Tourism Policies in A WHC: Santiago de Compostela (Spain)

Xosé Manuel Santos Solla
Department of Geography, University of Santiago de Compostela,
Faculty of Geography and History, Santiago de Compostela, Spain
xosemanuel.santos@usc.es

Lucrezia Lopez
IDEGA, Instituto Universitario de Estudios e Desenvolvemento de Galicia
University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain
lucrezia.lopez@usc.es

Abstract: The international visibility of Santiago de Compostela is mainly related to one of the most influential Apostles in the life of Jesus Christ, being his body buried in the cathedral of Santiago. The city been endowed with various tools of tourism management that are exemplary for historical cities. These successful improvements were marked by a roadmap combining promotion and planning effort. However, public policies and tourism planning have generated some problems that pose a real challenge for the future management of this activity and even of the city.

We combine the literature reviews of planning documents approved in Santiago de Compostela with empirical methodology consisting of detailed analysis of the case study. We analyze the planning documents and action plans that were used to draw up a strategy that attempted to optimize a series of results that can be regarded as excellent in terms of increased tourist flows, a higher quality visitor experience and a more diverse set of services and attractions.

The results of all of the city planning and tourism measures merit consideration and whilst at times we may examine these individually, they will be continual overlap between them.

Our discussion is mainly interested in analyzing the existing challenges, many of which arise or are reinforced by the measures implemented during recent decades, which require effective answers to safeguard the city’s tourism competitiveness.

Keywords: Santiago de Compostela, WHC, Tourism Policies, Tourism Planning, Management of the Historic City

1. Presentation

Santiago de Compostela is a small city in the northwest of Spain. Despite its modest size it plays an important role as administrative capital of the region of Galicia. In addition to this, the city is internationally famous as the final destination of one of Europe’s most popular pilgrimage routes. Since the middle Ages, Santiago de Compostela has played a major part in European history, although its significance has grown and diminished at various times over the centuries. Its origins can be traced back to the 9th century when the remains of the Apostle St. James (known in Spain as Santiago el Mayor) were discovered and authenticated. James was one of Jesus’s closest disciples and according to tradition he had been travelling around these westerly lands at “the end of the earth”. Based on strictly religious and other more geopolitical considerations (Barreiro Rivas, 2009) a major pilgrimage movement emerged, reaching its heyday in the 12th and 13th centuries. The roads to Santiago helped consolidate Christian Europe and spread cultural ideas and trends.

The splitting up of Christianity in the 16th century and religious wars, amongst other things, pushed Santiago into the background during most of the Modern and Contemporary era. The resurgence of pilgrimages to Santiago happened very gradually. Throughout the 20th century the church at Santiago de Compostela began to set up initiatives aimed at reinstating the tradition of making a pilgrimage to the tomb of St. James. During the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975) the figure of the Apostle and therefore of the city of Santiago de Compostela represented the ultraconservative myth used to underpin national Catholicism. In this way, St. James became “patron saint of all the Spains” and...
Franco’s government set about the historic monumentalising of the city of Santiago and of some of the major landmarks along the *Camino* (Castro Fernández, 2010; Lois González & Lopez, 2012).

This also entailed some intense promotion of the pilgrimage movement, which at first had purely religious connotations (Rodríguez, 2004; Santos Solla, 2006). However, rapid tourist growth in Spain meant that pilgrimage inevitably started to take on all kinds of aspects related to tourism, especially from 1965 onwards. Since 1980s pilgrimages and the city of Santiago really started to become popular. The enlargement process taking place in the EU, which Spain joined in 1986, together with other circumstances such as the involvement of Pope John Paul II, helped to promote pilgrimage and reinvent the city of Santiago. Some significant milestones in this new era included the historic city being listed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1985. From the town planning perspective, this sparked the development of a series of planning instruments, and in terms of tourism the city now had access to ministerial plans for creating and consolidating new or mature destinations (promotion and excellence plans) as well as more financial tools for taking its projects to fruition (Santos Solla, n.d.). There was also a need to ascertain the number of monuments in the city and their purpose (Sotelo Peréz, 2012).

