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

Camin
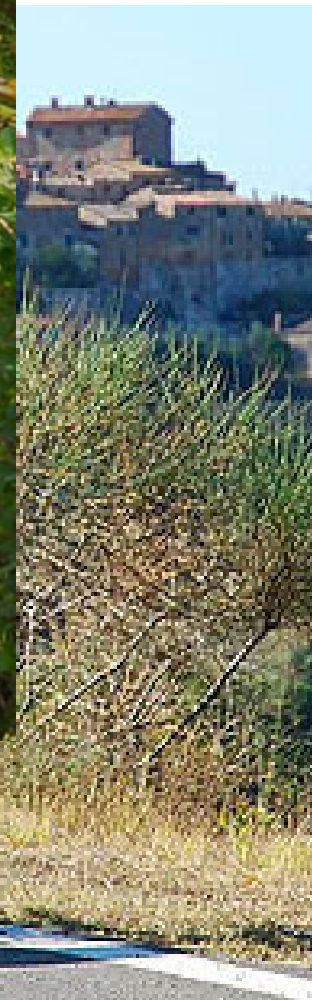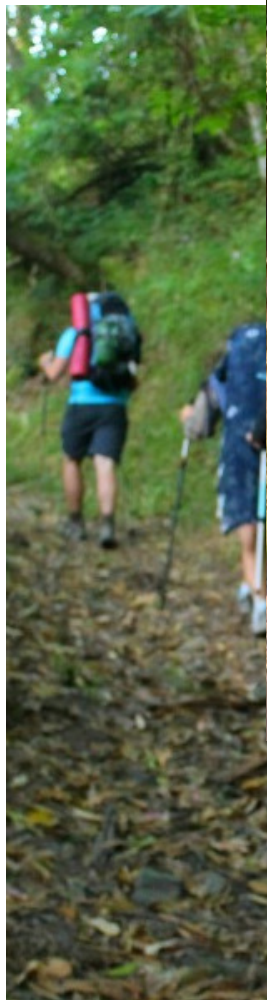
Highlights of the Camino:
The Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela

Highlights of the Camino:
Modern practices
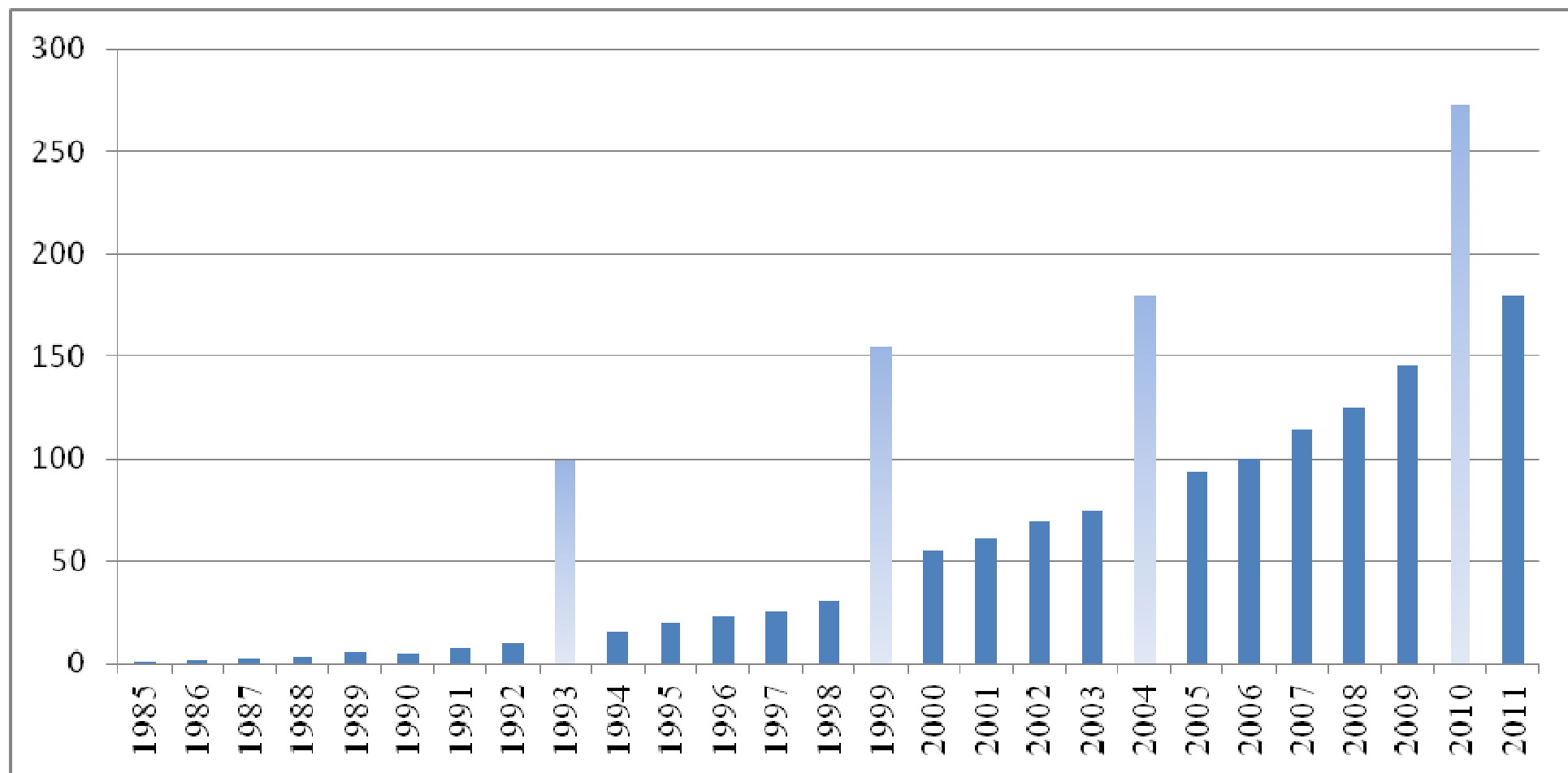

