

ACADEMIC TOURISM IN GALICIA: OTHER FORM OF UNIVERSITIES CONTRIBUTION TO LOCAL ECONOMIES

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Recently, a remarkable increase in student mobility has been noticed. During the second half of the last century, and continuing this, there has been a steady upward trend in the number of international students –from the EU and non EU– studying in Spanish higher education institutions. Due to the numerous opportunities provided by scholarships, exchange programs and partnerships between universities, every year thousands of Spanish students choose to experience studying abroad at the same time a similar number of foreign students comes to study in Spain.

Aside from the educational experience, spending some time abroad gives the student a chance to learn languages, experience new culture, customs and get immersed into a different society. Student travel encourages the exchange of ideas, contributes to education and plays an important role in greater international understanding. It also increases the interest in connecting directly with the culture and social life of another country.

From a conceptual point of view, academic mobility can be considered a type of tourism, since it meets the parameters used for this purpose by international organizations related to the field of tourism. Indeed, the activities conducted by persons who travel outside their usual environment for a period of less than one year, with the objective to carry out studies can be considered as tourism (Organización Mundial de Turismo, 1994). In this work we use the term of «academic tourism» to refer to all stays lasting less than one year and carried out in higher education institutions outside the student's usual environment. The main purpose of such stay would be to complete university degrees and/or attend language courses organized by these schools. Therefore, one could differentiate between domestic academic tourism (if the move to study takes place within the country) and international academic tourism (if the move is abroad). This research focuses on this latter form of academic tourism, due to its importance.

There are some characteristics that distinguish academic tourism from other types of tourism: such as the prolonged nature of the stay at the destination, a greater consumption

of local goods and services or shared flats as the preferred type of accommodation, which makes academic tourism an interesting complement to so-called conventional tourism, especially in Galicia, which is an academic destination par excellence. The University System of Galicia consists of three Universities which provides their students the opportunity of participating in numerous exchange programs, bilateral agreements, language courses and internships.

There are few works on academic tourism. Only has been very recently when it has begun to loan attention to the student exchanges like a tourist current. There are pioneering works that reflect the increasing interest for knowing the economic effects generated by the student mobility, but the academic tourism has not been analysed in depth until the moment.

This research focuses on the analysis of the positive economic impact of foreign university students who enrol in official courses offered by the three Galician universities, which make up the University System of Galicia (SUG). In order to establish the characteristics of this type of tourism and to estimate its economic impact, 730 students enrolled in the SUG in 2008 were surveyed. These students were selected through stratified random sampling. The questionnaire consisted of four main thematic sections: general questions, questions concerning the different types of expenditure, questions about possible visits to other places (as well as visits of their friends or relatives) and questions regarding their level of satisfaction with their stay.

Considering the monthly living expenses, expenditure on tuition fees and visits to other destinations in Galicia, the average expenditure per student was estimated at 3,608 Euros per academic tourist. To calculate the number of academic tourists in Galicia in 2008 the data related to the number of incoming students, were provided by the international relations offices of the three Galician universities, as well as data related to the number of foreign students coming to study Spanish language. According to these data the number of academic tourists in Galicia was 3,212 in 2008. Multiplying the figures, we find that the direct economic impact generated by tourism in Galicia international academic is equal to 11,589,000 Euros.

Apart from quantifying the direct effect, the study focuses on the indirect impact. Tourism models have traditionally relied on input-output modelling. The input-output techniques are powerful empirical tools that are often applied in research about the economic effects of tourism and they will also be used for the empirical application in this paper.

Indirect impacts are the impacts of tourism on other sectors, which act as suppliers to those directly affected by tourism demand. That means, in the present case, each Euro a tourist spends in Galicia, academic tourism generates a demand for higher value than one Euro. The first step to estimate the indirect impact is to know the vector of demand for academic tourists. The survey results provide information on the distribution of average spending by academic tourists in different concepts related to their stay, allowing disaggregation. Once the calculations are made, the vector of demand is obtained, that will be used to estimate the indirect impact. As a result we were able to quantify the total effect of academic tourism in Galicia (direct and indirect) in 16.5 million Euros and the multiplier effect in 1.43.

The work contributes to the analysis of this new typology of tourism. Besides, in a moment of economic crisis, in which it does increasingly necessary analyse the efficiency of the public resources, the investigation will serve to show the paper of the universities, creating the necessary conditions to attract this typology of tourists. This research makes an important contribution as it provides some very relevant information about the economic impact of academic tourism. The results offer some detailed information about the patterns of expenditure of the academic tourists and about other aspects related to their stay in Galicia, such as their visits to tourist sites within Galicia and the rest of Spain, visits of friends and relatives and their loyalty to Galicia. This information can be useful, among other things, for tourism policy making. Academic tourism has great potential and offers a number of significant advantages. This suggests the need to increase efforts to attract more foreign students. As the results of other studies conducted at national level, the number of academic tourists in Galicia and therefore the economic impact could be even greater taking into consideration the Galician population or the number of students enrolled at their universities.