Another significant event in the decade of the 1980s was the declaration of the *Camino de Santiago* as the First European Cultural Itinerary on 23 October 1987, paving the way for the pilgrimage route to be listed as a World Heritage Site in 1993. This European site, loaded with collective memory, claimed its right to be protected and reinvigorated in its role as contributor to the process of building Europe. These events bring us to 1993, which was the first Holy Year to record mass pilgrimages along traditional routes once again. The impact on tourism was really spectacular and not just in terms of the arrival of increasingly larger numbers of pilgrims. While this was happening, Santiago was consolidating its position as a cultural destination in which international tourism was gaining greater importance year after year.

The profile of the city of Santiago de Compostela as a World Heritage Site with a pilgrimage route leading into it, started to take shape with a wealth of successful attractions. In terms of public policy, the fundamental value of the historic centre for the city as a whole was recognised, understood as being the area containing the legacy of the city prior to the contemporary era. The profile spoke about the old quarter in more descriptive terms, with greater emphasis on its urban and architectural features (Lois González & Santos Solla, 2014). Santiago’s status as a major tourist destination is by no means a coincidence. It is partly due to the recovery of the traditional pilgrimage to the tomb of St. James. But it is also due to the measures arising from tourism action, managed using professional criteria and with a strong ambition of continuing to attract new market segments. The growing appetite for tourism in the historic centre of Santiago activated a planning process that aimed to put development plans in place for placing what was genuinely monumental, distinctive and cultural at the centre of the tourist experience.

2. **LITERATURE REVIEW**

2.1. The Origins of Tourism Planning in Santiago de Compostela

The Holy Year of 1993 marked a milestone in the history of Galicia and of Santiago de Compostela, when the *Camino* became the star product of Galicia and a promotional campaign was set in motion to publicise the “Plan Xacobeo 93” (Celeiro, 2013). It was based on the idea that the *Camino de Santiago* is Galicia’s most famous brand and easy to sell on the European and world market. The 1993 Holy Year marked the conversion of both Santiago and the *Camino* into major Spanish tourist destinations and offered the chance to transform Galicia into an international tourist destination: “from the 1993 Holy Year onwards there was a substantial shift: the *Camino de Santiago* became one of Galicia’s main cornerstones of development and promotion, showing an appeal that amazed everyone at first” (Santos Solla, 1999: 104).

From 1999, tourism planning was carried out by a municipal company, the new professional body known as INCOLSA-Turismo de Santiago, which took over responsibility for managing, planning, structuring, marketing and promoting tourism in the city. INCOLSA-Turismo de Santiago was in charge of managing the *Plan de Excelencia Turística* [Plan for Excellence in Tourism] (PET, 2001-2005) by means of an institutional partnership set up between the Ministry of the Economy (General Secretary for Tourism), the Xunta de Galicia regional government (Department of Social Communication, Culture and Tourism), the *Concello de Santiago* [Santiago City Council], the local
Chamber of Commerce, and Hotel and Restaurant Owners Associations in Santiago and the surrounding area. This Plan was intended to establish the city of Santiago as a focal point for tourism excellence (Turismo de Santiago de Compostela, 2006).

The Plan de Excelencia Turística [Plan for Excellence in Tourism] (PET) 2001-2005 has been a key tool in the development of tourism, in driving Santiago forward as a tourism destination and in planning for action. This is an objective that was achieved by the drafting of the Plan de Marketing Estratégico del Turismo [Strategic Marketing Plan for Tourism] (2002-2005) which focuses on detailing the strategies and the tourist offerings that require development and promotion (Turismo de Santiago de Compostela, 2004). The aim of this is to ensure the diversification of the tourist product, by making use of resources and investment in the city, by reducing seasonal variation, by increasing urban cultural value with increased awareness of the available cultural resources and their potential, and by increasing the length of the average stay. This is the purpose of the Plan de Desestacionalización [Seasonal Variation Reduction Plan] which is based upon campaigns carried out with the involvement of public and private bodies.

