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Sustainability and visitor management in tourist historic cities: the case of Santiago de Compostela, Spain

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ABSTRACT

Tourism has a leading role in heritage cities and this implies a major challenge. The overall objective of this paper is to evaluate the performance of tourism planning and management with the view of achieving sustainable tourism in the historic center of Santiago de Compostela, Spain. The study addresses topics collected during a long research process of more than 10 years, such as strategic tourism plans, the implementation of quality management systems for tourism, the tourist supply and the regulation of flows. The results show a destination that has introduced alternatives to improve the tourism experience and diversify its offer beyond the Camino de Santiago. There is also growing concern in promoting the sustainability of the historic center. From our point of view, the strengthening of synergies between the different agents involved in the tourism sector of the city has been a key factor in dealing with this situation. However, in this sense, the main problem which is decongesting the tourist flows to the cathedral and its surroundings is still unresolved.

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Introduction

Heritage cities are a major tourist attraction, which generates flows of visitors occasionally that threaten the sustainability of these spaces (Santos & Lois, 2005; Timothy, 2011). This is the case of the Old Town of Santiago de Compostela, especially during the summer period or every Jubilee Year. Since 1985 Santiago de Compostela has been a World Heritage Site and the destination of the most important religious and cultural movement of the Middle Ages: the pilgrimage along the Way of Saint James. Its cathedral has become a major focus for swarms of visitors, which has led to some research to regulate its carrying capacity in an effort to ensure its conservation without diminishing tourism potential (Santos & Pena, 2014).

Despite the constant desire of political actors, tourism managers and business owners to increase the number of visitors in historic cities, it is important to be aware of the level of overcrowding of the destination. To avoid the negative effects of uncontrolled mass tourism, with a negative impact for both tourists and for the local population, it is necessary to understand that the tourist reception capacity is limited. The concept of carrying capacity (Massiani & Santoro, 2012; Van der Borg, 2004) is the cause of debates between politicians and the industry, since the regulation of the number of visitors is interpreted by business owners as a decrease in tourists and therefore, a decline in revenue (Troitino, 2003). However, this is about proper planning aimed at the management of flows and

therefore distributing tourists in time and place to counteract the possible irreversible effects that may result from tourism in the long run (Pérez Guilarte, 2014).

The success of a heritage listed destination depends on the combination of cultural, tourist and political regulations. In historic cities tourism, urban development and cultural heritage planning should be developed jointly, since they constitute the basic pillars for integrated urban recovery and sustainable tourism (Santos & Lois, 2005). The main objective of this article is the assessment of tourism planning and management in Santiago de Compostela, in order to encourage sustainability in its historic center.

Theoretical background

Without a doubt, the historical centers with their buildings, squares, fountains, statues or archaeological sites, are the most attractive part of the cities from a touristic point of view (Timothy, 2011). Ashworth and Tunbridge (2000) developed the concept of Tourist Historic Cities (THCs) as areas where urban structure, architecture and artifacts are used to create a place-based heritage product.

At a social level, historic cities are defined by their heterogeneity and have been marked by transformation processes as time passes by. For example, initially the middle and upper classes abandoned the historic centers paving the way for the settlement of the working classes and consequently the degradation and marginalization of these areas (Santos & Lois, 2005). However, the historic center's tertiary sector and revitalization processes have led to the return of the upper classes because of the prestige of residing there. This behavior is known as gentrification, defined by Borghi, Mariott, and Safarzadeh (2011) as the process by which middle or upper class people establish their residence in traditionally working class areas, thus changing their character.

In the majority of historic cities, heritage tourism is located in the city center, ignoring new shopping areas, residential areas, business centers or industrial estates located in the outskirts or in suburban residential districts (Timothy, 2011). In some cases, this behavior results in the overcrowding of main squares and areas surrounding major attractions, causing the deterioration of the place and the experience. To avoid such situations in historic cities, tourism should be following sustainable development models, further than only ensuring the protection of heritage (Cohen-Hattab, 2013; Mercie, 2010).

When referring to sustainable cultural tourism, terms, such as cultural heritage management, heritage planning and heritage consumption have emerged (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000; MacKay, 2001; Manning, Valliere, Wang, Lawson, & Newman, 2002). Tourism management strategies that face the problem of how to deal with sustainability limits have been described by several authors (Butler, 2010; Landorf, 2009; McCool & Lime, 2001; Russo & Van der Borg, 2002). The idea that sustainable tourism in historic sites is closely related to the carrying capacity (physical, social, economic, environmental and perceptual) has been reinforced by several authors (Barrera, Castillo, & Azevedo, 2014; Cimnaghi & Mussini, 2015; García, 2000; García, 2003; Massiani & Santoro, 2012; Troitino, 2003; Van der Borg, 2004).

