



THE ROAD OF SANTIAGO IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

ПЪТЯТ НА САНТЯГО В КОНТЕКСТА НА COVID-19

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Abstract: Spain is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world. Apart from the traditional types of tourism, the importance of religious tourism has been growing in recent years. The main prerequisite for this is the widespread spread of Catholicism in the Spanish lands and the numerous religious and cultural monuments. Santiago de Compostela, the capital of the Autonomous Community of Galicia, plays an important role in this regard. The famous Santiago Road, the first European cultural tourist route, reaches there. Travel on the Roads of Santiago changed significantly in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic hit this tourist segment very hard, and the number of pilgrims fell sharply.

Keywords: Religion; tourism; tourist resources; Camino de Santiago; pilgrims.

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INTRODUCTION

Spain is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world. In 2019, it was visited by 83,5 million tourists (№2 in the world), and tourism revenues amounted to 79,7 billion dollars (№2 in the world). Apart from the traditional types of tourism, the importance of religious tourism has been growing in recent years. The main prerequisite for this is the spread of Catholicism in the Spanish lands and the numerous religious and cultural monuments. Today, almost all Spaniards are Catholics, and the religion is closely associated with numerous public holidays dedicated to the saints and martyrs of the Roman Catholic Church.

Santiago de Compostela, the capital of the Autonomous Community of Galicia, plays an important role in this regard. There is the tomb of the Apostle Santiago, where in the XI–XIII century an impressive cathedral was built and his relics are preserved. It is the end point of one of the greatest journeys in Christianity. It is believed that everyone who has walked the Path of Santiago receives complete indulgence.

The object of study in this report is the Way of Santiago, traced through the prism of COVID-19. The subject of research is the emergency situation related to the pandemic and its impact on the tourist flow.

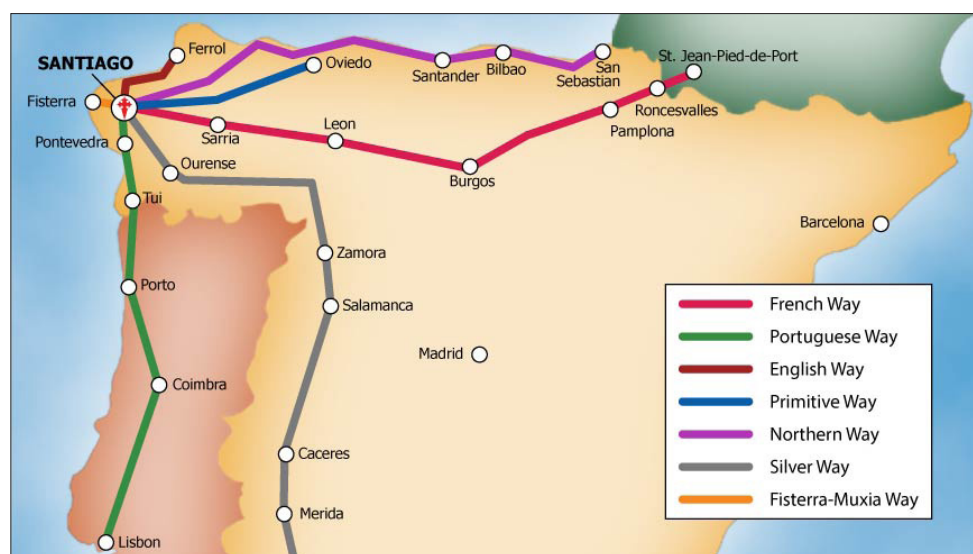
The aim of the research is to clarify the possibilities for the development of tourism on the Santiago Road in the conditions of an emergency epidemiological situation.

EXPOSURE

The idea of promoting some European cultural routes, using the Santiago Way as a model, was initiated at separate meetings in 1984 and 1985. The first was the recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on „European Pilgrimage Routes” and the second was European Conference of Ministries responsible for architectural monuments. The centuries-old cultural significance of the Pilgrimage Route to Santiago de Compostela was recognized in 1987 by the Council of Europe as „Europe’s First Cultural Route“, and the city of Santiago de Compostela was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site (Sánchez, 2005, p. 11).

