

Tourism on the Camino de Santiago

Turismo no Caminho de Santiago

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Abstract | This study explores how the study of Tourism on the Camino de Santiago within polytechnic universities may influence the sustainable development of tourist destinations. Through a methodology encompassing literature review, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews conducted with nine national stakeholders and seven foreign visitors via Google Forms, this research investigates the potential impact of Camino de Santiago knowledge on destination sustainability. The findings anticipate that augmenting comprehension of the Camino de Santiago could significantly bolster sustainable development within tourist destinations reliant on this tourist attraction. The practical implications highlight the potential value of introducing specialized courses dedicated to Camino de Santiago tourism, emphasizing their role in fostering sustainable development within these destinations.

Keywords | Camino de Santiago, tourism, sustainable development, polytechnic universities, destination sustainability

Resumo | Este estudo explora como o estudo do Turismo no Caminho de Santiago, nas universidades politécnicas, pode influenciar o desenvolvimento sustentável dos destinos turísticos. Através de uma metodologia que engloba uma revisão da literatura, análise de documentos e entrevistas semiestruturadas realizadas com nove intervenientes nacionais e sete visitantes estrangeiros via Google Forms, esta pesquisa investiga o impacto potencial do conhecimento sobre o Caminho de Santiago na sustentabilidade dos destinos. Os resultados antecipam que o aumento da compreensão do Caminho de Santiago poderia fortalecer

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significativamente o desenvolvimento sustentável nos destinos turísticos que dependem desta atração turística. As implicações práticas destacam o valor potencial da introdução de cursos especializados dedicados ao turismo no Caminho de Santiago, enfatizando o seu papel no fomento do desenvolvimento sustentável nestes destinos.

Palavras-chave | Caminho de Santiago, turismo, desenvolvimento sustentável, universidades politécnicas, sustentabilidade dos destinos

1. Introduction

Tourism is a strategic economic activity at national and global levels, assuming, in the Portuguese context, a major role in its economic development, therefore, it is intended, through the proposals presented in this paper, to contribute to the sustainable development of tourism, through the development of research in this knowledge area, which can be transferred and applied to the tourism industry, contributing to the training of professionals for the sector, with good technical, scientific and social skills. The main goal of this paper is to understand how the study of the Camino de Santiago at polytechnic universities might contribute to the sustainable development of tourist destinations. It is intended, therefore, to contribute to creating and transmitting knowledge to transform lives, communities, and society, in general, by promoting training for citizenship, with respect for the freedom, equality, and dignity of the human person. Moreover, this study aims at understanding how important it would be to propose to local polytechnic universities the implementation of courses about ‘Tourism on the Camino Santiago’. More precisely, it intends to propose the implementation of a course designated as ‘Short-Advanced Program’ (SAP) about ‘Sustainability in the context of Tourism on the Camino de Santiago’, and a Curricular Unit about ‘Tourism on the Camino de Santiago’, which would be included in a ‘Tourism master’s degree course’ at local polytechnic universities. This proposal might be justified by the strategic and emerging role of this tourism product - Camino de Santiago - within the scope of the sustainable development of tourism in the territory of northern of Portugal.

2. Theoretical context

This study aims at understanding the phenomenon of ‘Tourism on the Camino de Santiago’ (also known as Jacobean routes or ways of Saint James), being its main goal to understand how studying it at polytechnic universities might contribute to the sustainable development of tourist destinations. In this sense, it aims at answering the following research question: *how might the study of the Camino de Santiago at polytechnic universities contribute to the sustainable development of tourist destinations?* In order to answer it, a literature review was carried out on the topics under study. Within the scope of this literature review, some articles were searched in the SCOPUS and Google Scholar databases (Murray & Graham, 1997; Lois González & Somoza Medina, 2003; Lourens, 2007; Lois-González & Santos, 2015; Amaro et al., 2018; Pérez Guilarte & Lois González, 2018; Gonçalves & Costa, 2020; Kim et al., 2019; Romanelli et al., 2021; Santos, 2021).

According to the UN Tourism (UNWTO, 1995), tourism emerges as a phenomenon resulting from people traveling outside their usual environment, referred to as 'visitors'. Tourists are visitors who stay overnight in tourist destinations, while excursionists (day visitors) are those who visit for the day. These individuals travel outside their typical environment for leisure, business, or other purposes but do not engage in any paid activities within their tourist destinations. Visitors are the key element of the tourism phenomenon, contributing to the sustainable development of tourist destinations, activities, and products within the scope of Tourism Satellite Accounts (Gonçalves, 2018; Silva, 2013; Smith, 1994; UNWTO, 2008).

