural heritage and spiritual awakening

1800 buildings, both religious and secular, of a great historic and cultural interest (UNESCO, n/d)

- heightened community spirit
  vs
- commercialization and loss of authentic meaning

Restricting the use of advertisements and providing support to people and communities that preserve traditions and cultural artifacts
Webetnography: socio-cultural context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overuse of signs</th>
<th>Cathedral should provide guides. The aim is to limit/reduce the damage currently being wrought by uncontrolled access.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graphitty</td>
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<td>'Unescapeable' asphalt ruins the experience</td>
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<td>The noise and disturbance to church services, e.g. Many times when the botafueiro (the smoking pot) is in use, the audience starts applauding.</td>
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<td>Damage to fragile elements of ancient interiors:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- placing hands on the column</td>
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<td>- banging head on the column</td>
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Conclusion

“Tourism is not a ‘smokeless’ industry”
R. Sharpley (2009/2010, p.9)

- Challenges are inescapable considering the growing popularity of the Camino

- Suggested solution to reduce negative impacts resultant from high tourism flow is redistribution of tourism flows and limiting access

- Challenges directly related to the management (overuse of signs, lack of public toilets) should be addressed by the authorities

- Education of tourists should not be underestimated, both in its physical (no touching of ancient artefacts) and mental (no disturbing during religious rituals) aspects.
REFERENCES (1/2)

Camino de Santiago de Compostela. Where past pilgrims share and future pilgrims learn. (n/d) URL: http://www.caminodesantiago.me Accessed on October 29, 2012
REFERENCES (2/2)


Thank you for your attention!