Gradually, the Way of Santiago became increasingly popular, and worship took place along several major routes. These are – French (it is referred to as El Camino de Santiago), Northern (El Camino del Norte), Via de la Plata (Vía de la Plata), Portuguese (El Camino Portugués), English Road (El Camino Inglés), Camino Primitivo (El Camino Primitivo), Ruta del Mar de Aruoka and Río Ulla (Ruta del Mar de Aruosa y Río Ulla) and the Camino de Fisterra-Muxía (Figure 1). They are marked with special tourist columns and signs, some of the roads and paths have been recently reconstructed with money from European funds (Oficina de..., 2021).

There are numerous tourist routes in Galicia itself. They all start and end in Santiago de Compostela. The most preferred are Rias Bajas, Barbansa, Ribera del Uya, Fistera-Costa de Morte, Rias Altas and others.



Source: <https://www.elcaminoconcorreos.com/en/blog/camino-santiago-maps>

Figure 1. The roads of Santiago

These tourist routes are the busiest during the so-called jubilee years (xacobeos), when the feast of St. James on July 25 falls on a Sunday. The last such years are 2004, 2010 and the next is 2021, etc. (Dimitrov, 2018, p. 7).

In the spring of 2020, an unusual situation occurred caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and as a result, a travel ban was issued, including on the Roads of Santiago. The coronavirus and its rapid spread around the world have forced governments to close borders and cancel flights between the various countries affected.

Given the situation, the Camino de Santiago is also affected by the closure of hotels, guest houses, hostels, restaurants and shops. Other services related to the Camino de Santiago, such as luggage transfer, have also ceased operations.

The Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela and the reception of the pilgrim also took appropriate preventive measures, closing their doors on March 13, 2020. This battle against the pandemic could only be won by severing contacts and social relations, so pilgrims loving the Camino de Santiago had to stay at home and think about resuming their plans at a later stage.

Travel on the Roads of Santiago changed significantly in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic hit this tourism segment very hard. Due to security measures imposed by the Federation of Associated Friends of the Camino de Santiago, the pilgrims suggested postponing their plans to cross the road for a later period of time after the pandemic subsided.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the Federation launched an information campaign on the situation with COVID-19 in Camino through their website. From there, they suggested that all pilgrims who still travel on the Camino de Santiago be very careful and vigilant when it comes to safety measures and restrictions adopted by the various territories.

For those planning a Camino de Santiago, a few tips for safe travel have been given:

Reservations at the Camino Albergeries

One of the changes resulting from this „new normal“ situation after COVID-19 is the recommendation to book in advance a place in the hostels or other types of accommodation that are used for overnight stays during the trip. This will ensure that pilgrims find vacancies and open accommodation.

This is necessary because in 2020 some of the accommodation on the Camino remained closed and there is a lack of beds, so it is recommended to make sure in advance that the places where you want to spend the night work. Lists of more than 4,000 hostels, hotels and hostels were made on the association's website, with telephone numbers and email addresses so you can plan your trip in advance.

Also, Xunta de Galicia has created a website where you can check availability and book a place in public hostels (<https://alberguesxacobeo.gal/>).

It should be noted that only 50% of the seats will be available compared to what was offered in previous years, as they had to adapt to the new safety and hygiene rules (restriction of space, equipment, public spaces, etc.). According to the information, the pilgrims will now be able to make a reservation from the previous day until 13:00 on the same day. Only then, if there are any seats left, will they be available for pilgrims who arrive without a reservation.

Galicia, meanwhile, has created a map and a list of all the hostels that will be available for Camino's various routes during the winter months. They have also developed an application that can be downloaded.

Pilgrims who choose the French Way will be able to find free places in hostels in real time. This will be possible thanks to the LOT Hostels initiative, promoted by the Association of Municipalities of Camino de Santiago in collaboration with the governments of Navarre, Aragon, La Rioja, Castile and Leon and the Galician Association of Private Hostels.

The Association of Municipalities on the Road to Santiago also launched a Safe Dormitory campaign on July 1, including support and advice to a network of traditional and municipal hostels on sanitation requirements related to COVID-19. A number of posters have been developed for this campaign, which can be found throughout the network of hostels, with all the suggestions that will make the hostel a safe place. They have also created an interactive map with the location and contact of the Safe Albergues Network, which can be found on their website. This map is updated weekly, including all available hostels (<https://www.amcsantiago.com>).

The website also has a list of hostels that will be open on the French road between November and February.