The concept of tourism capacity in general, as well as the more specific concept of tourism carrying capacity, has gone through a process of refinement from a single criteria measurement toward a multidimensional definition (Massiani & Santoro, 2012). The reception capacity has four dimensions (Troitiño, 2003): physical, economic, social and cultural. The physical capacity establishes the number of visitors which affect the environment and the natural resources. The economic capacity sets the limit by which imbalances occur in conjunction with other functions of the historic city. Social capacity is associated with the volume of visitors that leads residents to perceive tourism as an invasion. Cultural capacity is related to the trivialization of culture and the loss of meaning and identity.

Whether in cases of a specific site or an entire town (or part of it), capacity issues are often central to several European destinations, where in many cases actions have already been put in place to manage, control, diffuse (in space and time) visitors. Such a process is not always easily implemented.

Capacity issues often have a strong political and economic dimension as they affect perceptions about growth prospects and bring considerations of economic costs and community impacts (Coccossis, 2013).

For managing visitor flows, different measures can be found in works by several authors (Barrera et al., 2014; Coccossis, 2013; García, 2000; Massiani & Santoro, 2012; Troitino, 2003; Xiaoru, Fang, & Kaixuan, 2013). Among these measures accessibility and mobility actions can be found, such as traffic regulations, signage, limits to free access or to specific activities, concentration or dispersion of tourist flows and pressures, and land use/spatial planning measures. Other tools are economic, such as pricing, taxes and incentive schemes, or organizational, as in the cases of booking systems, information management, education, training and market control.

The historic city has a cultural dimension, thanks to its secular legacy based on the identity and the collective heritage of a community. It also has an economic dimension, related to an emerging vision of heritage and culture, making it an engine for development (De la Calle & García, 2016). However, the religious dimension is also relevant. At religious sites that host significant numbers of visitors, touristic and religious perspectives engage in a symbiotic reciprocity that makes certain sites both sacred religious places and appealing travel destinations (Bremer, 2006). This convergence of religious/sacred and tourist/secular space, however, adds a complexity to traditional management practices at sacred sites (Olsen, 2006). The most important challenge to be faced by managers in the case of religious heritage is to achieve compatibility and the approach between its sacred vision and the secular viewpoint of cultural tourists (Shackley, 2005).

In order to promote a sustainable coexistence of religious and tourism uses, cooperative tourism planning between all stakeholders involved should be the goal (Timothy, 1998). Government organizations, urban planners, local and regional tourism managers, cultural managers, regional economic development agencies and state-sponsored historical societies, are major stakeholders in terms of influencing how religious sites function (Olsen, 2006). However, this cooperation can be difficult because tourism is frequently influenced by local power relationships which favor the political or economic elite (Sharpley, 2000). Incompatibility between the goals of large-scale tourism operations and the goals of other stakeholders is also another problematic factor (du Cros, 2001).

Likewise, when talking about synergies between different territorial actors, the local population must be mentioned. This is one of the most widely discussed parameters in recent years in the discourse on the preservation and sustainability of tourism management (Jones & Evans, 2012; Landorf, 2009; Lombardi, Porter, Barber, & Rogers, 2011; Lussetyowati, 2015; Nyseth & Sognnaes, 2013). Policies for sustainable tourism, especially in inhabited historic cities of social and urban sensitivities, strive to focus on interdependence between representatives of the tourism industry and representatives of the local community (Cohen-Hattab, 2013).

The historic center of Santiago de Compostela

Santiago de Compostela is the capital of the Autonomous Region of Galicia, which is located in the northwest of Spain (Figure 1). The city has a population of 95,671 inhabitants¹ (IGE, 2013). However, it has great international recognition, since medieval times, for being the end of the Camino de Santiago, one of the main pilgrimage routes of Christianity. The significance of this route is prized for its prevalence in time, although it is not only influenced by religious motivations.

The historic center of Santiago de Compostela was declared a World Heritage Site in 1985 and is the main protagonist of the city. Its area is 2 km² (Figure 2) where 12,319 inhabitants reside (Council of Santiago de Compostela, 2014). Between the 1960s and 1980, this space suffered a decline in its classic tertiary functions and its population values (aging, feminization and loss of residents). However, the transfer of the political and administrative capital of Galicia to Santiago in 1985 led the local government to adopt a series of measures aimed at the protection and recovery of the historic center (Aldrey, Santos, & Pazos, 2009).



Figure 1. Geographical location of Santiago de Compostela. Source: Own work.

For the last ten years, Santiago de Compostela has received more than 1 million annual visitors, with the exception of 2015 and 2016, with 752,367 and 820,304 visitors, respectively (INE, 2017). Despite this decrease in the number of visitors, the increase in the number of overnight stays in both years should be noted, with 2016 being the first non-holy year in which overnight stays exceeded 1,300,000, reaching 1,371,732 (INE, 2017). The highest tourist season is summer, especially August. Since 2015, the city has received over 60,000 visitors during this month. If the variation in the volume of visitors in the 2006/2016 period is analyzed, a notable rise can be observed (35.7%), which has created critical saturation situations. In contrast, January is the month with the lowest demand. About 15,000 people visit the city at this time, proving the high seasonality of tourism in Santiago.

