

BARCELONA TOURISM IMAGE WITHIN THE FLICKR COMMUNITY

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Photography has been a central element in tourism practices, both in the choice of destination and visitor behaviour at destination (Urry, 1990). In urban tourism, the tourism ritual often consists in a tour around the most important nodes of the city to capture a photographic moment that will perpetuate the canonical image of this city.

The advent of digital photography has transformed the photographic practices of tourists. The visitor now has much more storage capacity and instant viewing of images. But the most important factor is that the images acquire the value of elements of socialization, that is, they act as messages in networks that help their owners to be placed in its social context. This is a fundamental change in the history of tourism. For the first time, the image of a destination is not built only from intermediation or from the destination itself, but tourists are now «builders» of tourism images. Numerous articles have appeared in recent years with the purpose of analyzing the impact of digital photography and social networking on the tourism image of a destination (Mack, Blose and Pan, 2008, Zheng and Gretzel, 2010, Sheungting Lo et al. 2010).

This paper also studies the impact of digital photography on the tourism image of a destination, the city of Barcelona, in order to analyze the changes caused by digital transition on the symbolic construction of a destination. We were interested, especially, in defining the most relevant features of the tourist image of the city, the pieces that integrate this image and their organization into a hierarchy or system of relations.

The source used for the study is the photographs of Barcelona published on the social network Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>). The sample selected was 3100 photos, of Barcelona, published in July 2010. 90% of the images have been obtained from a search using the word Barcelona and 10% with the word *Barcelone*. This distribution corresponds to the name used to designate the city in the languages of the principal tourism markets, according to data provided by Barcelona Tourism Board (2010). Selection followed random criteria.

For each photograph five data were collected:

1. Identification. Each new element was registered with a code.

2. Category. Twelve categories have been identified: religious monument, civil monument, memorial, leisure facilities, street, park, urban element, harbour, skyline, restaurants, beach and others.
3. Period. The period refers to the historical and artistic movement to which the item photographed belongs, distinguishing between three possibilities: before Modernism, Modernism period and Contemporary period.
4. Zoom. We analyze the way in which the picture shows the photographed object. This is how the tourist focuses the zoom of the camera on the object. So, we distinguish between four possibilities: a fragment (eg. a tower of the Sagrada Familia), the whole piece (eg. the Sagrada Familia), the piece in its urban context (eg. the Sagrada Familia and the Gaudí Avenue) or a panoramic (eg. the Barcelona skyline).
5. Degree of humanization. We considered whether there are tourists, residents, or both in the pictures taken by tourists.

The study results show that the photographic image of Barcelona tourism has changed with the advent of digital photography. It is true that the most common pictures of Barcelona respond to conventional tourist image of the city. In fact, 30% of the images are concentrated in just four nodes, which are the elements of the Gaudí universe of the city: the *Sagrada Familia*, *Casa Batllo*, *Park Guell* and *La Pedrera*. In addition, the main tourism nodes correspond to the traditional elements of the city: the MNAC, *Montjuïc* fountains, the Columbus monument, the Cathedral ... The same images that we would find in an old catalogue of the city or a travel guide. However, including classic elements, the node list reaches 197 nodes, which shows a remarkable dispersion. The spontaneous ability to create nodes is much easier when digital photography allows an unlimited storage capacity. Here we see the process of the long tail (using the term proposed by Chris Anderson) and secondary images take on, all together, a much greater weight than the main icons.

Like all Mediterranean cities, Barcelona has rich historical elements from very different periods: Roman, Gothic, Baroque, Renaissance ... However, the study also revealed the importance of contemporary architecture in the pictures taken by tourists. Most of the photographs are elements that are at most a century old. In fact, only 17% of the pictures represent an element prior to the nineteenth century.

It is true that the tourist gaze is a fragmented view, but in the case of Barcelona visual and panoramic photographs have much more relative weight than fragmentary images. That is, some monuments tend to be framed in its immediate urban environment. In fact, 39% of the images correspond to a panoramic view, especially the Barcelona skyline, and 22.8% of images are a sight in its context, in its urban environment.

Finally, we also studied the degree of humanization of the photographs. Despite the status of the images, the percentage of images with tourists is very low. The study has shown that images where people appear, whether locals or visitors, are much less frequent than images without humans. In fact, almost 70% of the total image of the city is photographs without tourists or locals.

The analysis of the image of Barcelona has demonstrated the potential of this source, which can be expanded to other geographical areas, in a wider time frame, or even add new registers.