

The Impact of Tourism on the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Pilgrim Routes: The Case of El Camino de Santiago

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Abstract : This qualitative and quantitative study will identify the impact of tourism pressure on the intangible cultural heritage of the pilgrim route of El Camino de Santiago (Saint James Way) and propose an approach to a sustainable touristic model for these Cultural Routes. Since 1993, the Spanish Section of the Pilgrim Route of El Camino de Santiago has been on the World Heritage List. In 1994, the International Committee on Cultural Routes (CIIC-ICOMOS) initiated its work with the goal of studying, preserving, and promoting the cultural routes and their significance as a whole. Another ICOMOS group, the Charter on Cultural Routes, pointed out in 2008 the importance of both tangible and intangible heritage and the need for a holistic vision in preserving these important cultural assets. Tangible elements provide a physical confirmation of the existence of these cultural routes, while the intangible elements serve to give sense and meaning to it as a whole. Intangible assets of a Cultural Route are key to understanding the route's significance and its associated heritage values. Like many pilgrim routes, the Route to Santiago, as the result of a long evolutionary process, exhibits and is supported by intangible assets, including hospitality, cultural and religious expressions, music, literature, and artisanal trade, among others. A large increase in pilgrims walking the route, with very different aims and tourism pressure, has shown how the dynamic links between the intangible cultural heritage and the local inhabitants along El Camino are fragile and vulnerable. Economic benefits for the communities and population along the cultural routes are commonly fundamental for the micro-economies of the people living there, substituting traditional productive activities, which, in fact, modifies and has an impact on the surrounding environment and the route itself. Consumption of heritage is one of the major issues of sustainable preservation promoted with the intention of revitalizing those sites and places. The adaptation of local communities to new conditions aimed at preserving and protecting existing heritage has had a significant impact on immaterial inheritance. Based on questionnaires to pilgrims, tourists and local communities along El Camino during the peak season of the year, and using official statistics from the Galician Pilgrim's Office, this study will identify the risk and threats to El Camino de Santiago as a Cultural Route. The threats visible nowadays due to the impact of mass tourism include transformations of tangible heritage, consumerism of the intangible, changes of local activities, loss in the authenticity of symbols and spiritual significance, and pilgrimage transformed into a tourism 'product', among others. The study will also approach some measures and solutions to mitigate those impacts and better preserve this type of cultural heritage. Therefore, this study will help the Route services providers and policymakers to better preserve the Cultural Route as a whole to ultimately improve the satisfying experience of pilgrims.

Keywords : cultural routes, El Camino de Santiago, impact of tourism, intangible heritage

Conference Title : ICUTCH 2024 : International Conference on Urban Tourism and Cultural Heritage

Conference Location : Sydney, Australia

Conference Dates : August 29-30, 2024