According to the studies characterizing tourist demand developed by the Tourism Observatory of Santiago de Compostela from 2005, around 95% of visitors to the city claim they visit the cathedral and its surroundings (CETUR, 2016). According to this figure 779,289 people visited the cathedral in



Figure 2. Delimitation of the historic center of Santiago de Compostela. Source: Authors' work based on the National Geographic Institute (2014) and Aldrey et al. (2009).

2016, which often meant seeing the temple crowded with visitors, without following any order or having any consideration for others during their visit.

Regarding the optimal number of visitors to the historic center, and in particular to the cathedral, the work of Santos and Pena (2014) is highlighted. It establishes the physical loading capacity of the cathedral at 995, as the maximum number of visitors in it at one time. However, the lowest value that this indicator had in the study was 6000. In addition, on the days with higher flows, up to 23,000

people were registered per day. These figures signal the need for a joint plan between the religious authorities, responsible for the management of the cathedral and the local and regional public tourism authorities.

In Santiago de Compostela, since 1991 the Royal Patronage of the City has been in charge of promoting and coordinating the actions directed towards the preservation and revitalization of its cultural heritage. It materializes the institutional cooperation between the government of Spain, the government of Galicia and the City of Santiago, under the Presidency of the King of Spain, through an executive body established in 1992: the Consortium of Santiago. A consortium is an organizational formula of inter-administrative cooperation, an institution where public entities at various levels (state, regional and local), or private non-profit entities pursuing public interest purposes are associated (Toscano, 2011). This status as an inter-administrative entity has allowed the Consortium to promote integral management of urban, cultural and tourist policies, thus contributing to the sustainability of the destination (Russo & Van der Borg, 2002; Santos & Lois, 2005). It has constituted a reference for the foundation of other consortiums with competences in heritage conservation, recovery and tourism in diverse historical cities of Spain.

Methods

The assessment of tourism planning and management in Santiago de Compostela has been centered on the analysis of the tourism plans implemented in the city by the Autonomous Government of Galicia and the municipal tourism company INCOLSA. From these, the strategies aimed at improving tourism products and the creation of entities capable of articulating the new policies of the sector have emerged and been implemented. A relevant aspect of these plans has been the joint participation of different actors involved in the development of tourism, such as public administrations, companies and the university. This paper shows the tools used both by public and private actors, to encourage the development of sustainable tourism in the city.

The period of the study was from 2001 to 2015. In 2001, the Tourism Excellence Plan 2001–2005 was launched, being the first reference of a specific tourism plan developed in the city. The Excellence Plan in Spain was a distinct action in a mature tourism destination, with significant investment and the collaboration of different administrations (national, regional and local), as well as the participation of associations and tourism entrepreneurs. For its part, the 2009–2015 Strategic Tourism Plan finished in 2015 and until now has been the last one to be implemented.

Among the entities created as a result of the tourism plans is the Center for Tourism Studies (CETUR). It was promoted in 2005 by the University of Santiago, and supported from the beginning by the municipal tourism company INCOLSA and the business sector of the city, which needed rigorous studies on the dynamics of the activity of its main indicators. Since then, CETUR's participation in tourism planning processes has been relevant. Therefore, the article reflects the work it has carried out during these last 10 years.

More than 18,500 questionnaires of visitors (tourists and excursionists) were conducted by CETUR between 2005 and 2015 (Turismo de Santiago, 2017). The questionnaires were distributed equally during this period of time, with an average of 1700 per year. Taking into account that the volume of visitors depends on the tourist season, the distribution of the sample size was established per quarter. Considering an infinite population, a confidence level of 95% and an admissible level of error, with a maximum of up to 5%, were established for each quarter. The average annual refusal rate was 22% of the total number of people approached.

The work was carried out through questionnaires translated into eight languages. The objective was to gather information on elements, such as motivation and ways of organizing the trip, sources of information, activities of interest, expenses, satisfaction with tourism services, image of the destination and sociodemographic profile. The questionnaires were conducted at random at the main tourist attractions in the city, in particular, the surroundings of the cathedral, different squares and streets of the historic center. These data have allowed the study of tourist flows, the identification

of iconic attractions and the characteristics that define the demand in the historic center on an ongoing basis. Methodologies from the Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS) (Richards & Queirós, 2005; ATLAS, 2016) or European cooperation projects, such as Atlante, have been followed in order to attain these data (Santos & Lois, 2005).

The ATLAS method consists of giving out questionnaires to the local residents, day visitors and tourists at a range of different sites worldwide, mainly at museums, festivals and historic sites. A minimum of 200 questionnaires per destination is established usually using interviewer administered self-completion questionnaires. Visitors are approached on a random basis and asked to complete a questionnaire. It covers the basic motivations for visiting specific cultural attractions and locations, the image of the destination, the visitor's origin and sociodemographic profile, the activities undertaken, and the use of tourism intermediaries and suppliers. Since 1991 this common methodology has enabled the analysis of trends in cultural demand, as well as the comparison between cultural destinations. The total number of questionnaires exceeded 43,000 between 1992 and 2013 (ATLAS, 2016; Richards, 2015).