Transporting a backpack or other luggage on the Santiago Road

The Post Office introduced an additional transportation service on the Roads of Santiago. This service is already available on the way from Soria to Santiago, with all safety measures. The delivery team has been trained in COVID-19 and has everything you need to ensure safe delivery: FFP2 masks, hydroalcohol gel, disinfectant for vehicles and more.

An online form for pilgrims has also been introduced so that they can book their reservation and pay securely by credit card or PayPal, avoiding cash (www.paqmochila.com).

Pilgrims also have access to other Post Office services on the Road to Santiago, such as the possibility of cycling to and from the Road, storing luggage and leaving things when in Santiago, and also have the opportunity to send suitcases, backpacks and packages from over 150 post offices along the Way of Santiago.

Visits to the Cathedral of Santiago

After the forced closure for several months, the Cathedral of Santiago opened its doors on December 30, 2020. With the arrival of the Jubilee 2021 and the celebration of the 120th holy year of Compostela in its history, the cathedral looks great again and can be visited by 9 : 00 to 20:30 every day.

Pilgrim meat

The Mass of the Pilgrim returns to the Cathedral of Santiago. Every day is held at two o'clock: from 12:00 and 19:30.

Obtaining a pilgrim certificate

The Pilgrim Reception Service, where certificates are received, will be open daily from 10:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. During this time, pilgrims can visit the center and receive a certificate after verifying the passage of the Camino by showing identification.

The procedure for collecting stamps and issuing a certificate has undergone minor changes to ensure the safety of the pilgrims and staff of the center itself. The steps to be followed are described in detail: pre-registration; drawing a ticket which allows to avoid long waits and avoid crowds in front of the office; visiting the office and taking a certificate at the specified time. From the post office of the center you can send your bicycles, suitcases or buy stamps, cards and souvenirs.

Pilgrims have passed

In the last 10 years, 2.4 million people have crossed the road to Santiago. In 2019, their number is 347,578 pilgrims (Table 1). This is an increase of 5.8% compared to 2018. The most preferred is the French road (54,65% of pilgrims), followed by the Portuguese road (27,23%), the northern road (5,47%), the English road (4,54%), The Primitive Way (4,52%) and others. In 2020, the pandemic interrupted the ever-increasing number of pilgrims traveling on the Way of Santiago. Their number is only 53,906 people and registered a decrease of 84,5% compared to 2019.

Table 1. Number of pilgrims on the Roads of Santiago (1972–2019)

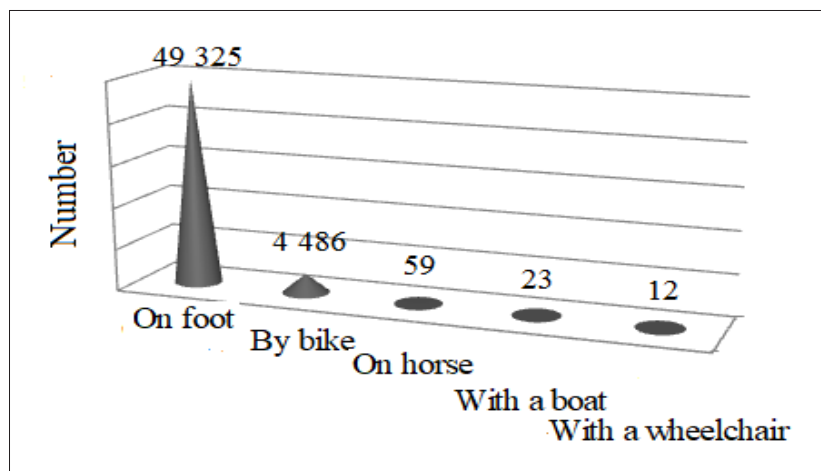
| Year | Pilgrims | Year | Pilgrims | Year | Pilgrims | Year | Pilgrims |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|
| 1972 | 67 | 1984 | 423 | 1996 | 23.218 | 2008 | 125.758 |
| 1973 | 37 | 1985 | 690 | 1997 | 25.179 | 2009 | 147.467 |
| 1974 | 108 | 1986 | 1.801 | 1998 | 30.126 | 2010 | 272.417 |
| 1975 | 74 | 1987 | 2.905 | 1999 | 154.613 | 2011 | 183.378 |
| 1976 | 243 | 1988 | 3.501 | 2000 | 55.004 | 2012 | 192.458 |
| 1977 | 31 | 1989 | 5.760 | 2001 | 61.418 | 2013 | 215.879 |
| 1978 | 13 | 1990 | 4.918 | 2002 | 68.952 | 2014 | 237.882 |
| 1979 | 231 | 1991 | 7.274 | 2003 | 74.614 | 2015 | 262.447 |
| 1980 | 209 | 1992 | 9.764 | 2004 | 179.891 | 2016 | 277.854 |
| 1981 | 299 | 1993 | 99.436 | 2005 | 93.929 | 2017 | 301.036 |
| 1982 | 1.868 | 1994 | 15.863 | 2006 | 101.189 | 2018 | 327.378 |
| 1983 | 146 | 1995 | 19.821 | 2007 | 114.466 | 2019 | 347.511 |

