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The Compostela Ways: Search for Meaning, Importance of Relations and Stakes of Sustainable Development

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Summary

The Compostela Ways are fashionable. They are an interesting research object in an approach from an information and communication science perspective, focusing on the interactions and the primacy of the relationship to meet with issues of Territorial Intelligence.

We will study the Compostela Ways as a special ground for the meeting of Competitive Intelligence in its societal and cultural dimension with Territorial Intelligence, particularly as a revealing and an identity marker, with the importance of the question of meaning. We will then study in terms of sustainable economic development of the territories crossed.

Résumé

Les chemins de Saint-Jacques de Compostelle sont à la mode. Ils constituent un objet de recherche intéressant pour une approche sciences de l'information et de la communication (SIC) centrée sur les interactions et le primat de la relation pour rencontrer des enjeux d'Intelligence Territoriale.

Nous étudierons les Chemins de Compostelle comme un terrain privilégié pour la rencontre de l'Intelligence Economique dans sa dimension sociétale et culturelle et de l'Intelligence Territoriale, notamment comme révélateur et marqueur d'identité, avec toute l'importance de la question du sens. Nous les étudierons ensuite sous l'angle du développement économique durable des territoires concernés.

Resumen

Los Caminos de Santiago de Compostela están de moda. Son objeto de enfoque de interesantes investigaciones para las ciencias de la información y de la comunicación que se centran en las interacciones y en la primacía de la relación para cumplir con las cuestiones de Inteligencia Territorial.

Vamos a estudiar los Caminos de Santiago como un terreno privilegiado para la reunión de la Inteligencia Economica en su dimensión social y cultural y de la Inteligencia Territorial, en particular para desarrollar y marcar la identidad, con la importancia de la cuestión del sentido. A continuación estudiaremos los Caminos en términos de desarrollo económico sostenible de los territorios atravesados.

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Introduction

The Compostela Ways are fashionable. This trend reveals ambiguities in our society and of contemporary people. In this paper, we will analyse this phenomenon of society using a **communicational and informational approach** ("new communication" cf Y. Winkin) focusing on interactions between all the involved actors and on the "primacy of relations" (D. Bougnoux) in a "new" communication approach and the search for meaning and also from the angle of the Sustainable Development of the concerned territories.

Our position is that of an **involved researcher**: episodic pilgrim-walker along these Ways since 2002 for a few days each year, both in France and in Spain. Besides our personal observations and discussions with other walkers, this paper is supported by interviews with Tourism Office members, with people in charge of Compostela Walkers' Associations, by a specific documentary resource base and by information from relevant Internet sites (Compostela – Saint Jean Pied de Port – Saint-Lizier / *Piémont français des Pyrénées* ...). The explosion of their number is one of the major indicators of the popularity of the Compostela Ways.

1 - The Compostela Ways as the meeting point of Economic (Competitive) Intelligence in its Cultural and Societal dimensions with Territorial Intelligence

Our approach allows us to link the "new territories" of French-style Economic Intelligence (in particular underlining the background or context): Societal Intelligence, Cultural Intelligence and Sports Intelligence (Duval, 2008) with Territorial Intelligence, by which we mean the understanding of the territory and participation of the actors with a view to its Sustainable Development (Bozzano, Dumas, Girardot, Masselot).

H. Bozzano (Caenti, 2008) proposes the formula: $TI = TU + TAP / SD$ or Territorial Intelligence = Territory Understanding + Territories Actors Participation for Sustainable Development.

For Luc Gruson (Arc-et-Senans / Caenti, 2008), "Culture is a very important dimension of territories". According to J.J. Girardot (ENTI Salerno, 2009) "culture is an important pillar of Territorial Intelligence". It constitutes an essential part of immaterial (intangible) capital. Our perspective joins that of the Levy-Jouyet report (2007), stressing the main stakes of the Economy of Immaterial and the weak promotion of immaterial (intangible) capital: of course of firms (patents, licences ...), but also of public organizations (data bases) including local authorities but also territories themselves; Y. Bertacchini and P. Dumas speak about "territorial intangible capital". This unexploited intangible capital constitutes a potential wealth factor in our economy of services and of knowledge.