The Atlante project was also a methodological reference for CETUR as a pioneering initiative. This was the result of a transnational agreement signed in 2003 between Galician and Portuguese Atlantic municipalities with Heritage Listed historic centers. In the framework of the Tourism and Sustainability Sector Working Group for the project Atlante, a study aimed to analyze the positive and negative impacts of tourism in historic centers was presented. Therein, the sustainable development criteria and policies in historic cities were evaluated, assessing the instruments used and presenting the most successful models (Santos & Lois, 2005).

Therefore, a working method focused on monitoring all plans and programs in the local tourism sector, as well as the projects developed by institutional actors over 10 years has been provided. In addition, the main attractions, the impact of their location on the behavior of tourist flows, and the ways to deal with the saturation of visitors around the cathedral have been analyzed. This contribution primarily aims to show an academic work of extended research rather than responding to a detailed analysis of some tourism variables in Santiago de Compostela.

Tourism planning and management in Santiago de Compostela

In Spain, the tourism competences began to be transferred to the autonomous regions in 1978. The Statute of Autonomy of the Autonomous Region of Galicia was approved in 1981, granting exclusive control for the promotion and management of tourism in its territory. In Santiago de Compostela tourism planning began to be visible with the creation of the municipal company called INCOLSA in 1999. The company is responsible for the planning, structuring and promotion of tourism in the city, and for the re-launching of the image of Santiago to become more attractive for national and international markets.

Tourism planning in the city had a second boost with the award of the 2001–2004 Tourism Excellence Plan (PET). This plan was, undoubtedly, the mobilizing element of the tourist development of Santiago de Compostela as it managed to bring together public administrations and the private sector around a common project. Within the Spanish tourism policy, the tourism excellence plans have been one of the most outstanding initiatives. Their objective was to improve quality and achieve excellence in consolidated tourist areas. The actions focused on the conditioning and improvement of beaches, urban recovery, the provision of equipment and access improvements, the diversification and enrichment of supply, marketing and communication, business management, and training in the area of tourism (Beas, 2009).

The idea of the Tourism Excellence Plan, which arose from the agreement between the government of Spain, the council of Santiago and the Tourism Directorate General of the government of Galicia, turned the city of Santiago de Compostela into a pilot area developed by the Ministry of Economy. The program of actions agreed by the three public administrations had a 4.06 million

euro budget (Beas, 2012) and was equally co-funded. The municipal company Turismo de Santiago oversaw the plan management (Turismo de Santiago, 2006).

The Tourism Excellence Plan was, in a certain sense, the direct heir of a long process of transformation of the city that began in the 1980s. The Tourism Excellence Plan (PET) transferred to tourism the spirit of coordination included in policies, such as the General Plan of Urban Planning (PGOU), the Special Plan of the Historical Center and the Strategic Plan of the City. All of them gave tourism an essential role in shaping urban life (Turismo de Santiago, 2006). According to Russo and Van der Borg (2002), the fact that there is this cohesion of tourism policy in the different strategies of the city is one of the key factors to making the tourism system attractive.

The design of new tourism products from the city resources was one of the core tasks carried out by PET, with the purpose of adding other motivations beyond the pilgrimage. For this purpose, it considered the degree of development of infrastructure and the maturity of the resources. Thus, the diagnosis distinguished two product groups. The first was made up of three types of consolidated tourist products: cultural and urban, religious and business. The second included under-developed products, such as food, family and nature tourism (Turismo de Santiago, 2006).

In parallel, the PET allowed for the creation of new entities specialized in tourism in the city. In 2001, the Tourism Quality Board was created, managing the Integral System of Tourism Quality at Destination (SICTED). It is a nationwide initiative promoted by the General Secretariat of Tourism and the Spanish Federation of Municipalities. Active Santiago tourism institutions and actors are represented: the city council, the University of Santiago, the Hospitality Association of Santiago and Region and the Spanish Association of Travel Agencies, among others (Turismo de Santiago, 2006). The Q Brand is the most visible element of the whole system. Establishments with this award are recognized by national consumers as well as by tour operators and foreign consumers.

Likewise, thanks to the PET, the Tourism Observatory was created in 2005 and promoted by Tourism of Santiago in collaboration with the University of Santiago de Compostela. By 2005 the Observatory had grown to become the main reason to found the Center for Tourism Studies at the University of Santiago (Turismo de Santiago, 2006). The CETUR is dedicated to research, teaching, information, training and technical advice. Its importance lies in its ability to generate qualitative information on visitors to Santiago, their behavior, and their assessment on tourism services offered by the destination. It also included the analysis of the situation of the hotel and restaurant sectors.