The modern symbol of the way

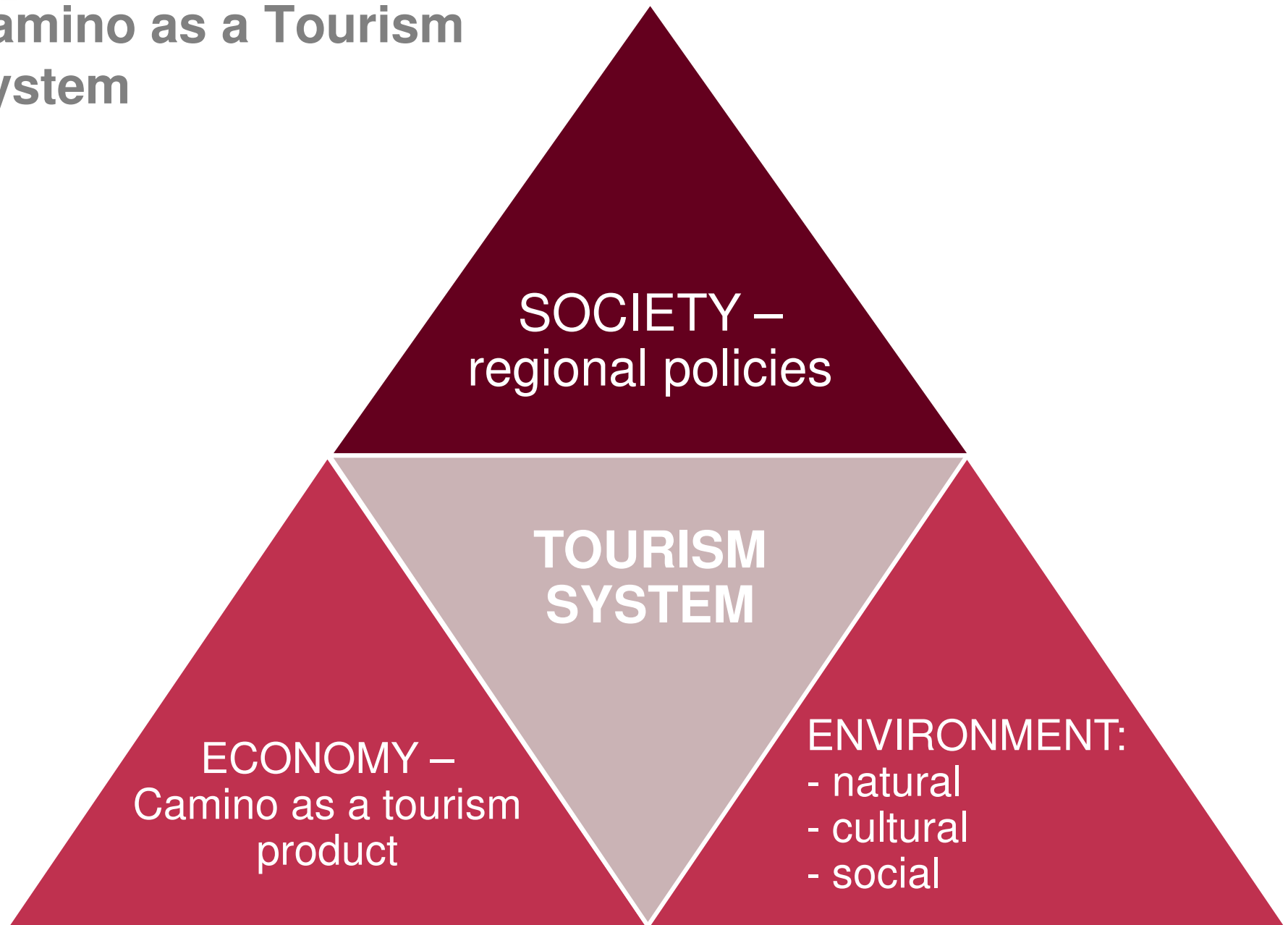Compostela

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

TOURISM
SYSTEM

ECONOMY –
Camino as a tourism
product

ENVIRONMENT:
- natural
- cultural
- social

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