Source: Oficina de Acogida al Peregrino, Santiago de Compostela

Means of transportation

To this day, pilgrims on the Santiago Road traditionally travel on foot, by bicycle or on horseback. In recent years, there are also a small number of pilgrims who have walked the Road in wheelchairs. In

2020, their number is 12. Ship trips are often combined with walking, especially on the English road. It is still preferable to travel on foot, and in 2020 this way of traveling is preferred by 49,325 people or 91,5% of all those who have walked the Santiago Road (Figure 2).



Source: Oficina de Acogida al Peregrino, Santiago de Compostela.

Figure 2. Number of pilgrims according to the mode of movement, 2020

Today, it is believed that the Camino is successfully passed by every pilgrim who has walked at least 100 km or 200 km by bicycle or horse. Of course, there are those who carry huge crosses or travel the entire distance, dragging themselves on the ground on their knees. A whole network of road shelters and chalets is available to passengers. Most were built in the Middle Ages and are supported by the voluntary work and donations of hundreds of Friends of the Way of Santiago clubs scattered throughout Galicia and Spain. There, in spartan conditions, in dormitories you can spend 3-5 nights. Those who have passed the Way receive a written certificate in the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela (Figure 3). Most of them wear mussels on their necks, on which the cross of St. James is painted. Legend has it that once the first pilgrim to pass this time, when he had to cross a raging mountain stream, received instructions from above for a ford of arranged mussel shells. Thus they became a symbol of all worship (Dimitrov, & Petrov, 2006, p. 210).



Source: Oficina de Acogida al Peregrino, Santiago de Compostela.

Figure 3. The stamps needed to receive in writing certificate from the pilgrims

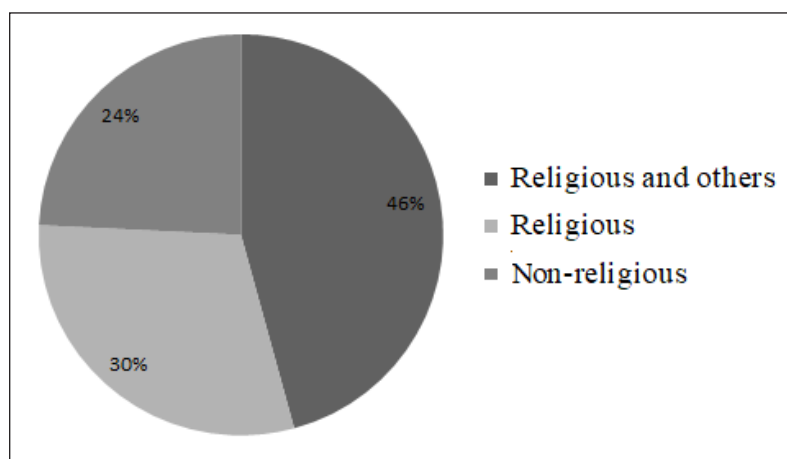
Reasons

Along the Santiago Road, personal travel plays a significant role. Organized tourists are 1/3 of the pilgrims. Despite this small percentage, organized groups are of particular importance. Some of the tour-

ists cross the entire route, and a significant part of the organized tourists cross on foot only the required at least 100 km, or 200 km by bicycle or on horseback.

Religious and other motives are leading (45,76%), and the share of travelers with religious motives is decreasing (30,01%). 24,23% of the pilgrims travel with non-religious motives (Figure 4).