CETUR also examined the degree of knowledge and acceptance of the municipal tourism policy of local residents. The study involved the completion of a questionnaire and took place in 2005 with 421 city residents being interviewed, both in the historic center and its surroundings (CETUR, 2005). The results showed that only 14% of the local population knew the Tourism Excellence Plan of Santiago or any other action related to tourism. However, in contrast to this result, 98% agreed that Santiago de Compostela is a tourist destination of great interest, and 50% affirmed that tourism is sufficiently developed in the city (CETUR, 2005).

Additionally, CETUR has issued an annual report on the city's visitor profile. In relation to these reports, it should be noted that it allows the evaluation of the effectiveness of the policies implemented in the city from a visitor perspective. The 2016 report shows that visitors consider Santiago an attractive destination (98.4%). 89.7% stated their intention to visit the city for a second time, while 97.5% would recommend it to other visitors. The degree of overall satisfaction with the destination is very high (4.5 on a scale of 1 to 5). The most valued aspects are personal safety, the gastronomic offer, pedestrian mobility, the cleanliness of the city, the open spaces and green areas, and the tourist information offices (CETUR, 2016).

After PET, the next boost to tourism planning in Santiago was thanks to the 2003–2008 Strategic Tourism Marketing Plan. The municipal government commissioned it to a Catalan consultancy company specialized in tourism planning and marketing, ROS Development & Planning. In addition, it had the technical assistance of a team from the Department of Geography from the University of Santiago, once again showing the collaboration between different actors. The objective was the sustainable and balanced growth of the city to avoid the dangers of massification, banalization

and ‘musealization’. In its first phase the plan defined the strategies of tourism development through a diagnosis and in its second phase, two specific action plans were designed: The Competitiveness Plan and the Operative Marketing Plan.

The Competitiveness Plan presented programs for the improvement of tourism products. Some of the top priorities were cultural tourism, short breaks, business and congress tourism, and independent and organized tours. Other products to be promoted were nature and gastronomy tourism while religious tourism and pilgrimage were to be sustained and balanced. For its part, the Operative Marketing Plan focused specifically on the issues of marketing, promotion and communication, through INCOLSA, either alone or in collaboration with other entities and institutions (Turismo de Santiago, 2004).

Subsequently, and in order to continue in the line of sustainable and competitive growth, consultants’ ROS Development & Planning developed the 2009–2015 Strategic Plan of Tourism of Santiago Update. CETUR also collaborated offering technical and documentary support in the scope of its competences. Its basic hypotheses were to achieve optimum performance within the tourism system, and the harmonious and balanced integration of the tourism sector with the rest of the economic sectors and with its citizens. The lines of action had varying degrees of priority. Among the priority actions were the strengthening and extension of the airport connectivity, and the integration of the Ciudad de la Cultura² [City of Culture] with the historic center of Santiago. Among the high-priority measures included were the promotion of new tourist and cultural nodes and areas, the decongestion of the cathedral, and empowerment and management of the museum’s offer (Turismo de Santiago, 2009).

Tourism offer in Santiago de Compostela

The historic heritage of Santiago de Compostela continues to be its biggest element of attraction, as is reflected in research into visitors in the city (Pérez Guilarte, 2014; Turismo de Santiago, 2017). In this sense, we shall describe the most relevant cultural attractions in the historic center, as well as their spatial distribution. In this way, we will discuss to what extent its location can influence the creation of overcrowded spaces and therefore affect the destination’s tourism sustainability.

In the Middle Ages traveling to Santiago was purely religious. Although we cannot speak of tourism, this was when the first facilities were created to accommodate pilgrims. However, it is not until the second half of the twentieth century when there were transformations that allow us to talk about the creation of a tourism product. In the Holy Year³ of 1954 both the hotel Parador de los Reyes Católicos and Santiago’s airport facilities opened (Aldrey et al., 2009; Lois & Castro, 2006), starting the ascension of a tourism offer that has improved considerably over the years. Initially, it focused on pilgrimage and religious tourism; however, over time the phenomenon of the pilgrimage has transformed, and today, the former strictly religious motivation has lost prominence. In fact, it coexists with other reasons, such as spiritual, cultural (gastronomy and folklore along with others), natural heritage, historical and artistic heritage, sport or simply leisure.

The Cathedral of Santiago is one of the main cultural attractions of the city. It is in Obradoiro Square where pilgrims, tourists and residents coexist, offering a unique environment (Figure 3). It is a multifunctional space, since in addition to the religious and tourism functions there is also the political, with the town hall of Santiago, and the educational, with the presence of the Rectorate of the University of Santiago. As shown in Figure 4 in this area there is a concentration of cultural resources. This situation means that visitors crowd these areas close to the cathedral creating congestion problems and, at the same time, are only able to undertake short tours which in many cases reduce the stay in the city.