In terms of the diversification of the tourism offering, the Strategic Marketing Plan opts for adding value to particular elements, notably the lively urban scene and the young, university atmosphere. It insists that Santiago is not a “museum city”, but rather a major city that is dynamic and welcoming and it invests in Santiago’s attributes in order to be able to offer a markedly different product through the diversification of the types of tourism available and by providing innovative tourist products. Finally, the Strategic Marketing Plan specifies improved competitiveness as an objective to be achieved by means of quality, with Santiago having been selected in 2001 by the Sistema Integral de Calidad Turística Española en Destino [Integrated Quality System for Spanish Tourist Destinations] (SICTED) as one of the eight pilot destinations for the implementation of an Modelo de Gestión Integral de la Calidad Turística de un Destino [Integral Management Model for Tourist Destination Quality]. This system was managed by the Mesa de Calidad Turística [Tourism Quality Board], represented by various public and private institutions within the city.

This has served to strengthen Santiago de Compostela as a destination for cultural and city tourism. Cultural tours and pilgrimage routes converge on the city, granting it a semantic and emotional significance (Santos Solla, 2002; Lois González, 2013). There is a progressive rise in a new kind of cultural and city tourism which, whilst not aspiring to become the predominant or most popular type of tourism, is having an impact upon activity as a whole by improving Santiago’s experiential offering and the sense of a unique experience from which one can learn whilst at leisure or on holiday (Lois González & Santos Solla, 2014). This image received a boost in the year 2000 when Santiago was named European Capital of Culture, giving the city new historic status and marking the start of a critical reassessment of its architectural heritage and the twofold task of the redevelopment and conservation of the historic city’s shared space (Estévez Fernández, 2001).

The latest Plan de Turismo de Santiago 2010-2015 [Santiago Tourism Plan 2010-2015] sets out the strengths of tourism in Santiago and the way in which the sector is driving development, supported by increased hotel capacity and a rise in the flow of visiting tourists. However, it is necessary to reposition the city as a broad-ranging destination for cultural tourism and to set new goals for the future. The new Plan analyses the international economic situation and the urban context, warning of some of the problems. One of these relates to day-trippers who spend little but who add to the congestion around the Cathedral and the area surrounding it.

In some areas, the Plan restates issues that were raised in the previous report, such as for example the need to diversify Santiago’s city tourism offering and to improve the distribution of visitor flows. One solution would appear to lie in the city’s museums, which would also allow Santiago to highlight its importance as a cultural destination. Another option would be greater visibility for the city’s green spaces as a tourist product, taking advantage of the abundance of public parks. Weaknesses include the problem of air travel links, an issue that is picked up as one of the key points in the city’s Strategic Plan (2008) and which is still a matter of the highest priority today.

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1 Santiago de Compostela is a city that is “enveloped” by green spaces. In fact it has 1,708,017 square metres of green space.
3. METHODOLOGY

The study combines the literature reviews of planning documents approved in Santiago de Compostela with empirical methodology consisting of detailed analysis of the case study: Santiago de Compostela. It analyses the planning documents and action plans that were used to draw up a strategy that attempted to optimize a series of results that can be regarded as excellent in terms of increased tourist flows, a higher quality visitor experience and a more diverse set of services and attractions. We will be discussing tourism policies applied in the city over recent years and their consequences. We will be focusing mainly on existing challenges, many of which appear or are reinforced as a result of measures implemented over the last few decades and that required effective responses to ensure the city remained competitive. However, public policy and tourism planning generated a whole series of problems that have presented a real challenge for the future management of this activity and even of the city itself.

