

Motivations for Pilgrimage: Why pilgrims travel *El Camiño de Santiago*

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Biographies

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Abstract

Given the importance and rise of religious tourism, this study aims to identify pilgrims' motivations to undertake the *Camiño de Santiago* and examine differences regarding socio demographics and other characteristics. An online questionnaire was used to collect data from pilgrims that had travelled the *Camiño de Santiago* at least once. A total of 1,140 valid responses were collected from 45 different nationalities. The results indicate that pilgrims are mostly motivated by spiritual aspects, by wanting new experiences, for the outdoor experience and for cultural reasons. Religious motivations and fulfilling promises are the factors with the lowest averages, demonstrating that modern pilgrims take the journey for other reasons rather than the traditional ones. The findings of this study offer a better understanding of modern pilgrims, providing useful insights to several stakeholders.

Introduction

Pilgrimage can be seen as a “journey to a sacred place which lies beyond the mundane realm of the pilgrim’s daily experience” (McKevitt, 1991, p. 78). Several authors have long argued that it is a form of tourism (e.g. Lois-González, 2013; Nilsson & Tesfahuney, 2016; Rinschede, 1992). Being associated to tourism raises considerable debate on pilgrims' real motivations to undertake their journeys. Although historically a pilgrim was described as a person that walked to a shrine place with religious motivations (Rinschede, 1992), nowadays modern pilgrims travel for many other reasons (Oviedo, de Courcier, & Farias, 2014).

Given the rise in religious tourism, it is crucial to understand what motivates travelers to sacred sites (Raj, Griffin, & Blackwell, 2015). This study aims to identify pilgrims' motivations to undertake the *Camiño de Santiago* and examine differences regarding socio demographics and other characteristics.

Literature Review

The *Camiño de Santiago* has become a successful touristic product in the promotion of cultural tourism (González & Medina, 2003). Pilgrims come from many different places to search a singular experience even if it is to enjoy the holiday period, or for religious or spiritual reasons (Lois-González & Santos, 2015).

Historically, a pilgrim was described as a person that walked to a shrine place with religious motivations (Rinschede, 1992). Nowadays, modern pilgrims travel for many other reasons than religious ones (Oviedo et al., 2014). In fact, a significant number of researchers have pointed out that pilgrimages are a type of tourism (e.g. Blom, Nilsson, & Santos, 2016; Cànoves, Romagosa, Blanco, & Priestley, 2012; Lois-González, 2013; Rinschede, 1992) and are, many times, connected to holidays and cultural tourism (Mustonen, 2006; Rinschede, 1992). Indeed, it is difficult to distinguish a pilgrim from a tourist. This thought is well captured in Turner and Turner's (1978) seminal quote: "if a tourist is half pilgrim, a pilgrim is half tourist" (p.20).

There are limited studies addressing motivations for pilgrimage (Blackwell, 2014). The few studies addressing pilgrims' motivations to religious places have produced mixed results. For instance, Fernandes, Pimenta, Gonçalves, and Rachão (2012) and Lopez (2013) found that the most important reasons for walking the way were religious motives. However, more recent studies have evidenced that clarification, spiritual growth, sensations seeking and seeking life directions were motivations more important than religious ones (Oviedo et al., 2014; Schnell & Pali, 2013).

Methodology

Data was collected using an online questionnaire administered in August and September of 2015 to individuals who had travelled the Camino at least once. The questionnaire was available in English, Portuguese, Spanish, French and German since these are the nationalities of most of the pilgrims according to the Pilgrim's Welcome Office (2017).

A set of 25 items capturing pilgrimages' motivations was available on the questionnaire for them to rate using a 5-point Likert-type scale where 1 represented "not important at all" and 5 "extremely important". These items were selected from previous literature (i.e. Battour, Ismail, Battor, & Awais, 2014; Oviedo et al., 2014). The final part of the questionnaire dealt with demographic information such as gender, age, residence, education, and marital status.

Pilgrims were targeted using several approaches. First, a link with the online questionnaire was placed on several *Camino de Santiago* groups existent on Facebook and Twitter. The Associations of Pilgrims was also contacted and shared the survey among pilgrims. A total of 1,140 valid surveys were collected.

Descriptive analysis was used to examine respondents' profile, using means (M) and standard deviations (SD) to describe quantitative variables, while qualitative ones were summarized with counts and percentages. In order to simplify the analysis of pilgrims' motivations, a factorial analysis was conducted to reduce the 25 items into a smaller set of factors.

