

CULTURAL TOURISM IN BARCELONA: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF INFORMATION FROM DIFFERENT TYPES OF ESTABLISHMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Culture forms one of the fundamental axes for tourism in the city of Barcelona. As an urban destination that boasts a variety of nuances, the present research interrogates the importance of cultural tourism as it concerns the degree of satisfaction visitors expressed with the touristic products offered by the following types of establishments: tourist information offices, hotels and digital platforms. The objective is to determine whether or not the range and the available information on cultural tourism products meet the needs of the tourists visiting Barcelona, and to establish the level of satisfaction the tourists feel about the products offered.

The methodology employed is quantitative, based on surveys carried out in touristic establishments (tourist information offices and hotels) and with tourists directly. The conclusion indicates that the level of information about cultural tourism in Barcelona is high and carried out in different languages by specialised individuals; that hotels display an artistic sensibility and interest in helping their clients, especially those with questions or concerns; that certain nationalities (specifically Chinese and American) demonstrate a notable interest in cultural products; and that in general, tourists to Barcelona are satisfied by the cultural tourism on offer in the city.

Key words: cultural tourism; Barcelona; satisfaction; tourist information offices; hotels

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1. THE ROLE OF CULTURAL TOURISM

Tourist destinations go to great lengths to define themselves through their repertoire of inclusive and attractive products for tourists. The concept of a touristic product is kaleidoscopic and shifts over time, though generally, it refers to what a person does when they visit a city that is not their own, whether for leisure, culture or business. It includes both physical assets and the services that characterise a specific destination and that form part of the experience of a tourist in a given location. For an increasingly substantial number of tourists, the attraction of cultural tourism is acting as the essential motivating factor for a trip (Morère Molinero, 1999; De la Calle Vaquero, Velasco González and Pulido Fernández, 2013). Culture has become a fundamental axis for the tourism industry as it attempts to commercialise these kinds of products through Internet, social media and networks, and digital devices, with the smartphone leading these techniques (Fondevila Gascón et al, 2015, 2016a, 2016b).

It is necessary to keep in mind that the positioning of a cultural tourism product in the mind of the consumer is linked to a number of fundamental attributes that can be tangible or intangible. Touristic products are characterised by the factors like intangibility, expiration dates, inseparability, and heterogeneity, thereby leading to specific marketing focuses that are increasingly digital and measurable (Fondevila Gascón, 2014).

The concept of cultural tourism cannot be separated from a critical gaze (Senabre López, 2007). There exists a current of thought that considers the adjective 'cultural' as implemented in a way that adulterates the meaning of tourism associated to historical patrimony. According to this point of view, the tourist attempts to achieve an apparent happiness through a manipulated or abbreviated sub-product of a historical nature. This client will not notice the mercantile mechanism that surrounds the product and thus the label 'cultural' is stripped of its meaning through a superficial usage. It is even necessary to ask whether or not it is possible to consider leisure tourism that is not linked to patrimony as antithetical to culture. It is also possible to identify a relationship between responsible tourism and respect for cultural attractions (Fondevila Gascón and Soliguer, 2012).

The idea of acquiring culture through travel, or whether culture should be inculcated beforehand so that what is perceived can be interpreted, is a further analytical axis. The dichotomy between the efficiency of cultural tourism from a market perspective and the analysis of the phenomenon from a humanistic perspective demonstrate two visions that are necessary and interrelated in attempts to bring the cultural phenomenon to the market.

The perspectives adopted in order to study the phenomenon of cultural tourism are diverse. Geography is one of these perspectives. As such, studies by area have been undertaken in, for example, the Community of Valencia (Vidal Causanilles, 2004; Andreu Simó, 2004), Bilbao (García Feijoo and Eizaguirre Zarza, 2004), the Villa El Chocón (Patagonia-Argentina) (Jalil, González Yanzón and Zanfardini 2004) or in areas with specific attractions such as the Roman theatre at Sagunto (Orón Moratal, 2004). A segmented vision can be found in museums (De Esteban Curiel, Sánchez García and Antonovica, 2013), and in fact, cultural tourism is frequently associated with museums, which attract independent tourists who are highly educated and enjoy an elevated spending power. These components positively impact the receiving cities and local businesses, and thus require rigorous planning in order to better satisfy a tourist who is more demanding than the traditional one.