Outside the historic center, there are several works of contemporary architecture and urban design with the power to attract tourists. The Faculty of Communication Sciences, the Galician Center for Contemporary Art (both works of the Portuguese architect A. Siza-Vieira) and the Auditorium of Galicia are worth mentioning, all of which are part of the tourist train around the city. It is



Figure 3. Obradoiro Square. Source: Authors.

worth noting that this train also leaves from Cathedral Square (Figure 4), further contributing to the increase of tourism flows in this space. One possible decongestion strategy might be for it to depart from other less-visited parts of the old town, or even in the newly built district of the city.

With further regard to architectural works, the case of the City of Culture should be highlighted. It is a monumental building that constitutes another example of the design of large cultural constructions, built by a prestigious architect (P. Eisemann from New York) with the intention of generating interest thanks to its structure and to confer a modern image upon the city (Vila Vazquez, 2014). However, in this case the exaggerated dimensions of the work and the lack of a plan of use have doomed this urban flagship to underutilization. This is the first example of popular failure of a large building conceived as a tourism and cultural facility.

As was diagnosed in the PET, Santiago has potential for the development of other forms of tourism, such as business and congress, food and wine, creative, or nature tourism. The characteristics of these forms of tourism enable visitors to access resources in areas outside of the historic center. In this way, activities can be planned to show visitors parts of the city that can also be tourist attractions. For example, individuals who attend a conference and visit the Congress and Exhibitions Center of Galicia can visit the San Lazaro district, to the east of the city. This, of course, would mean the introduction of cultural-leisure initiatives, perhaps with the participation of the residents and involving gastronomic or creative attractions.

Food and wine tourism is an option that relies on the quality of Galician products, backed by certifications of Protected Geographic Indication or Protected Denomination of Origin. An important feature of Santiago is its proximity to rural municipalities, which are favorable to the creation of recreational activities and offer several types of nature tourism. Also, something intangible but with a great impact on the increase in the number of visitors to Santiago is the celebration of the Apostle Santiago, which is held in the second half of July throughout the city. For this reason, July is a significant month in terms of incidents of overcrowding in the cathedral and its surroundings.

Facing the challenge of tourist flow management

The role of officials responsible for the planning and management is essential for managing tourist flows and achieving sustainable tourism management. As already mentioned in the case of Santiago,