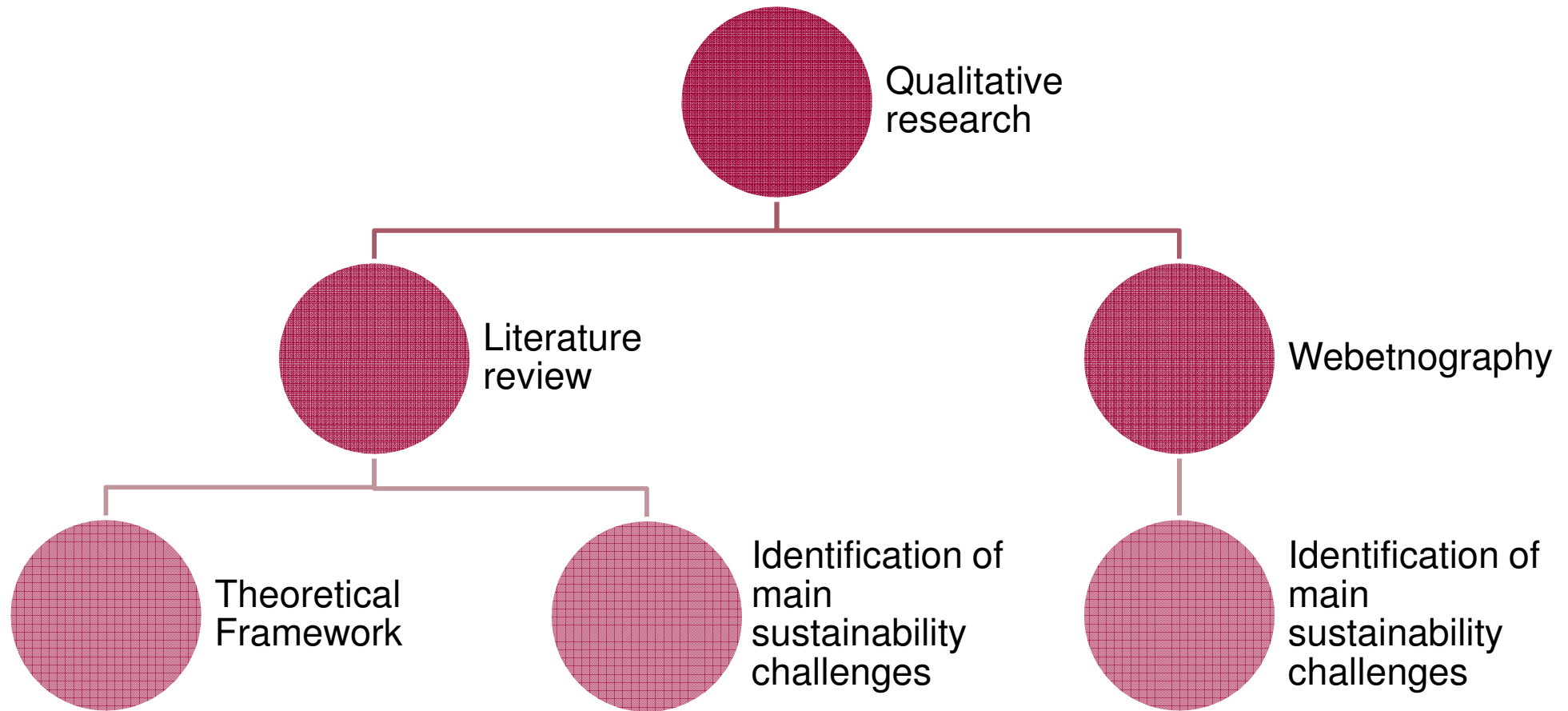
METHODOLOGY: webetnography

- 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

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR PILGRIMAGE ROUTES AND MANAGEMENT WITHIN IT

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)