Results

Respondents' Profile

The respondents were pilgrims that had travelled the *Camino de Santiago* at least once. Most of them were Portuguese (31.7%), followed by the Spanish (17.9%), the Dutch (12.6%), the French (6.1%), Brazilians (6.0%) and Americans (5.6%). Male respondents were 56.6% and 57% reported being married or having non-marital partnership. The respondents are highly educated, since more than 57% have at least a bachelor degree.

Regarding pilgrim's motivations, 25 items were aggregated into eight dimensions (explained variance = 71.5 %, KMO = 0.875) as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Factor Loadings and Reliability for Pilgrim's Motivations

Factor and Items	Mean	Factor Loading	% of Variance	Cronbach's Alpha
F1 – Religious Motivations	2.63		15.8%	.92
To pray		.93		
By faith		.91		
Journey for devotion to God		.85		
Participating in sacraments		.78		
Devotion to St. James		.72		
F2 – Spiritual Motivations	4.15		10.5%	.78
Enjoy solitude and inner peace		.82		
Spiritual and quiet journey		.79		
Experiencing a simpler lifestyle		.62		
Detachment from material goods		.60		
The feeling of freedom		.55		
F3 – New Experiences	4.10		10.2%	.77
Learning new things to increase knowledge		.77		
Experiencing new/different		.77		
Seeing as much as possible		.70		
F4 – Cultural Motivations	3.91		8.3%	.79
Visiting great monuments of worship (Cathedrals)		.80		
Visiting historical places		.72		
Learning culture of other places		.61		

F5 – Outdoor and Nature Motivations	4.03		7%	.60
Outdoor experience. walking in nature		.80		
Physical activity		.78		
F6 - Escape from Routine	2.98		6.8%	.48
Getting a change from a busy job		.83		
Getting away from home		.75		
F7 – Meet new People and Places	3.32		6.5%	.61
Meeting new people		.78		
Going places friends have never been		.57		
Going places I have not been		.51	6.4%	
F8 – Fulfil Promise/Tradition	2.03			.51
To fulfil promise		.82		
By tradition		.79		

The results indicate that pilgrims are mostly motivated by spiritual aspects (M=4.15), by wanting new experiences (M=4.10), for the outdoor and nature experience (M=4.03) and for cultural reasons (M=3.91). Interestingly, religious motivations (M=2.63) and fulfilling promises (M=2.03) are the factors with the lowest averages, demonstrating that modern pilgrims take the journey for other reasons rather than the traditional ones.

Comparing motivations with other characteristics, the findings also revealed that religious motivations are higher for Portuguese and Brazilians. Furthermore, pilgrims more motivated by religious aspects tend to stay in pilgrims' hostels.

Regarding spiritual motivations, Portuguese and Brazilians also score high on these motivations, when compared with Germans and Dutch. Pilgrims with high values on these motivations are more common in female, younger pilgrims, single and divorced, in those who travel by foot and those who look for a pilgrim's hostels to stay.

Pilgrims motivated by new experiences tend to be higher in female, younger pilgrims, in those who look for a pilgrim's hostels to stay and in those who do not travel by foot. Single pilgrims tend to value more the search for new experiences than married or in union ones. Portuguese and Brazilians have demonstrated higher levels of motivation by new experiences.

Regarding cultural motivations, Spanish, Portuguese, Americans and Brazilians are alongside, with higher values than Germans and Dutch. Outdoor and nature experience motivations are higher for females, single pilgrims and German and Americans.

Escape from the routine also tends to be higher in female, younger and single pilgrims. Americans and Germans tend to have higher values than Portuguese, French, Spanish and Brazilians.

Younger and single pilgrims tend to value more the motivation to meet new people/places. Those who travel by bike also tend to score higher on this motivation. Americans are more motivated by meeting new people/places than Spanish, French and German.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study has found that pilgrims are mostly motivated by spiritual aspects, by wanting new experiences, for the outdoor and nature experience and for cultural reasons. Religious motivations and fulfilling promises are the factors with the lowest averages.

Motivational differences were found for gender, age, marital status, nationality, the way the pilgrims undertook their journey and pilgrims choice of accommodation. No motivational differences were found for education.

Religious tourism growth brings unprecedented opportunities for sustainable development by creating jobs, allowing infrastructure and investment and stimulating local culture, crafts and food (UNWTO, 2016). Policy makers and managers who want to promote religious tourism need to realize that pilgrims' motivations are different and therefore, it is necessary to create tourism products and services that appeal to these different needs.

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