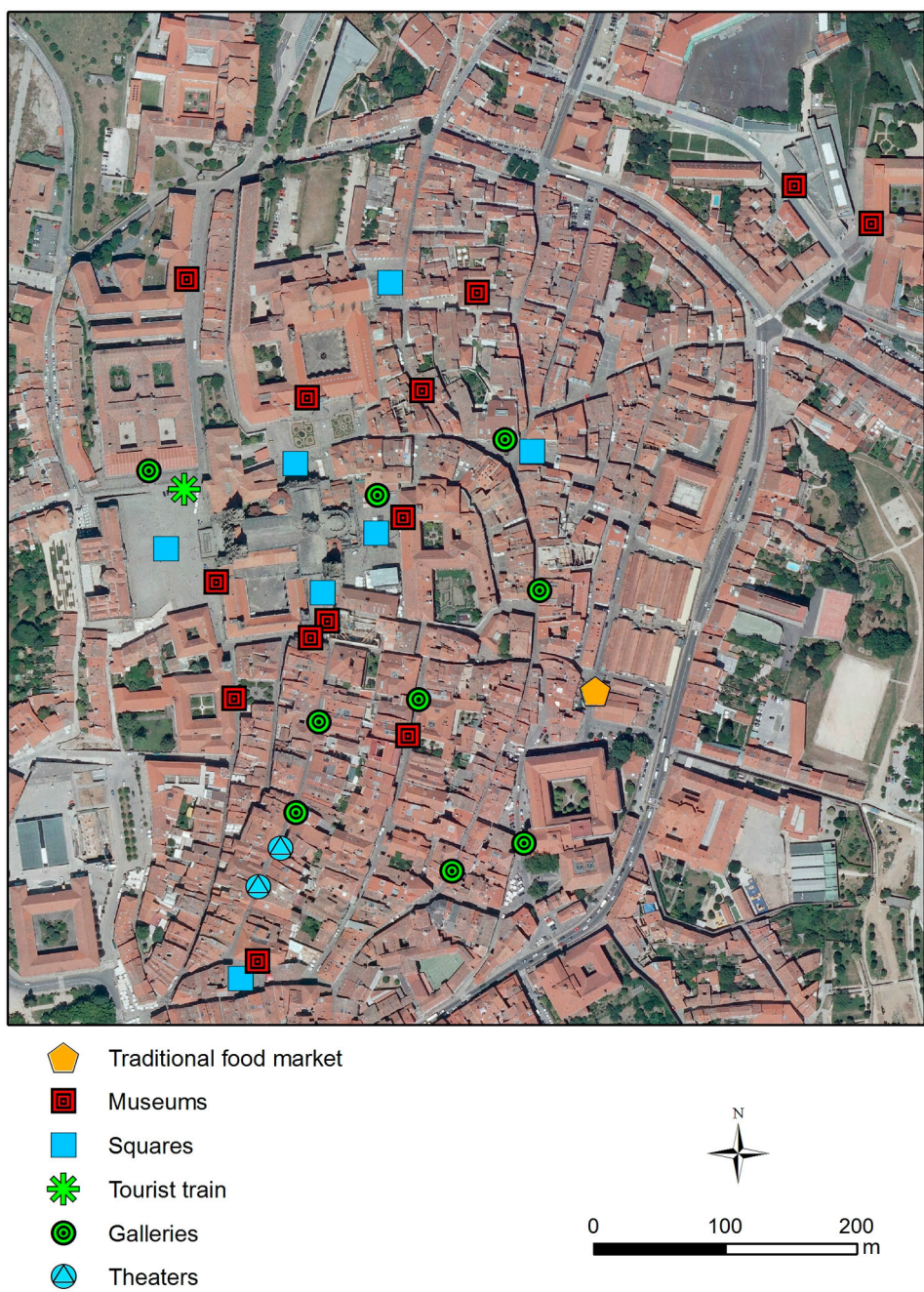


Figure 4. Location of cultural attractions. Source: Authors’ work based on the National Geographic Institute (2014).

tourism management has been coordinately promoted with the rest of the urban strategies. In relation to the management of tourist flows specifically, we will discuss some actions driven by the government of Galicia and by the council of Santiago, in collaboration with the university.

Research work developed by CETUR includes its participation in the 2004 project of the Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS). Santiago de Compostela, together with 37 other institutions, participated in the application of 12,700 questionnaires at 130 cultural sites from 23

countries around the world (Richards & Queirós, 2005). The work consisted of interviewing tourists who visited any cultural attractions or the historic center of the city. Among the results, it should be noted that tourists showed a greater interest in discovering the local culture and experiencing the atmosphere of the place, to the detriment of the traditional motivation of cultural trips related to the contribution to cultural knowledge. Likewise, the most popular sites are museums (25.1%), festivals (20.2%) and historical sites (18.5%) (Richards & Queirós, 2005).

The participation of CETUR in project Atlante should also be explained. This project establishes four fundamental aspects for the regulation of tourist flows: expansion of the tourist space, de-seasonality of the activity, visitor management, and growth limits. One of the pillars of this project was to promote management focused on ensuring that historic centers were also perceived as attractive by the inhabitants of the city (Santos & Lois, 2005). This is understood as an improvement in the residents' quality of life, for example through the creation of nature routes and trails and urban land public parks or the establishment of socio-cultural premises in all the districts of the municipality (Lois & Santos, 2006). At the same time, so that residents do not stop considering this place attractive to live, phenomena, such as the following, should be avoided: the existence of excessively saturated spaces by visitors, the prevalence of high prices intended for tourists, and loss of cultural identity.

The increase in the number of visitors to the city of Santiago de Compostela in summer (Figure 5), encouraged a study into the reception capacity and the control of flows in the historic center. The first phase of this project focused on the Cathedral of Santiago and was funded by the Tourism General Directorate of the government of Galicia. It also involved representatives in charge of tourism and heritage policies at regional and municipal level, as well as the ecclesiastical authorities. The study, conducted between March 2008 and April 2009 by CETUR, was carried out with the collaboration of the group 'Tourism, Heritage and Development' at the Complutense University of Madrid (Pérez Guilarte, 2014).

The overall objective of the project was the analysis of the conditions in which the public's visit to the cathedral took place. However, it was also complemented with a check of the queries made by visitors in the central tourism office, and the registration of groups through counting buses. The findings of this research resulted in a series of recommendations aimed at reconciling the religious and tourist use of the cathedral. Some of them were put into practice during the Holy Year of 2010,



Figure 5. Visitors to the Cathedral in the Obradoiro Square. Source: Authors.

but had no continuity afterwards. The proposals put in place included the installation of electronic mechanisms for visitor counting to monitor the limits of capacity, the creation of routes to facilitate circulation, and an information and interpretation center to make visitors aware of the need to minimize their impact before entering the cathedral (Santos & Pena, 2014).

This study of the cathedral was conceived as a starting point, which would have a second phase that would include the historic center as a whole; however, this has not yet been done. Research activities by CETUR have declined considerably in recent years, due to the decrease in work being done by consultancy firms, the government of Galicia and the Association of Business owners. At the same time, the collection of information is limited to the study of the demand; preventing the collection of data relating to offer, specific tourism products, or the degree of satisfaction of the population with tourism (Pérez Guilarte, 2014).

Findings and discussion

This work offers an insight into planning and tourism management actions carried out over ten years in a consolidated cultural destination, whose proposals can serve as an example for other heritage destinations in the world. For example, achieving synergies between territorial actors involved in tourism (public administrations, companies, community and tourists) translates into benefits for the competitiveness and tourism sustainability of the destination (Landorf, 2009; Lusetyowati, 2015; Russo & Van der Borg, 2002; Santos & Lois, 2005). However, establishing these relationships in a coordinated and effective manner is a challenge for most destinations.