We will explain how the results of this long process intertwining tourism and town planning have been uneven, although generally speaking they could be described as positive. The economic crisis affecting the whole of Spain since 2008 has also made itself felt in the city, although we believe that it has not prompted a profound reflection on the role of these two factors (tourism and town planning) in relation to how they could have an impact on lessening the effects of the crisis.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of all of the city planning and tourism measures merit consideration and whilst at times we may examine these individually, they will be continual overlap between them. It is essential to remember that the enhancement of tourism in the historic city of Santiago, a result of the resurgence of the pilgrimage phenomenon, is closely linked to urban planning policy, especially in terms of its effect upon the historic centre (Villanueva, 2013).

At first sight, it is easy to make a positive assessment as in recent years Santiago has been seen to consolidate itself as a destination for cultural tourism at the same time as the city, primarily its historic centre, has experienced an intense process of recovery. Santiago has even won international recognition, for example in receiving the European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage (the Europa Nostra Award) in 1996, the European Commission’s European Prize for Town Planning (1997-1998) and the 2002 UN Habitat Dubai Award for Best Practices awarded by UNESCO for the “protection and rehabilitation of the historic city and its integration with its natural environment”.

As stated above, there is no doubt that in terms of tourism, Santiago has become a benchmark for religious and cultural tourism, not only within Spain but also within Europe. This is not due solely to the relevance of the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route, whose attributes incidentally fall outside of the control of local administration. The city itself has also generated its own flow of tourists linked to conference tourism and recreational tourism, as well as in relation to its heritage and to a complex offering of diversified products.

We only have to examine the data to see the overwhelming evidence for this. For example, supply jumps from 3,500 beds in 1994, when the tourism boom linked to the 1993 Holy Year was already underway, to over 7,000 beds in existence at the present time. Thus, the number of tourist beds has doubled. It is also necessary to consider at least two facts which add to the value of these statistics. Firstly, there is new tourist accommodation available in the districts surrounding Santiago, benefitting from rates that reflect the close proximity to the city. Coastal destinations have also played a role. They bring false and indirect day-trippers, of the type identified by Russo (2002), into the city centre via high-capacity transport links. The issue of day visitors, however, merits greater in-depth examination. Secondly, we must mention the emergence of hostels which were initially linked to the pilgrims but which have grown rapidly in recent years. The most significant of these is located at Monte do Gozo and contains over 3,000 beds. There are also other smaller ones which are scattered around the urban area, and there is also accommodation linked to the Church which is no always very visible.

Following on from these changes in supply are developments in accommodation ratings. In 1994, 41% of hotel establishments were rated above three stars. In 2014 the figure is 56%, bearing in mind that a large proportion of establishments in the historic centre are unable to access high ratings as a result of structural issues connected to the historic nature of many of the buildings.
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Alongside the increased supply, demand has also been rising. This rise has probably not been equalled with the increase in supply; however it has maintained a definite upward trend. In analysing the data, it has been necessary to disregard figures for exceptional years, such as Holy Years (for example, 1999) and the year that corresponds to Santiago as European Capital of Culture (2000). According to official information held by the National Institute of Statistics relating to tourists in regulated accommodation, the figures range from 340,000 in 2001 to 573,000 in 2007, the year preceding the onset of the crisis. From 2007 there is a period of stagnation which corresponds to a drop in Spanish tourists and a rise in foreign visitors, although the final total for 2012 was below 540,000 tourists.

Unfortunately, we do not have reliable official data to enable us to go further back in time to appreciate the growth in demand with greater clarity. However, we can report that demand has risen more slowly than supply, as illustrated by occupancy rates which show a continued decline from a level of 41.2% in 2001 to 38.7% in 2012. This, together with the freeze in prices and the significant fall in conference tourism, has led to serious profitability problems for the city’s hotels. Santiago’s hotels can generally be divided into two broad groups. Firstly, there are the fairly small establishments with exceptional locations inside the urban area, many of which are situated within the historic centre itself. The second group consists of larger-scale hotels, frequently part of major business groups, which tend to be situated within the established city. It is this second group which has suffered most as a result of the expansion in hotel supply due to its greater dependence upon MICE tourism, business tourism and organised tours with overnight stays. In fact, these issues have, for some hotels, led to serious financial difficulties.