Some pilgrims travel for religious reasons. They want to visit the tomb of St. James, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ, the brother of John the Theologian, who along with Peter and John belongs to the group of privileged disciples who were admitted by Jesus in the most important moments of his life, incl. his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. St. James was the first apostle to be martyred and beheaded by order of Herod Agrippa in 44 in Jerusalem. That is why the worship of his relics attracts many worshipers.



Source: Oficina de Acogida al Peregrino, Santiago de Compostela.

Figure 4. Number of pilgrims, according to the motives for worship, 2020.

Along the French road passing through Navarre, Aragon, La Rioja, Castilla-León to Galicia, about 1,800 religious and secular buildings have been built, in which Romanesque art has become a typical Spanish architectural style (Aleksova, 2005, p. 10). Among these temples, the most famous are the cathedrals of Jaca, Pamplona, Burgos and Leon; the monasteries near Logroño, Estella and Ortega, the Templar castle in Ponferrada, and in the first place the huge cathedral in Santiago de Compostela, considered the pinnacle of Spanish Romanesque architectural style (Dimitrov, 2017, p. 844).

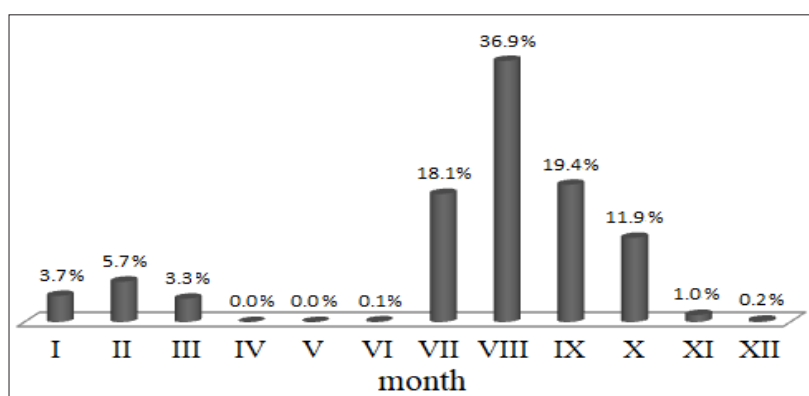
Many tourists travel this route, attracted by Spanish culture. Cathedrals, bridges, Roman roads, monasteries, mansions, palaces, houses and many buildings representing a real cultural treasure can be seen everywhere along the way.

Nature lovers can enjoy amazing landscapes and contrasts, follow the coastline and cross high mountains, vast plateaus and plains. Most of the worshipers who choose this motivation want to free their minds and escape from everyday life.

Seasonal models

There is a certain seasonality in the pilgrimage tourism along the Santiago Road, which is explained by the more favorable climatic conditions and the most common way of getting around. The pilgrimage season is limited mainly in the summer months from April, May to October, because the pilgrimage takes place outdoors. This is especially true for routes passing through the northern part of Spain, which is mountainous. The summer holiday months also affect pilgrimage tourism. People prefer holiday activities, especially where the pilgrimage can be combined with holiday or educational functions. The highest peak of travel is observed in August (Figure 5) and July, especially when there are holy years and July 25 falls on Sunday (Dimitrov, 2018, p. 116).

In 2020, despite the pandemic, most tourists cross the Santiago Road in July (9,752 people), August (19,812) and September (10,441). The fall mainly affects the months of April and May, when there is no traffic on the road...



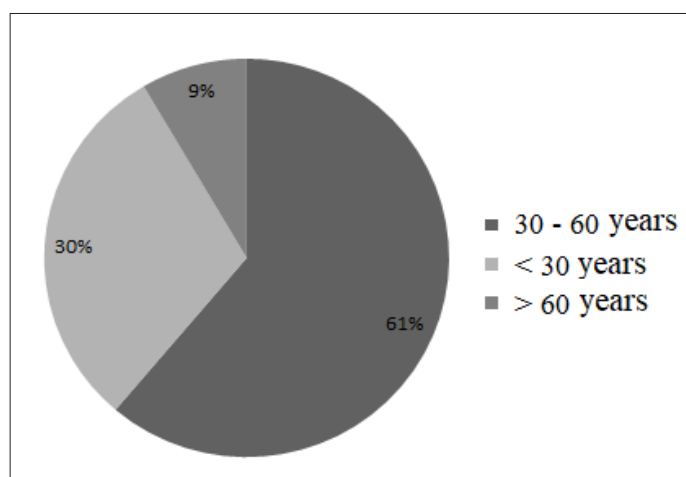
Source: Instituto Gallego de Estadística, 2021.