Territorial Intelligence is also regarded as "Competitive Intelligence applied to territory" (François, 2008). For us, this meeting of Territorial and Competitive Intelligence in their societal aspects in our post-industrial society also corresponds to the assertion of two main concepts: those of Network and of Project. For M. Castells (1996), our Information Society has become a Networked Society. The Project has also become a central paradigm (Boutinet) used everywhere : company projects, projects of towns and of society, life projects, holiday projects, ... with the importance of Social Networks in the assertion of the territory.

In the case of the Compostela Ways, the notion of the project can be found on two levels: firstly on the level of an individual life project (especially at times of change and rupture such as the beginning of retirement) and secondly as a Sustainable Development project of a territory. The latter is inseparable from the search for meaning for contemporary people who have progressively lost many of their landmarks and values. The territory can also from now on be considered as a synergy of development projects (Bourret, 2008) and as a system of social networks.

2 - The rebirth of an identity marker

Tourism may be regarded as an identity marker (tracer) and an expression of territoriality.

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The Compostela trend constitutes a deep phenomenon which has become progressively apparent. The Compostela Ways' success corresponds to the rejection of a surfeit of materialism, the search for authenticity (beyond the "marketing" aspects), the concern – not necessarily religious – to follow in the steps of thousands of other men or women: to become part of an ongoing historical process. The pilgrimage towards Compostela which played a major role in the integration of Northern Spain in the Occidental Christendom, peaked in the XIIth - XIIIth centuries with the role of the Cluny congregation linked with the "*Reconquista*" against Islam. Then it was affected by wars and disasters in the XIVth century (wars between Castile and Aragon, struggle for power in Castile, the Hundred Years War between France and England, The Black Death epidemic ...). In the XVIth century it was affected by the criticisms of humanists such as Erasmus, and by the development of Protestantism. Then the centralized States of France and Castile were opposed to pilgrimages (assimilated to vagrancy). In the XVIIIth century, the Enlightenment (*Lumières*) was opposed to religion, assimilating it to superstition. So the Compostela's Pilgrimage was dying at the end of XIXth century (there were only 40 pilgrims in Compostela in 1867) and remained obsolete right up to the 1960-1970's.

In France, Barret and Gurgand's pilgrimage and their book (1977) constituted a turning point. In 1982, John Paul II was the first Pope to go to Santiago of **Compostela**. 2491 pilgrims obtained the "*Compostela*" (or attestation of the pilgrim's arrival in Santiago) in 1985 and 7274 in 1991. There were 100 377 in 2006, 111 026 in 2007 and 125 141 in 2008.

Almost 50 % of these pilgrims came from Spain (61112). Germans were the second nationality (15744), followed by Italians (10707) then French (6618), Portuguese (4341), Americans (2214) and Canadians (1933). The great majority were walkers (103669). Pilgrims could use bicycles (21143) or horses (290). The majority were men (72936) for 52205 women. The majority were in the 36-65 years age range (65364), followed by 19-35 years old (41123).

This growth in attendance on ways to Santiago of Compostela is also illustrated at the level of the towns passed through. The case of **Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port** in the foothills of the Pyrenees Mountains at the convergence of three of the four main French Compostela Ways from Paris-Tours, Vézelay and Le Puy and point of departure to Roncesvalles, is particularly significant. The number of pilgrims who have their "credential" card stamped here is steadily rising: 10444 in 2000, 13799 in 2001, 17241 in 2002, 18196 in 2003, 21544 in 2004, 23710 in 2005, 25630 in 2006, 31180 in 2007 and 33730 in 2008.

In 2008, the most affluent months as far as pilgrims' numbers are concerned, were in order: May (6841), August (5626), September (5354) and July (4435) while in Santiago of Compostela the months of the greatest number of arrivals were: August (29747), July (20989), September (17298), May (15988) and June (15860). Pilgrims going through Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port were divided into 56% men and 44% women. Pilgrim cyclists represented 12.8% (nearly 87% were walkers). Pilgrims came from 82 different countries: 7837 French, 6111 Germans, 3477 Italians, 1373 Canadians, 1057 Dutch, 884 British, 863 Swiss, 811 Belgians, 770 Americans, 747 South Koreans, 699 Irish ... The majority of pilgrims (23702) began their walk in Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port.

