

THE ROMERIES: TOURIST OPPORTUNITY AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN LOCAL AND VISITORS. THE CASE OF LA CERDANYA IN CATALONIA (SPAIN)

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Many rural towns, with the aim of reducing their secular demographic, economic, social and cultural marginalization, are committed to highlighting their natural and cultural heritage, assuming that if historical memory is lost, identity is also lost.

In this way, the interest in the tourist reevaluation of the material and immaterial religious heritage of these territories has grown. Thus, some religious places have ended up becoming a multifunctional and multifaceted element, a meeting point for tourists and the local population.

In addition, tourists, more experienced, critical, demanding and individualistic, have modified their motivations and concerns, demanding activities that are increasingly personalized, authentic and that provide them with values and experiences. On the other hand, the attitude of residents toward tourists is also changing. Among the most influential factors in residents' attitudes toward tourism, there are two fundamental factors: the type and degree of interaction between residents and visitors and the importance of tourism activity in the territory.

The theory of social exchange explains that human beings select their relational transactions once they have evaluated their benefits and costs. According to this idea, attitudes are affected by the perceptions of the exchange that individuals consider they are performing. In this way, those who benefit most directly from tourism are those who perceive that this activity generates greater benefits and fewer negative impacts.

A case of new activities that are being developed around cultural-religious tourism are the pilgrimages. These are excursions, usually on foot, to hermitages and / or sanctuaries located in the middle of the countryside or in the mountains, where, in addition to the purely religious activities, it is also take advantage of other festive events linked to the traditions of the place.

At present, these historical events are proliferating, within the boom that in recent years is having the demand for cultural tourism, not exclusive of religious people. This increase is closely related to the desire of new tourists to make sense of their recreation and leisure time.

For this reason, with the pilgrimages, some religious and emblematic places have become meeting points for tourists, mainly holidaymakers with second residences in the place or its surroundings, and the local population, all with different motivations. The most of them are quite far from a purely religious feeling. These are festive-tourist activities based on historical religious events that have become a tourist attraction and a tool for the expansion of culture. However, they are also activities of encounter and interrelation between the local population and the habitual non-residents.

Thus, the main objective of this work paper is to analyze how the ancient pilgrimages have become an element of tourist attraction in the interior territories, with a triple function: revalue the local heritage, attract people and be a meeting place between the community local and visitors.

The study was carried out, based on the collection of documentation on the subject and a series of interviews with participants in this type of event. First, the case of the pilgrimages held annually in the region where tourism and second residences have emerged as the main economic engines is analyzed. Second, a brief summary on the revaluation of the pilgrimages as a tourist attraction and the current degree of tourism development is analyzed in more detail in the case of the pilgrimages in the Cerdanya, a Spanish region in the Catalan Pyrenees, based on a series of statistical data, and a qualitative analysis based on short interviews with several people who have carried out this activity in the region in recent years.

This choice this region is justified if we consider that it is an example of how religious heritage and ancient folkloric activities are valued for tourism. These activities revitalize and preserve a heritage, often in the process of abandonment, preserving it from oblivion and satisfying the new cultural demands of the population.

From the results obtained, and presented in this work paper, it has been possible to see how the cultural and recreational cultural events establish a positive relationship between the local community and tourists, reaffirming the destination as a meeting point of both groups and presenting it, also, as a place of tourist interest for its heritage value.

Thus, pilgrimages are an example of religious-cultural activities whose tourist revaluation helps to reaffirm the local identity, preserve the material and immaterial heritage and, in addition, generate social relations between segments of the population with different interests and motivations.