

VALUE ADDED, AUTHENTICITY AND LOYALTY DURING THE 2010 XACOBEO EVENT: A TOURISTS PERCEPTION PERSPECTIVE

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Xacobeo is a cultural and religious event staged in Santiago de Compostela during the Holy Years. Since its inception in 1991, Xacobeo has been celebrated four times: in 1993, 1999, 2004 and 2010. Data published by public institutions suggest clearly that Xacobeo has been a successful event. In the first Xacobeo event, for example, nearly 100.000 Compostelas¹ were delivered, a number 10 times higher than the compostelas granted the previous non-holy years. Over the years, in Spain and elsewhere the interest toward the pilgrimage has been growing, and Holy Years continued to attract a large number of visitors and pilgrims. For example, during the last 2010 Holy Year more than 250.000 compostelas were delivered to pilgrims. The success of Xacobeo has also increased the number of tourists visiting the Galician autonomous region and in particular the city of Santiago de Compostela. During the various Holy Years the autonomous community received on average 1,5 million of visitors more than the previous non-holy years, and half million represents a long-term increase in future visitors in Galicia (Ulloa and Ruiz, 2010).

The growing importance of the Xacobeo and its consequences for tourism has not been adequately studied in the tourist literature. While the Camino de Santiago has generated a large debate (Torres et al., 1993; Santos, 1997; Murray and Graham, 1997; Santos, 2006; Herrero 2008), very little has been said about Xacobeo as tourist product (Santos, 1999; Tilson, 2005; Rodríguez et al., 2010). Moreover, those studies analyzing the Xacobeo have concentrated essentially on its communication strategy and destination branding, with no much emphasis on the analysis on tourists perceptions of Xacobeo.

With the aim of fulfilling this gap, the present study focuses on how tourists perceived the Xacobeo in terms of its value added to the visit, its authenticity and loyalty. To this

1 One «Compostela» is a formal accreditation delivered to people who undertake the Camino de Santiago. To know more about the requirements of this accreditation visit: <http://www.archicompostela.org/peregrinos/Espanol/La%20Compostela.htm>

end, 400 tourists visiting Santiago de Compostela during the 2010 Xacobeo event were interviewed. The results demonstrate that tourists visiting Santiago consider that the event added very little or nothing at all to their visits and that they are not willing to revisit the Xacobeo again. At the same time, results indicate that tourists are very likely to return to the city of Santiago de Compostela. It follows, therefore, that our results seem to contrast with the idea of success emerging from the data regarding the visitors and pilgrims visiting Santiago during a Xacobeo.

A summary of the most important results can be found in table 1.

Table 1
ASSESSMENT OF XACOBEO EVENT

	Mean	Standard deviation	Coefficient of variation
Loyalty			
If I had to decide again, I would come back to Santiago de Compostela during the Xacobeo celebrations (L1)	2.653	1.444	0.544
I will recommend to my friends and family visit Santiago de Compostela during Xacobeo celebrations	2.904	1.491	0.513
I will return to Santiago de Compostela during the Xacobeo celebrations (L3)	2.596	1.414	0.545
Added value			
Visiting Xacobeo added extra value to my visit to Santiago (V1)	3.020	1.348	0.446
Discuss to my friends that I visited Santiago de Compostela during Xacobeo celebrations will add value to my visit (V2)	2.964	1.433	0.484
Existential authenticity			
I enjoyed a unique religious and spiritual experience (Ex1)	3.074	1.504	0.489
My experience in the city was enriched by the environment created during the Xacobeo (pilgrims, particular events) (Ex2)	3.133	1.363	0.435

Source: Own elaboration base on survey

Results indicate that event loyalty is relatively low. About 50% of tourists said to agree very little or not at all with the possibility to return to Santiago de Compostela during another Xacobeo. A similar result can be found with respect to the possibility of assisting the event in the future, while 43% does not agree with recommending visiting the city during the event celebrations to family and friends.

The perceived added value is slightly higher than loyalty. Yet, one third of tourists consider that participating to Xacobeo did not add extra value to their visit and that when sharing the experience with friends the visit is not more valuable because it took place during a Xacobeo.

With respect to authenticity, 37% of tourists interviewed indicate that they did not enjoyed a unique religious and spiritual experience, while 30% did not agree that the experience in the city was enriched by the vibrant environment created by the staged event.

Moreover, considering the influence of motivation on tourist behavior (Yoon and Uysal, 2005; Severt et al., 2007; Schofield and Thompson, 2007; Kolar and Zabkar, 2009), we analyzed the previous variables according to the motivations to visit Santiago. We found important and statistically significant differences between tourists visiting Santiago for religious and non religious reasons. It was found that tourists visiting for religious reasons scored higher across all the items used.

A different picture emerges if we focus not on the event but on the city of Santiago de Compostela. Considering loyalty, between 87% and 90% of tourists surveyed agreed or totally agreed with the statement that they will recommend the city to family and friends and that they may return to the city in the future. In the same vein, tourists evaluated the city authenticity above the event authenticity. The most important factors are people friendliness and the peaceful environment.