This study provides useful knowledge into how successful interactions have been achieved in Santiago de Compostela. Their success was measured taking into account the following factors: the number of actors involved, type of collaboration (inter-sectorial, public/private and regional scale), duration, budget allocated and the regional impact of the actions. In this way, the study shows how collaborations between public entities at various levels of management (local, regional, autonomous and national) are carried out, as in the case of the Consortium of Santiago or the PET. Likewise, it describes how private entities are involved such as in the case of the Strategic Marketing Plan; or the integration of both public and private sectors, as in the constitution of the Center for Tourism Studies (CETUR) or the Tourism Quality Board. Another example is the collaboration between ecclesiastical authorities and the public administration, at all levels, such as the project to regulate tourist flows inside the Cathedral of Santiago. Likewise, the work carried out by the Consortium of Santiago demonstrates the will of the destination in terms of the integration of urban, cultural and tourism policies (Russo & Van der Borg, 2002; Santos & Lois, 2005).

On the other hand, the intention to involve the local community in tourism and concern for their quality of life, determining factors in a sustainable destination (Aquino, Phillips and Sung, 2012; Cohen-Hattab, 2013; Evans, 2002; Jones & Evans, 2012), are verified by the research study developed by CETUR. Among its lines of action, a questionnaire to residents in Santiago to find out their degree of knowledge and acceptance of the municipal tourism policy was designed and implemented. However, despite being a relevant initiative, these studies have not continued since 2005 because of budget cuts prompted by the economic crisis, and successive changes in the Galician, Spanish and local governments.

In this article, we interpret the results of the plans and projects that have been carried out, and formulate some fundamental questions still to be solved. This is the case of visitor congestion in the historic center, which is a common phenomenon in many historical cities (Barrera et al., 2014; Massiani & Santoro, 2012; Timothy, 2011). In this regard, specific actions to decongest the crowds of visitors in the surroundings of the Cathedral of Santiago are highlighted, such as the transfer of the exit of the tourist train to an area outside the surroundings of the cathedral. Similarly, the creation of tourist offer in the eastern part of the city is also discussed, as a way of complementing the events organized in the Congress and Exhibitions Center of Galicia.

Conclusions

In historic cities the integration of cultural, tourist, urban and political policies constitute a basic pillar for a sustainable development. For achieving this goal, synergies between different stakeholders, including the local community, are a key factor. This is particularly relevant in religious sites where sacred and tourist functions share the same space. In some cases, this results in overcrowding, deteriorating the experience for both visitors and religious people. However, promoting integral and sustainable management models allow counteracting this type of situation.

The formalized study on Santiago de Compostela has tried to gather a long tradition of analysis on tourism in historic centers, which began in Europe and has been formalized through ATLAS recommendations (ATLAS, 2016). The recognition of Santiago is closely related to the declaration of its historic center as a World Heritage Site and furthermore for being the destination point of a very important Christian pilgrimage route. This study distinguishes the keys to the success of establishing Santiago as a tourist destination. Firstly, the institutional coordinated action between the different levels of government, especially local and regional. This political consensus has been based on the enormous historical (and legendary) prestige of the city, which explains why no public actor wants to stay out of its management and promotion. Secondly, cultural and urban actions have driven tourism activities in medium and small cities. This can clearly be seen in Southern Europe where countries, such as Italy, Spain or Portugal are great tourism powers that want to lower their dependence on the sun and sand products.

Finally, the continued study of tourism in the historic center of Santiago de Compostela underlines the need to introduce management criteria for an increasing flow of visitors in a monumental yet limited surface area. Conducting regular questionnaires with tourists can help understand the repetition of behaviors and detect carrying capacity problems at certain times and in certain months of the year. With diagnostics, new management policies in a product at the edge of overcrowding can be decided, opening new attractive urban spaces for tourism and developing innovative practices of tourism governance involving the authorities, the private sector and university researchers concerned about these issues.

Notes

1. Official figures from the Municipal Census at 1 January 2012 (IGE, 2013).
2. The City of Culture is a large architectural complex designed by the architect Peter Eisenman at the request of the Government of Galicia. It is in Santiago de Compostela at the top of Gaias Hill. Its construction began in 1999, was partially opened in 2011, and in 2013 the works were stopped leaving two unfinished buildings: the Music and Performing Arts Center and the International Art Center (Vila Vazquez, 2014).
3. A Jacobean Holy Year is on the 25th of July, the day of St. James the Apostle, falls on a Sunday. During the Holy Year the faithful arriving to Santiago can receive the indulgence of their sins, provided they meet three requirements: visit the Cathedral, pray a prayer and pray for the Pope's intentions, and receive the sacraments of penance and communion (Tourism of Santiago, 2016).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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