The same dramatic increase occurs at the Piedmont Road stage in the French Pyrenees, **Saint-Lizier** in the Ariège department (the association's headquarters): 21 in 2000, 26 in 2001, 30 in 2002, 40 in 2003 69 in 2004, 130 in 2005, 154 in 2006, 189 in 2007 and 262 in 2008.

The number of pilgrims is not the only indicator of the attractiveness and fashionable aspect of the Compostela Ways. Over the past decade the number of guides, videotapes, books on success (eg that of P. Coelho or that of French celebrities such as the TV journalist P. Poivre d'Arvor), newspaper articles, films (with the success of *Saint-Jacques - Mecca* by Coline Serreau ...) has multiplied. The number of websites (mainly from associations of pilgrims and friends of the road) is also impressive. They deserve a specific study with all the stakes of the Web 2.0 or Social Web.

3 - What are the motivations for different types of pilgrims?

One can question the motives of those walking to Compostela. Of the 125,141 pilgrims who obtained the "Compostela" in 2008, 63,598 speak about "religious and other reasons", 50732 about "religious reasons". Only 10,811 speak about "non-religious reasons". An analysis by professional occupation of the "pilgrims" would have been interesting. We did not find the

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data. During our walks, we had the opportunity to talk to young people who go to Santiago at the end of their studies before entering the workforce, individuals or couples who are beginning retirement, others who want to find meaning in their lives after a major rupture such as divorce or the death of a loved person. All belong to a certain socio-cultural level.

The success of Compostela Ways, listed by UNESCO as a "World Heritage Site for Humanity" reflects the uncertainties and the identity crisis of the contemporary individual. For R. Debray, quoted by J. Beauchard: "man exists only in he fits (into a territory)" ("*l'homme n'existe qu'inscrit*"). To survive, he also still needs to give meaning to his life (Frankl), especially at a time when traditional markers (churches, trade unions ...) are in crisis. The success of sects could have the same causes, individuals seeking to achieve a collective dimension. A. Ehrenberg has particularly studied the identity crisis of the contemporary people: "tired of being itself" and exhausted by the "cult of performance".

This search for the meaning of life is accompanied by a rejection of consumer society and of "the right way of thinking" imposed by the media (televisions, radios and newspapers). There is also a rejection of this society of "connected individualism" described by P. Flichy and also rightly highlighted by P. Breton as a "communicating" but not "meeting" society. While some pilgrims (often important executives in firms or organizations) have opted to make their pilgrimage to Compostela a time for meeting with others and with themselves, by not using for the duration of their trip any communicating tool (phone, Internet), the majority of walker-pilgrims keep their mobile phone and connect to the Internet in the evening in the inns and hostels.

The individual in crisis has rediscovered that man is a social being who lives only through his interactions and his meeting with others. It is indeed through the "primacy of the relationship" (D. Bounoux), that the rediscovery of communication in the literal sense of the word, is to be found, that is to share, an experience, a project, and to fit into a collective dimension. There is also a search for a certain authenticity, an encounter with oneself, to make some effort to give up certain facilities of life, sometimes going to the limit of one's strength (with, as in the Middle Ages, some dramatization of the suffering). But again the types of walker-pilgrims are very different: the walker who overloaded, wounded, accelerates his pace to try to have a bed for the night in the inn where only a symbolic financial participation is required, has little to do with tourist-pilgrims, who stay in good hotels and use a support vehicle. Some travel agencies specializing in hiking, such as *La Balaguère*, also offer support services to walkers (booking hotel rooms, baggage transfers at each stage, routing and repatriation). Some pilgrims live on public charity and receive free housing. The pilgrims' interactions with local populations are much greater in Spain, where older people like to talk to the pilgrims, greeting them by the traditional formula: "*¡Buen Camino!*"

As in the Middle Ages and until the late eighteenth century, those who have travelled the road or who want to do so, form associations (guilds), which organize meetings and celebrations, especially around St. Jacques (James) day (July 25th), in which the cultural dimension takes precedence over the religious one (private chapel in the churches in past times). Some like St. Lizier (Ariege), to which I belong, consider themselves as the heirs of past guilds (associations). The one in St. Lizier's, founded in 1533, kept its registry until 1710.