In terms of demand, there is evidence of some important changes as well as signs of weaknesses which could determine the future outcome to a significant degree. On the one hand we find that the low levels of foreign tourism have been improving thanks to strong promotional campaigns and very specifically due to the significance that the Camino de Santiago has acquired, as international visitors now make up over 50% of pilgrims. On the other hand, Galicia’s airport policy has to contend with strong localism which is causing a struggle to maintain three airports within a distance of little more than 100km, resulting in fragmentation that is very impractical for the competitiveness of the three cities in dispute, including Santiago. In addition, Galicia’s location as an outlying region makes it particularly vulnerable to deficiencies in its air transport links.

The official figures show that overnight stays by non-residents of Spain have risen from under 30% at the beginning of the 21st Century to the current level of 40%, with the majority of European visitors coming from countries such as Italy, Germany, France, Portugal and the United Kingdom within Europe; and beyond Europe, with most visitors coming from the United States. Furthermore, as indicated above, the number of foreign visitors following the Camino de Santiago now exceeds that of Spaniards, with the exception of Holy Years. However these tangible results, the consequence of urban and tourist policy-making, have also left us with other less measurable consequences. These include issues relating, for example, to the pressure of tourism on the historic centre and the issue there being fewer and fewer permanent residents living in this area, in addition to other problems linked to urban and tourism management.

The way that the Cathedral dominates the whole tourist area has created certain problems of visitor management, particularly in relation to day-trippers. The car parks situated around the area of the historic centre direct the movement of people directly towards the city’s key resource, its Cathedral. This increases the pressure on a fragile heritage monument and helps to focus tourist visits within a very small area. This is particularly significant in relation to the requirement for tourist coaches to use a parking area that is situated around 200m from the Cathedral.

Data from the City of Santiago Tourism Observatory shows that day-trippers, who make up between 25 and 30% of all visitors, remain in the city for over six hours on average. However, the breakdown of these figures gives a more detailed picture. A study carried out by Santos (1999) looking at the length of time that coaches are parked in the city centre for passengers to board and disembark, indicates that the average stay varies between 2.5 hours in February and 4.1 hours in August. These figures refer exclusively to organised tours not involving an overnight stay which, according to the Strategic Marketing Plan (2004), are of medium appeal and are one of the least profitable sectors.

A later study carried out with the aim of regulating tourist flows in and around the Cathedral showed the problem created by organised day trips. Conflicts related essentially to the confluence of day-
trippers’ schedules, the shortage of time which forced them to concentrate their visit solely upon the most iconic locations and the problems caused inside the Cathedral for the free circulation of other worshippers and visitors. As space in the Cathedral is limited and generally narrow, major problems arise in terms of movement when one or more groups attempt to visit it at the same time. In addition, there are no established itineraries or information stops. For this reason, following the 2010 Holy Year, there was an urgent need to create a booking system for group visits, in addition to other specific measures to manage organised group visits. A final issue in this area relates to the frequently lower spend by visitors who only remain at the destination for a short period of time.

![Fig1. Map of the city of Santiago de Compostela. Source: Authors.](image)

With the excessive pressure placed on the Cathedral by tour managers and the excessive weight given to religious motivation, action was taken to provide alternatives to this situation. On the one hand, the creation of products of a cultural nature was made a requirement. On the other hand, a second tourist node was designed within the historic centre, but on the outside of the walls surrounding the old city. As we understand it, the results were not as expected. Whilst religious motivation is indeed a secondary issue for tourists and even for pilgrims, the image of the holy city and even many of the initiatives that have been rolled out continue to reinforce a religious standpoint.

Research carried out by Lopez (2010) amongst Italian tourists showed how the visitors’ image of the city prior to their visit was clearly a religious one. In addition, efforts to diversify tourism products had the effect of giving a central role to the religious perspective. Such offerings included the Domus Dei route linking closed convents, the opening of a new central space to add to the offering, the city museum and the museum of pilgrimages, in addition to that of the Cathedral, which is by far the most visited.