Hotels form one of the pillars of cultural tourism, though they are increasingly dominated by the concept of hotel chains. These are businesses that seek to expand both

nationally and internationally due to the current market and include all kinds of hotels, both urban and holiday, with independent hotels attempting to link themselves with others so as to avoid being displaced.

The present research compares the importance of cultural tourism as it relates to other offers in terms of the information supplied by public entities (Oficina de Turisme de Barcelona/ The Barcelona Tourist Office) and private ones (hotels). Barcelona boasts a network of offices and information points at the service of tourists. The first of these is The Barcelona Tourist Office (Barcelona Tourisme). Barcelona Tourisme orients and offers touristic products and services that help visitors learn about the city. These offices offer personalised information on Barcelona's touristic and cultural products in a variety of languages; touristic pamphlets; hotel information and reservations in the city's more than 300 hotels and accommodation of different categories (including last minute reservations); information and sales of touristic products.

The offices situated in the City of Barcelona are the following: The Office of Plaça Catalunya, The Office of Plaça Sant Jaume, The Office of Sants Station, The Offices in The Prat Airport, The Ramblas, The Columbus Monument Office, and the Robert Palace Office. Booths are also located throughout the city (Sagrada Família, Plaça Catalunya, Plaça Espanya, Columbus Monument, The Estació Nord Bus Station).

The Catalan Tourist Agency (ACT) is an organism managed by the Government of the Generalitat of Catalonia, who determines the policies for the promotion of tourism. Since the beginning of 2010, it has taken the place of the old consortium Turisme de Catalunya (Catalonia Tourism), which had previously been in charge of this task. The ACT depends on the Department of Business and Employment and is formed by the Generalitat of Catalonia and by the General Council of the Chamber of Commerce of Catalonia, with the former representing the private sector. Among the territorial representatives are the Boards of Trustees for Tourism of the Councils of Barcelona, Tarragona, Lleida and Girona, as well as the public-private entity for the promotion of the Catalanian capital, Barcelona Tourisme.

The substitution of the Consortium for the Agency as the helm of the dissemination of information on the attractions of the Catalanian territory in the exterior represents a change in strategy for the promotion of Catalonia. The principal change is the co-management and the co-participation of the private sector in the responsibilities of promoting and selling Catalonia around the world.

The hotels analysed here are Eurostars Angli and Hotel Abba Sants, randomly selected from a list of the city's hotels. The Eurostars Angli 48 available rooms attempt to break with prevailing ideas of what luxury means. These rooms are completely sound-proofed, very bright and open, decorated with colourful murals and with ground-breaking interior design.

Eurostars Hotels is a hotel chain that belongs to the Hotusa Group with its portfolio of 74 establishments distributed throughout 13 European and American destinations: Germany, Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Cuba, Spain, United States of America, France, Hungary, Italy, Mexico, Portugal, and The Czech Republic.

Eurostars opts for urban, upper-class establishments, strategically located in the historical centres of the cities or in the areas of the financial districts, with minimal decoration and a carefully selected interior design and with the modern aim of satisfying the needs of the most demanding clients. At the same time, Eurostars demonstrates an artistic sensibility and a particular interest in attending clients with cultural interests.

As part of their corporate philosophy and, principally in the hotel industry, Hotusa Group professes an artistic and cultural sensibility and attempts to envelope their establishments in this feeling through training sessions, exhibitions and other activities carried out in each of them, like, for example, displaying the exclusive works of Albert Ràfols-Casamada, Lluís Lleó and Josep Maria Subirachs. This is a key component of the philosophy of Eurostars Hotels, and is established as a primary objective to be integrated into the establishments in the cities that accept them through details such as the architectural design of the buildings, the decoration and interior design, and the presence in their establishments of examples of local culture. Frequently, many of these works come from photography contests, exhibitions of local artists, and the acquisition of local artistic works with a local flair. The company, in collaboration with the University of Barcelona and RBA Books S.A., annually offers the Eurostars Hotel Prize for Travel Narrative.