Figure 5. Distribution of tourists crossed the road to Santiagoby months, 2020, in%

Social structure

The flow of religiously motivated tourists can be analyzed and differentiated according to aspects of its social structure. The ratio in the gender structure among the worshipers is very different in the different world religions. For a long time in Santiago, the greater share fell on men, partly due to the special characteristics of the Way of Santiago, the duration of the trip, the mode of movement, etc. In recent years, the number of women is growing, and in 2018 they are ahead of the number of men. In 2020, the number of men is 30,075 (55,79%) and of women (23,830) (44,21%).

Similar differences can be found in the age structure. By age, the distribution is as follows: over 60–8,41%, between 30–60 – 60,64%, under 30–30,95%. The largest share of pilgrims is between 36 and 60 years old, there is a tendency for an increase in pilgrims over 60 years of age and a decrease in their number under 30 years of age (Figure 6).



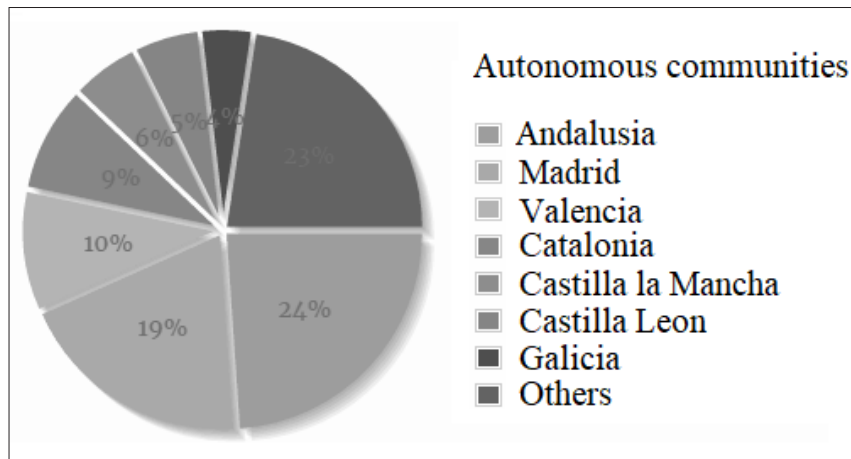
Source: Oficina de Acogida al Peregrino, Santiago de Compostela.

Figure 6. Number of pilgrims by age, %

The socio-professional structure of organized pilgrims in Santiago de Compostela shows that the largest share of workers (20,78%), students (17,96%), people with free professions (15,03%) and retirees (12,89 %). Teachers, employees, the unemployed follow. Artists, farmers, sailors and athletes are relatively underrepresented.

Ethnic origin

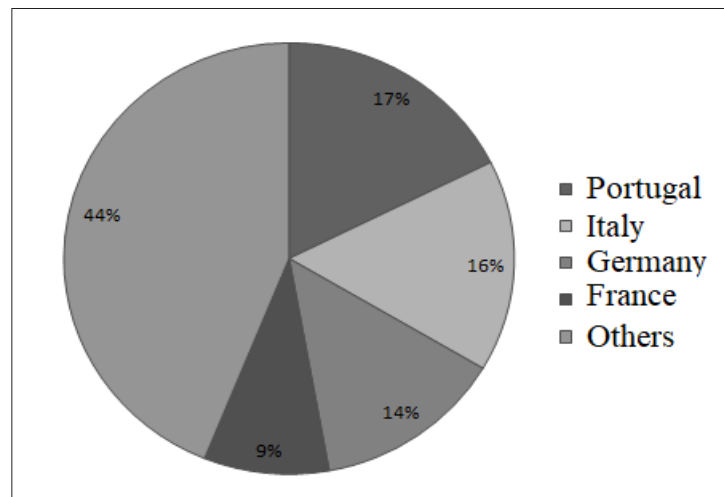
Of all the pilgrims who crossed the Way of Santiago in 2020, 68,57% are Spaniards. The Spaniards from Andalusia, Madrid, Valencia, Catalonia, Castilla la Mancha, Castilla Leon and Galicia predominate (Figure 7).