The sustainable development of tourism often hinges upon the inherent resources within specific territories. According to Fazenda (2014), Portugal requires a comprehensive and integrated tourism development strategy, supported by regional tourism approaches tailored to the distinct characteristics of each area. Therefore, territories emerge as pivotal elements in the sustainable development of any tourist destination. However, this development relies on the capacity to create or enhance the value of these territories, as well as how these aspects can be interconnected and shaped (Brito & Correia, 2006). Furthermore, tourism maintains a profound connection with territories, serving as their primary resources and a foundation for sustainable development. As such, tourism organizations rely significantly on their geographical locations, given that tourist destinations possess unique and unchangeable products and resources. Hence, it becomes imperative for tourism agents to embrace the notion that fostering a sense of community and facilitating knowledge exchange yield substantial competitive advantages. This

approach not only attracts new enterprises but also stimulates the innovation process. Conversely, innovation networks within the tourism sector should establish connections not only within the region but also with entities outside the locale, whether at a national or international level, and across diverse sectors of activity. This practice serves to infuse fresh knowledge into the region, fostering the creation of innovative tourism services and products (Brandão, F & Costa, 2014). Additionally, tourism revitalizes territories that have been affected by migrations of various scales, reintroducing new experiences, and paving the way for fresh tourist offerings where experiences are increasingly emphasized (Umbelino, 2014).

Routes and their components serve as products and promotional vehicles for territories; therefore, the most frequented locations exemplify this reality and have the potential to establish geographical connections among the so-called creative cities. Tourist destinations utilize the process of developing routes and itineraries (known as 'routing') as a tool to promote the consumption of available goods and services, as well as those yet to be created. Thus, routes represent significant territorial productivity factors. Across their diverse scales and themes, they function as productive elements that differentiate within the spectrum of tourist products. They enhance territorial circulation, mobilize new production factors, create networks for cooperation and competition, promote territories, and effectively constitute the backbone of travel and the tourist experience (Figueira, 2013). Indeed, the establishment of new routes and networks in the context of changing territorial competitiveness has fostered the creation of itineraries that traverse diverse landscapes, encompassing natural, architectural, historical, religious, cinematic, and musical elements. New routes in the context of experience tourism respond to social needs where, for example, the personalization of tourist products is increasingly common. The current social structure exerts more informed pressure on the management of territories and tourism is more shared thanks to the dissemination of information. Furthermore, "desire marketing" plays a crucial role in this dynamic, influencing how destinations attract and engage tourists. By tapping into the desires and preferences of potential visitors, destinations can effectively tailor their offerings, making them more appealing and personalized. This approach not only enhances the visitor experience but also contributes to the sustainable and competitive development of tourist destinations.

The growing economic significance of tourism, spanning from local to global spheres, has generated and continues to generate considerable expectations among political and economic stakeholders, the media, and local populations. These routes not only reinforce a sense of unity amidst a territory's diversity but also have the potential to promote territorial and social

cohesion, thereby contributing to overall development. Architectural heritage, artisanal crafts, music, and gastronomy serve as guiding facets leading towards new routes and alternative perspectives. For instance, the 'Camino de Santiago' stands as a prime illustration of routes that originated from religious motives during the 11th and 12th centuries, but it has recently regained prominence, being respectively declared the 'First European Cultural Itinerary' in 1987 and recognized as a 'World Heritage Site' by UNESCO, both in Spain in 1993, and in France, in 1998 (Cravidão, 2014).

The emerging approach to developing tourist destinations emphasizes the significance of networked organizations like 'tourist clusters' or 'product-space organizations' that operate with decentralized structures. This new paradigm in strategic tourism management highlights that the success of tourist destinations hinges on two key factors: safeguarding their inherent and unique characteristics, often attributed as innate distinctiveness, and the ability to create compelling 'honey-pot products'. Central to this approach is the implementation of network organization strategies that unite diverse stakeholders within the host communities. By fostering collaboration among these various actors, destinations can effectively promote themselves as vibrant 'product-spaces', showcasing their unique offerings and attractions (Costa, 2006). Hence, establishing partnerships between the public and private sectors, along with fostering strong collaboration among all involved stakeholders, becomes a pivotal success factor for tourist destinations. This collaborative approach aims to deliver high-quality products that surpass consumer expectations. Consequently, the competitiveness of each local supplier and distributor significantly influences the overall competitiveness of tourist destinations (Buhalis, 2000). Therefore, in its current phase, tourism emerges as a tool for the sustainable development of territories, functioning as an economic catalyst that integrates fundamental principles such as authenticity, tradition, culture, innovative sector management strategies and organization, collaborative governance, and the continuous strengthening of the network of public and private interests (Ramos & Costa, 2017).