We can qualify the Compostela Ways as a "cultural walk", combining hiking and a cultural aspect (art history, with churches in both romanesque, gothic or baroque styles) without forgetting the religious dimension. Neither should we forget the tourism aspect. The number of tourists visiting each year the city of Santiago de Compostela (more than 5 millions) has nothing to do with the 125 000 walker-pilgrims who obtained the "*Compostela*". For Paco Nadal, "The Camino is not a mere walk ... it is an initiated journey within itself that changes the perception of many things ... with the disconnection with the superfluous, and with the communion of the body with Nature (2008, p. 8 and 12). For J.C. Bourlès, the Compostela Ways can represent through a temporary and nomadic society, the search for different human and social values, with both the fascination of the precarious and unstable, and the questioning of the unsatisfactory lifestyle of our consumer society (2001, p. 183). The pilgrimage can also be considered as a "semiotic machine" for the construction of meaning to existence.

4 - An unquestionable aspect of territorial development

P. Nadal uses the formula of Antonio Machado (who is also central to our constructivist approach): "they are as many ways to Santiago as walkers to Santiago", each one building his own "*Camino*" (2008, p. 12). The ways are built by constant interactions between all the actors: walkers in all their diversity, local populations

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and especially those who drive a living from the ways (inns, bars, shops, hotels ...) or voluntary workers and also agents of local authority employees, especially the autonomous communities in Spain who want to use the "Camino" as a tool for local development.

Each region or autonomous community in Spain seeks to have its own Compostela Way. Of the 125,141 pilgrims who obtained the "Compostela" in 2008, the vast majority (98229) walked on the "Camino Frances" through Navarra, La Rioja, Castilla and Leon. 9770 used the "Camino Portuguès", 7035 the "Camino del Norte" going along the Atlantic coast (which is also the first historical way) and 5104 the "Via de la Plata" (Andalusia, Madrid). The autonomous community or *Xunta de Galicia*, where all the ways finally converge, made the Compostela Ways a development tool for energizing this remote, authentic region, which is greatly influenced by the Celtic culture.

This rebirth of the Ways of St James, especially in Spain, corresponds to a dynamic of Territorial Intelligence centred on interactions between "pilgrims" and local populations: the territory is continuously rebuilding along the Compostela Routes just as it did in the Middle Ages. Today it has brought back to life many villages, some of which had been abandoned (eg Foncebadón in León's Mounts or "despoblados" in Pyrenean Aragon) where even the most humble inns are endowed with Internet connections.

The local populations are very involved (especially in Spain) in this economic rebirth: new shelters, shops (records, walking articles, food ...) inns and hotels (from humble *Posadas* to luxurious *Paradores*).

We must not forget the concept of hospitality and the character of the "hospitalero" volunteer who devotes his life to the reception of pilgrims and the maintenance of a shelter. As pointed out by B. Pecqueur and J.-B. Zimmermann (2004): "The territory is constantly being rebuilt". This is particularly the case around the ways to Santiago, as was especially the case in the Middle Ages, when the "Camino Frances" was developed by the religious Order of Cluny, the kings of Navarre, Castile and Leon or saints "pontoneers or diggers" such as Santo Domingo de la Calzada and San Juan de Ortega ... The present day pilgrims' associations have recaptured the role of the ancient brotherhoods, but in a secular way. These associations can also manage houses and inns such as Gaucelmo Inn managed by the British Association of St. James in Rabanal del Camino, in the foothills of the Leon Mountains. The village was almost abandoned. Nowadays there are four pilgrims' inns and it has regained economic strength.

