


Chapter 8

Pilgrimage Routes to Happiness: Comparing the Camino de Santiago and Via Francigena

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ABSTRACT

The chapter investigates the topic of happiness and quality of life in the slow-tourism context, with specific reference to the pilgrimage tourism phenomenon. The Camino de Santiago and the Via Francigena are analysed through explorative research with the aim of understanding the effects of pilgrimage on individuals' levels of well-being and its implications for peoples' lives. The results reveal several differences in motivations and benefits obtained according to the pilgrimage road undertaken, with a more existential connotation tied to personal happiness in the Camino de Santiago pilgrim group and a more experiential connotation tied to wellness in the Via Francigena pilgrim group. These findings provide new insights into contemporary pilgrimages in a comparative perspective.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, quality of life and well-being have become important areas of investigation in tourism research (Jepson et al., 2019). Indeed, there has been a shift in the value of tourism towards more subjective elements, such as sustainability, wellness, well-being, and quality of life (Perdue et al., 2010). In particular, sustainability and personal/social well-being have become driving forces underpinning new forms of tourism, including slow tourism (Moore, 2012; Oh et al., 2016). Slow tourism is an umbrella term encompassing various tourism types (Serdane, 2020), such as responsible tourism (Timms & Conway, 2012) and ethical tourism (Clancy, 2015). Even pilgrimage tourism can be traced back to slow tourism (e.g. Kato & Prozano, 2017; Lemmi, 2020; Olsen & Wilkinson, 2016), and this connection is promoting renewed interest in a phenomenon traditionally analysed in the stream of religious tourism (e.g. Raj et al., 2015; Terzidou et al., 2018), heritage tourism (e.g. Timothy & Boyd, 2006), or cultural tourism (e.g. Rinschede, 1992). As part of the slow-tourism model, pilgrimage tourism “offers a more sustainable tourism product that is less alienated (and alienating), more culturally sensitive, authentic and a better-paced experience for hosts and tourists alike” (Timms & Conway, 2012, p. 398). In essence, pilgrimage tourism can be considered part of a humanistic philosophy, fostering and developing the well-being of tourism destinations’ stakeholders (Latusi & Fissore, 2021).

Although pilgrimage was the first form of tourism to come into existence hundreds of years ago (Timothy & Olsen, 2006), nowadays it can be considered as a relatively new phenomenon, given the changes experienced over the past decades and its ongoing process of transformation (Collins-Kreiner, 2020a). The modern idea of pilgrimage encompasses both religious and secular journeys, and since the 2000s researchers have discussed this holistic phenomenon in the context of spiritual rather than religious motivations and actions (Collins-Kreiner, 2016, 2020a, 2020b). The recent literature has pointed out that pilgrims are engaged in a quest for a variety of experiences, including enlightenment, knowledge, improved spiritual and physical well-being, challenge, and social bonds (e.g. Collins-Kreiner, 2020a, 2020b; Kim & Kim, 2019; Liutikas, 2015). Therefore, pilgrimage can be defined as a journey of becoming, a mobility for the search for deeper or higher meaning that includes an element of existential transformation and self-discovery (Collins-Kreiner, 2020a; Nilsson & Tesfahuney, 2016).

Despite these achievements, there is scarce research addressing the topic of pilgrims’ travel motivations and inner experiences (Amaro et al., 2018; Blackwell, 2014; Damari & Mansfeld, 2016). The few studies that exist tend to consider a specific route (mainly the Camino de Santiago) and pilgrims as a homogenous group (Amaro et al., 2018) rather than comparing different experiences, individuals, and

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