A variety of Eurostars Hotels offer monthly exhibitions of local artists or residents of the cities in which the hotels are located. Through this initiative, Eurostars Hotels attempts to offer emergent artists and creators an important platform for promotion and commercialisation for their work.

The Abba Sants Hotels is located a five-minute walk from Barcelona's principal train station and from the Metro station Sants Estació. It offers modern and sound-proofed rooms with air conditioning and satellite television. The high-speed train AVE leaves from Sants, along with trains travelling to the Barcelona Airport. The tourist bus also stops here, and the centre can be reached by metro in ten minutes. The Abba Sants restaurant specialises in traditional Basque and other cuisines.

Created in 1999, Abba Hotels is a Spanish hotel chain that owns and operates hotels in Spain's major cities, and in the capitals of Andorra, Germany, France and the United Kingdom. Their high-end infrastructure is designed to offer their clients the maximum in comfort with modern and functional installations in all of their establishments. The chain aspires to a balance between price and quality. Abba Hotels' preeminent trait is their restaurant, opting for gastronomical experiences and a selection of the best wines, at the hand of professionals in the culinary arts. They include restaurants specialised in regional and artisanal cooking.

2. METHODOLOGY

Given that this is a comparative study analysing tourists' levels of satisfaction with the cultural tourism available in Barcelona in relation to the sales of touristic products, the methodology used is quantitative. In order to measure tourist preferences, the sales undertaken at tourism offices, and hotels' promotional process for cultural tourism, three surveys were conducted in the middle of 2016.

The first survey was conducted in Barcelona's Tourist Information Offices, and the objective consisted in determining the type of product each office had for sale, the predominance of cultural tourism within the range of products, and the nationality of each client.

The second survey was directed toward the staff in the randomly selected hotels studied, Eurostars Angli and Abba Hotel Sants. The objective was to determine the importance of cultural tourism for tourists when making a reservation for a touristic product.

The third survey was conducted with the clients of the hotels being studied. This survey sought to determine the level of satisfaction with the cultural tourism product that the clients experienced.

The hypotheses for the present study are as follows:

H1. Tourists satisfactorily received the promotion of cultural tourism products undertaken in Barcelona Tourist Information Offices and in hotels.

H2. Interest in cultural tourism products predominates in tourists from certain countries.

H3. There is a high level of client satisfaction with cultural tourism products.

For those surveys undertaken at Tourist Information Offices, the base was $n = 100$, distributed across three Tourist Information Offices in Barcelona. 30 replies were received from the office located at the Columbus Monument, 50 from the office in Plaça Catalunya (located in the city centre) and 20 from the office located in Badalona.

3. RESULTS

The surveys carried out in Barcelona Tourist Information Offices made it possible to reflect the average number of petitions for tourist information on products that included cultural tourism in each of the three offices. The answers from the Columbus Monument was determined to be 70% of the requests, in Plaça Catalunya this reached 90%, and in the office located in Badalona, the number was 55%. These answers demonstrate an elevated interest in cultural content, though these are mixed with other kinds of touristic products. An average interest level of 71.66% was established for the offices analysed (Table 1).

Table 1. Petition for information on cultural tourism products

Information Office	Percentage
Columbus Monument	70%
Plaça Catalunya	90%
Badalona	55%
Average	71.66%

Source: The Authors

The next question focused on the nationality of the tourists looking for information (Table 2). The data is valuable for tourism operators and businesses specialised in cultural tourism products as it enables them to carry out specific marketing actions if they detect greater proclivity for tourists from a country or geographic area. Differences could be detected depending on the area, even though the countries remained the same, the order of interest varied. The results obtained from the office at the Columbus Monument indicate that the tourists most interested in cultural tourism information for Barcelona were from the

United States, followed by Italy, Russia, and China. The results obtained from the office at the Plaça Catalunya located the Chinese at the head of the list, followed by the Russians, the Americans and the Italians. Finally, at the tourism office in Badalona, the Italians and Chinese led the list, followed by the Americans and the Russians. In a hypothetical classification by points (4 to the country demonstrating the highest interest), China, Italy, and the United States accumulated 8 points, and Russia 6. The higher interest of tourists from these countries is intriguing information, and could lead, in future research, to the analysis of the curriculum followed in the education systems of these countries and correlate this to the interest in cultural tourism.