Source: Oficina de Acogida al Peregrino, Santiago de Compostela

Figure 7. Pilgrims from Spain, in autonomous communities

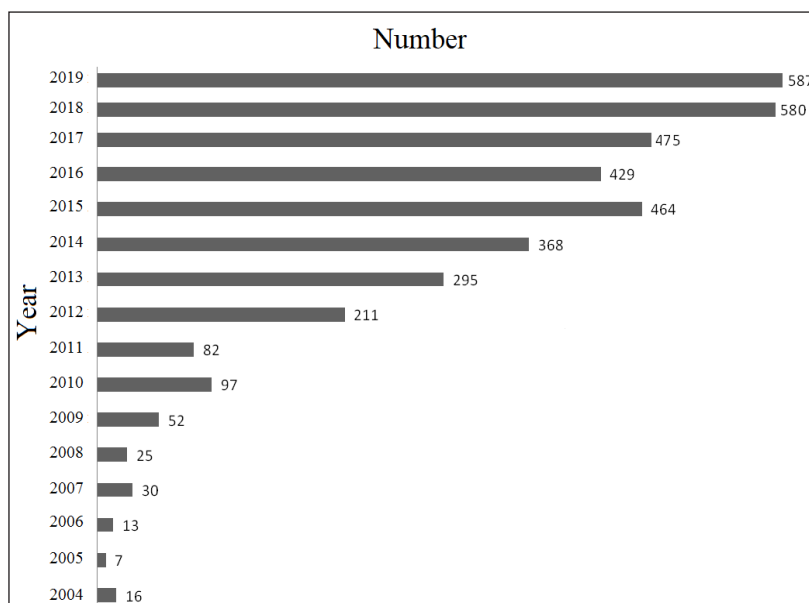
The remaining nearly 31,43% are foreigners, with Europeans sharply predominating (93,06%). The most numerous are the Portuguese, Italians, Germans, French (Figure 8). The numbers of Koreans, British, Poles and Americans are significant.



Source: Instituto Gallego de Estadística, 2021.

Figure 8. Distribution of foreign tourists passed on the road to Santiago, 2020, in%

In recent years, the number of pilgrims from Eastern Europe has been constantly growing. Of the Balkan peoples, the Bulgarians were the leaders for many years, but in recent years the number of Slovenes, Romanians and Croats has been growing rapidly. In 2019, the most numerous are Slovenes 855, Romanians 848, Croats 607 and Bulgarians 587 (0,17%). (Figure 9).



Source: Oficina de Acogida al Peregrino, Santiago de Compostela.

Figure 9. Number of Bulgarians who crossed the Road of Santiago (2004–2019)

By 2020, the trend is for the number of Bulgarians to grow steadily, which is explained by the great popularity of this route in Bulgaria, the significant number of Spanish-speaking Bulgarians and the close economic and cultural contacts between the two countries.

CONCLUSION

Probably 2021 will not be easier than the previous year. The Galician optimism makes us believe that when it's all over, we'll be stronger than before. Meanwhile, work will continue to improve services in 2021, when the Holy Jubilee Year is celebrated to ensure the safety of all future tourists on the roads of Santiago.

The restrictions related to COVID-19 will affect society as a whole, including our individual characteristics. In this sense, lovers of hiking and especially the Santiago Road have the advantage that this activity is carried out in places surrounded by nature, which minimizes the risk of infection compared to other types of tourist trips with crowded people.

The road to Santiago will always be there and we will once again walk through its beautiful landscapes, enjoying the people and the great pilgrimage atmosphere that characterizes it. So, when it's all over, don't forget that they are waiting for you there again...

From what has been said so far, several main conclusions can be drawn:

- The fall of COVID-19 in 2020 severely affected one of the most popular tourist routes in Europe, such as the Santiago Road. After decades of continuous growth of the tourist flow, in 2020 there is a sharp decline in the number of tourists passing through these roads (-84.5%). This is also the lowest figure for the 21st century;

- Religious tourism in Galicia continues to develop on the basis of interdependence with other segments of cultural tourism – cognitive, educational, creative and others. This type of tourism does not require expensive facilities and complex and diverse infrastructure, but rather the preservation and restoration of existing monuments of the past: churches, cathedrals, monasteries and fortresses;

- Revenues from travelers to the final destination of the destination are not large, given the main motive, but are a stimulus for the development of many small villages, especially in northern Spain and especially in Galicia. They were also hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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