The religious tourism image is indirectly strengthened in other ways. Causes include participation in the Holy Cities network together with Rome and Jerusalem and, most obviously, the papal visits of 1982, 1989 and 2010. There have also been efforts to present events that help mitigate the long gap between the 2010 Holy Year and that of 2021. To this end, in 2012 there were celebrations for the Cathedral’s 800th anniversary and 2014 marks the 800th anniversary of Saint Francis of Assisi’s pilgrimage to Santiago.

An issue that follows on from this relates to attempts to create a second tourist node to remove congestion from the Cathedral. The technical document within the 2004 Strategic Marketing Plan planned its development on one of the outer sides of the walled city, in a location where the Camino de Santiago enters the historic centre and where there are also some interesting cultural facilities. This node would be boosted by the installation in this area of a cable car connecting the urban area with a vast architectural complex called the City of Culture which is situated nearby on the side of one of the mountains that surround Santiago. The negative report produced by ICOMOS in 2008 (http://www.coag.es/websantiago/pdf/informeteleferico.pdf) scuppered plans for the creation of this new node and led to the abandonment of Eisenman’s complex by the tourism industry.

At present, plans to diversity and extend the tourist area are focused on the incorporation of the surrounding municipalities (http://www.areasantiago.es) and on the promotion of gastronomy, the cornerstone of which is the food market. The main problem with this initiative may be due to the
over-development of tourism within this area of the city: an area of the city which continues to be Santiago’s commercial hub and one of the engines fuelling life in the historic centre. If urban renewal has been unable to halt the decline in the number of residents and the disappearance of traditional commerce in favour of tourist business, the loss of customers for the food market as a result of tourism pressure could speed up the demographic crisis of this part of the city even further.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Santiago de Compostela has become an iconic city (as a result of its heritage, its history and some of its examples of contemporary architecture), leading to an increase in visitors. Furthermore, it retains its international dimension. Those who historically were pilgrims and merchants from different countries are now tourists and pilgrims.

The importance that Santiago’s historic zone has acquired during these years has meant that the image of urban Santiago is at odds with the space constraints in this area where the city’s highest concentration of heritage and history are to be found. Santiago’s historic centre retains its variety of functions; however this multi-functionality is continually being reduced due to the loss of residents and local business from the area. In fact, one issue that still needs to be resolved is the restoration of the area’s original residential function, as tertiarisation, or rather touristification (Santos Solla, 2006), is leaving a visible mark in terms of empty shops and vacant premises which have been colonised by tourist establishments. This is, without doubt, harmful for the city’s dynamic. It adds to the pressure upon its heritage, social degradation and conflicts between tourist spaces and residential spaces. Once again, the historic centre is facing profound functional and social change (TrotiñoVinuesa, 2003).

The commitment to valuing the heritage of the historic centre in tourism terms has revealed its weaknesses, and so a new planning focus is called for which will take these changes into consideration and which will ensure that the area’s functions are revitalised. Measures that have been taken so far have succeeded neither in extending the tourist area beyond the historic centre, nor in bringing in new residents to any significant degree. It is possible to improve competitiveness and tourism quality through a quality-driven culture. This will benefit both tourists and residents. For these reasons, Santiago de Compostela’s urban and tourism planning needs to be reformulated, seeking new ways to value its renewable resources and distancing itself from the spectre of stagnation and trivialisation (SantomilMosquera, 2012).

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AUTHORS’ BIOGRAPHY

Prof. Xosé Manuel Santos Solla, Senior lecturer in Human Geography at the University of Santiago de Compostela. Director of the CETUR (Centro de estudios e investigaciones turísticas – Centre for Tourist Studies and Researches) of the University of Santiago de Compostela between 2005 and 2014. His main research line is tourism, having published various articles and book chapters on the Way to St. James.

Dr. Lucrezia Lopez, She is Researcher at the University of Santiago de Compostela. She is member of the research group AN.TE (Territorial Analysis) at the same University. Her main research lines include human, cultural and tourism geography, heritage and geography of pilgrimages (sacred spaces and places).