Table 2. Countries of providence for tourists who sought further information on cultural tourism

Information Office	Order of Countries
Columbus Monument	USA, Italy, Russia, China
Plaça Catalunya	China, Russia, USA, Italy
Badalona	Italy, China, USA, Russia

Source: The Authors

A further axis for analysis is the interest demonstrated by each tourist according to their nationality, with the aim of determining the relationship between the types of products sought and the nationality of the tourist (Table 3). Chinese and American tourists demonstrated greater interest in cultural tourism products, ahead of Russian and Italian tourists. Even though the type of products varied, an interest in luxury goods (Russian and Chinese tourists), for the Barça or FC Barcelona sports brand (Italian and Chinese), for leisure products (Italian), gastronomy (American) and sun and beach (Russian and American) was demonstrable. By establishing an accumulating points system from 4 to 1, as earlier (though in some cases only three preferences exist, leaving the last category empty), cultural tourism obtains 10 points, luxury products 7 points, FC Barcelona brand 6 points, sun and beach products 6, and products related to nightlife/going out 3 points. As a result, when interest is demonstrated for cultural tourism, the likelihood that this will occupy the first position is high.

It is necessary to keep in mind that this study considered those countries that included cultural tourism within the top four preferences and that, as a result, the probability that culture would lead the list was quite high. Should those countries that did not include cultural tourism within the top four products chosen be considered the result would logically be quite different. It is also necessary to recognise that there is a difference between interest demonstrated at the interpersonal level and real interest, that is, in a Tourist Information Office, it is politically correct to solicit information on culture, but it is something else entirely to determine if the predisposition is real. Even so, H2 is confirmed here (Interest in cultural tourism products predominates in tourists from certain countries).

Table 3. Location of cultural tourism from within the tourist products most sought-after for information

Tourist Country of Origin	Order of Touristic Products
China	Culture, Luxury goods, FC Barcelona Brand
Italy	FC Barcelona Brand, Products related to nightlife, Culture
United States of America	Culture, Gastronomy, Sun and Beach products, Sports products
Russia	Luxury goods, Sun and Beach products, Culture

Source: The Authors

After analysing the percentages of information solicited, the geographical origin of those asking for information, along with the order in which information is sought whenever this includes culture, this study turned to consider the quantity of touristic products sold in the offices where the surveys were carried out, given that a higher probability of spending on cultural products is likely to be registered in places where preference is given to these products. The results demonstrate that there is a higher concentration of sales in the office in Plaça Catalunya, followed by the office in the Gothic Quarter (Columbus Monument) and in the outskirts of Barcelona (Badalona). Since the Chinese tourists in Plaça Catalunya are those who solicited the most information on cultural tourism, it is highly probable that this office also generates higher billing in this area. At the Columbus Monument, where American tourists were the most likely to ask for information, a distribution of resources toward cultural production can be generated given that this is also high on the list of preferences for these tourists. However, in Badalona, where the majority of sales are concentrated in Italian tourists, the impact of cultural tourism sales is symbolic, given that culture occupies the final position on the list of preferences of the Transalpine tourists.

In their turn, the surveys carried out on the receptionists of the hotels analysed attempt to determine the interests and the touristic areas in which tourists to Barcelona are most active from the point of view of the hotel sector. The most popular platforms for the commercialisation of tourist products were Ticketbis, Ticketin and Hotelextras.

In measuring the interests of tourists in the hotels in the moment of acquiring a touristic product, the order preference was found to be products related to the Barça brand, the tourist bus, cultural products and, finally, the gastronomy of the city. As a result, cultural tourism continues to occupy a privileged place, though prudence must be maintained given that the survey was carried out with receptionists of two hotels. The flow of information both in tourist offices and in hotels tends toward cultural products. Thus, H1 is confirmed, (Tourists satisfactorily received the promotion of cultural tourism products undertaken in Barcelona Tourist Information Offices and in hotels).