Compostela Ways generate a dynamic economic and societal well corresponding to the definition of Territorial Intelligence proposed by H. Bozzano, which includes people's participation. Let's not forget the "intangible territorial capital" well, integrated by the local authorities especially in Spain: the "Camino" is a highly attractive and profitable product brand. It also represents an imagined event, and an individual and collective real life experience. Many books develop stories of pilgrims who tell their personal experience of the *Camino* sometimes illustrating them with their own drawings, "pilgrims" more or less known and publicized by the media. Films, plays, also contribute to the creation of a collective imagination incorporating legends and stories of the Middle Ages such as the legend of the young people hanged in Santo Domingo de la Calzada. Plays may also experience some success, relayed by local associations. "One day I'll go to Compostela" (*Un jour j'irai à Compostelle*), a monologue written and performed by Marie-Céline Lachaud and presented in Saint-Lizier and Castillon (Ariege) in May 2008, went on to 180 performances since its first one in the "off festival" of Avignon in 2005.

5 – Really a Sustainable Development?

While the role of the roads to Santiago as a factor of economic dynamism is undeniable, is it really a lasting and sustainable development? Or is it only a fashionable trend which isn't far from reaching "overdose"? Is it a simple and ephemeral marketing product? Or can it enable the sustainable development of French and above all Spanish territories (Castile-Leon), which have been the victims of a massive rural exodus (*despoblados*) because of economic and tourist dynamics?

The pace of building new inns (municipalities, religious or private initiatives) or hotels is impressive, as indeed is that of flats throughout all Spain in the tourist areas of seaside and mountains resorts. But the situation was reversed with the financial and economic crisis which began in summer 2008 and these buildings constructed sometimes in areas of limited interest no longer find buyers now.

In the Middle Ages, the "Camino Francès" had given life or new life to many places: Estella, Logroño, Nájera, Santo Domingo de la Calzada, Sahagun, Astorga or Ponferrada and Compostela itself. Nowadays, the routes

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to Santiago revitalize villages particularly in Castile-Leon which were about to disappear or had even disappeared, having lost all their population (*despobalados*).

But will all these new infrastructures attract enough pilgrim-walkers to enable them to survive? We can now legitimately ask the question. The **competition** to attract pilgrims has become severe: fliers distributed along the ways, promotional prices ... The modestly priced inns are crowded in July and August but the private inns and hotels with higher prices are far from full. Filling them only depends on the attractiveness of the "Camino" because they are not located in areas with high tourism potential (seaside or mountain) which could compensate a decline in the attractiveness of the Camino. Of course the case of more populated towns (Burgos, Leon, Astorga, Estella, Pamplona, Santiago itself) is different because they benefit from other factors of attractiveness.

The Compostela Ways that try constantly to diversify into new ways of profiting from the "Compostela brand" and its current popularity, are also competing with other roads: the great "classics" walks like in France the GR10 in the Pyrenees or the GR 20 in Corsica, the "Sentiers cathares" in the Ariège and the Aude departments, the "Via de la Plata" in Spain, now also regarded as one of the Compostela Ways, the "Via de Don Quijote", and so on

Conclusion

The Compostela Ways constitute an interesting "research subject". From the analysis of interactions and the primacy of relations we encounter the main stakes for Territorial Intelligence: the participation of the actor-walkers and of local populations, economic development in a sustainable perspective, rediscovering and promotion of artistic and cultural heritage and, perhaps above all else, through hard efforts and surpassing oneself, meeting with others but also with oneself, a way of (re)discovering a meaning in one's existence.

The Compostela Ways attract pilgrims with very different motivations: superficial fashionable aspects and deeper aspects about looking for some authenticity. Like the contemporary people who is both fragmented and multimembership, their development is ambivalent. Executives exhausted by the cult of performance may put their stressed life in brackets for a few weeks to search for something else. The "Camino" will change them forever. They are an unquestionable factor for economic development in their cultural and touristic aspects. The Compostela Ways will become a mere sustainable development factor if they succeed in processing an ephemeral marketing product which is fashionable nowadays, into a new form of tourism. This would be based on more authentic interactions between walkers-pilgrims and local populations to create a specific lifestyle around a shared meaning participating in the construction of a collective identity.

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