Pilgrimage		Religious Tourism		Tourism
A	B	C	D	E
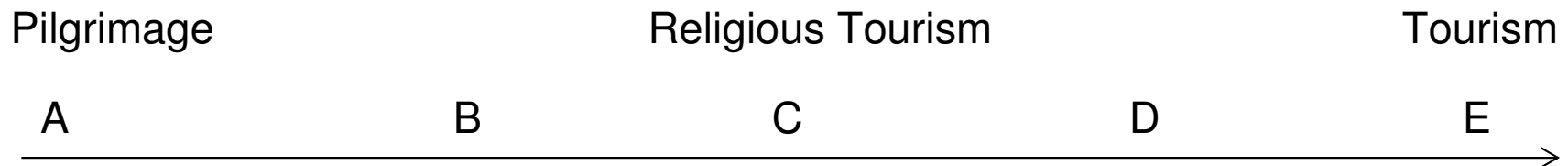
A. Pious Pilgrim
B. Pilgrim > Tourist
C. Pilgrim = Tourist
D. Tourist > Pilgrim
E. Secular Tourist

CAMINO DE SANTIAGO:
Environmental context
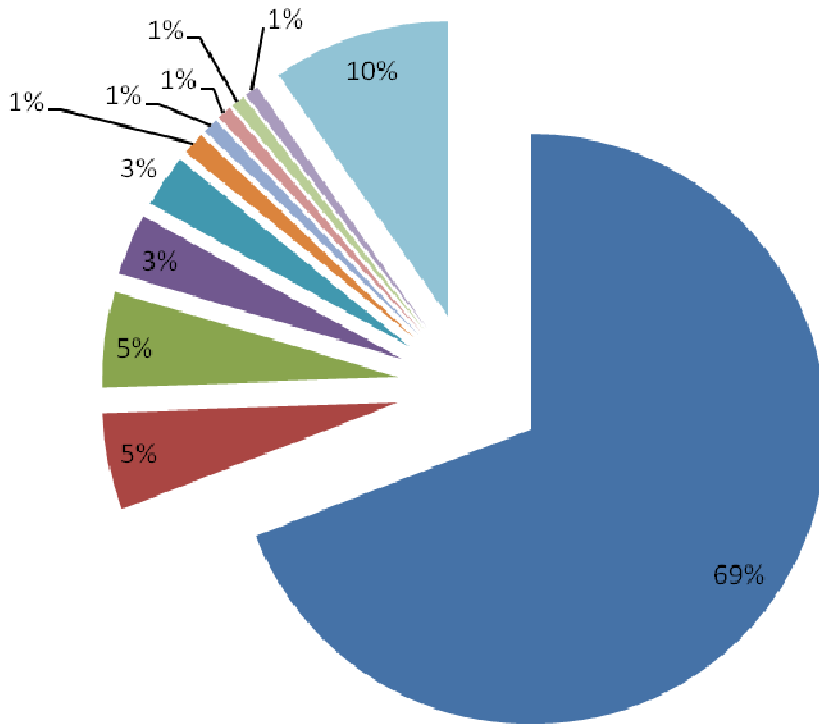
M.Murray and B. Graham (2007)

- 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

Legend: Spain, Germany, Italy, France, Portugal, USA, Ireland, Brazil, Holland, Poland, Other Countries

Pie chart values: 69%, 10%, 5%, 5%, 3%, 3%, 1%, 1%, 1%, 1%, 1%
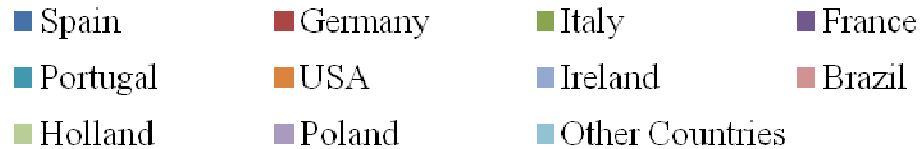
Other problems:

• 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

Monitoring and control
Diversification of the offer
Awareness

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

"Commercial corruption": offer of guided tours, vending machines; cheapening of the experience, reducing the Camino to a nice trek;	
Tradition being turned into commerce, e.g. Queimada (typical Galician drink) offered for money, etc.	Restriction of commercial offers along the Camino and limited use of advertising
Economic middle term goals	
Artificiality of the experience	

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

Overuse of signs	
Graphitty	
'Unescapeable' asphalt ruins the experience	
The noise and disturbance to church services, e.G. Many times when the botafueiro (the smoking pot) is in use, the audience starts applauding. *Damage to fragile elements of ancient interiors:* • *placing hands on the column* • *banging head on the column*	Cathedrals should provide the guides. The aim is to limit/reduce the damage currently being wrought by uncontrolled access.

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.

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