Receptionists at the hotels indicated that, in terms of determining the willingness of tourists to spend their money in order to acquire these products, general canons cannot be established as it depends entirely on the profile of each tourist, their nationality, and the location of the touristic product in question.

Finally, the tourist survey also supplies data on the level of satisfaction with the cultural products offered in Barcelona. Tourists tend to choose hotels, apartments, hostels and pensions, for their accommodation, in that order.

In terms of the most utilised means of acquiring cultural products, curiously, tourists maintain that hotels and similar establishments are the most active, followed by tourist information offices and then the Internet. The list is similar to those of tourist information offices when it comes to determining interest according to the type of product, and differs slightly from those of the hotels: culture, sports activities, leisure activities and gastronomy.

Observable results indicate a high level of multi-sector information demands (information offices, hotels, and tourists) for cultural tourism information (Table 4). Following the points formula for classifying regularity, Cultural Tourism achieves 11 points, FC Barcelona 6, Luxury goods 3, Sun and beach products 3, Sports 2 (though debatably this could include FC Barcelona), Tourist bus 3 and Gastronomy 2.

Table 4. Types of tourist products chosen according to the sources of information

Tourist Information Offices	Hotels	Tourists
Culture	FC Barcelona	Culture
Luxury goods	Tourist bus	Sports
FC Barcelona	Culture	Sun and beach products
Sun and beach products	Gastronomy	Gastronomy

Source: The Authors

In terms of the satisfaction tourists expressed with the touristic products, the relationship between quality and price is projected as: excellent (20%), satisfactory (50%), needs improvement (27%) and negative (3%). This reflects the fact that the possibility of improving the sales process for these products is subject to the increase in the satisfaction with the products themselves, and requires some improvement as the results indicate. However, H3 is confirmed (There is a high level of client satisfaction with cultural tourism products).

Even though 95% of tourists indicate that the cultural tourism products offered are sufficient, suggested improvements include an increase in cultural tours related to the green areas of the city (although this depends in large part on the location of the cultural offer and their construction would require complex and long-term infrastructure modifications) and a greater distinction between cultural activities directed at certain age groups.

4. CONCLUSIONS

According to the research carried out here, the cultural tourism products on offer in Barcelona are supported by adequate information channels. This is demonstrated by the fact that the promotion of cultural tourism products carried out by the Tourist Information Offices of Barcelona as well as the hotels studied were satisfactorily reviewed by the tourists.

A curious finding on cultural tastes is the predilection of Chinese and American tourists toward these kinds of products. Italian and Russian tourists also indicated interest. The importance of cultural tourism acquires even greater relevance when we consider that it is greater than interest in: Luxury goods; the FC Barcelona brand; Sun and beach products; and Products related to nightlife and partying.

More than the simple consideration that what the surveys demonstrated could be different from the reality, the ability to detect interest in cultural tourism products from specific countries can shed light on potential analog or digital marketing strategies aimed at informing and attracting interested tourists. In both tourist information offices as well as the hotels of Barcelona (and in other municipalities where similar cultural interest was demonstrated) there is a scientific basis for increasing the offer and the information on cultural products, given that the impact of cultural tourism at the time of reserving touristic products is equally high in tourist offices as it is in hotels. Similarly, in the offices with higher numbers of inquiries, it is necessary to reinforce actions in favour of cultural tourism. Monitoring the rates of demand, especially in moments of high intensity, could help in the sales of cultural products, whose concrete definition could facilitate the equivalent action.

Demands for information about culture are multi-sector. Cultural products are in higher demand than others such as FC Barcelona, Luxury goods, Sun and beach products, Sports, The Tourist Bus, and Gastronomy.

It is evident, thus, that tourists in Barcelona demonstrate an interest in cultural products and report a high (though with room for improvement) level of satisfaction with said products. The fact that the tourists themselves propose ideas for improvement indicates their experiential implication in the object of study carried out here.

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