In Portugal, the 'Camino de Santiago' route holds a prominent position as a major tourist attraction. Consequently, to safeguard, enrich, and promote this route, Decree-Law no. 51/2019 was put into effect, officially certifying its itineraries. Dating back to the 9th century, these pilgrimage routes to Santiago de Compostela gradually emerged following the discovery of Apostle Saint James' tomb, gaining widespread recognition as among Europe's pivotal communication routes. Furthermore, these routes, commonly known as the 'Camino de Santiago', represent a historical reflection of European culture and stand as a significant

cornerstone of European collective identity. Moreover, as delineated in this Decree-Law, the cultural significance of the 'Camino de Santiago' extends beyond Europe's borders, receiving acknowledgment as a 'European cultural itinerary' by the Council of Europe and earning the esteemed designation as a 'World Heritage Site' by UNESCO. During the Middle Ages, the Saint James' Pilgrims, while journeying along these routes, used to exchange greetings with fellow pilgrims using the Latin expression '*Ultreia e Suseia*', which signifies "go beyond and higher." Interestingly, this phrase was also employed by Pope Francis during the 'World Youth Day 2023' held in Lisbon. Millions of pilgrims travelled these medieval pilgrimage routes, and in the areas surrounding such paths, cities, churches, hospitals, monasteries, cathedrals, bridges, and fortifications were constructed. This led to the flourishing of local economies and the development of a distinct culture, characterized by values of solidarity and heartfelt hospitality. It could be argued that Europe was shaped upon these principles. Moreover, the Camino de Santiago in Europe resembles a 'spider's web' where each pilgrim departed from their home, congregated with others in their parishes, and formed groups to journey together to Santiago de Compostela. This communal and interconnected pilgrimage tradition fostered a sense of unity and shared experience among diverse individuals, contributing to the cultural tapestry of the continent (Gonçalves, 2012; Gonçalves & Costa, 2020; Ramirez, 2010).

A Pilgrimage represents a profound journey to revered sacred sites, often imbued with spiritual or religious significance, fostering a deep connection to faith and tradition. Simultaneously, the synergy between tourism and pilgrimage unveils their intertwined nature within the realm of travel, showcasing varied motives for exploration, cultural immersion, and spiritual quest, thereby enriching the tapestry of human experiences (Pereiro, 2017). The Camino de Santiago, once overlooked, has experienced a remarkable resurgence, undergoing revitalization efforts by various entities, attracting a surge in pilgrims seeking diverse experiences, cultural immersion, and personal metamorphosis. This renowned route culminates in Santiago de Compostela, a UNESCO World Heritage Site designated in 1985. Its revival, notably evident since the 1990s, has transformed it into Europe's foremost pilgrimage, drawing in several hundred thousand individuals annually. Embarking on this journey signifies more than a mere trek; it embodies a transformative passage, embracing a slower pace, fostering connections with nature, heritage, and one's inner self. This pilgrimage aligns with the ethos of 21st century tourism, emphasizing authenticity over mass commercialization, offering pilgrims a respite from the hustle of modern life and a chance for introspective exploration (González, 2013).

Additionally, this study delves into the phenomenon of 'Tourism on the Camino de Santiago', which has emerged as a significant tourist and cultural trend, experiencing remarkable growth, particularly in the 21st century. While its prominence surged in recent decades, notably in the 21st century, attention began to turn towards it during the latter half of the 20th century. This increased interest stemmed from the revival of traditional pilgrimages and the subject gaining recognition as a focal point for academic research (Santos, 2021), that confirms the pertinence of the main goal of this study.

The 'Camino de Santiago' route seems to encompass a multifaceted site intertwined with cultural, historical, and spiritual significance, rather than being exclusively tied to religion. Records from the 'Compostela' show that travelers (pilgrims) have varied motivations. Instead of strict distinctions like 'purely religious' or 'purely non-religious' intermediate categories such as 'religious and other' are more common. These statistics have been corroborated by other studies, affirming the diverse motivations of those undertaking the journey (Gonçalves & Costa, 2020).

Indeed, the 'Camino de Santiago' could be regarded as a destination for 'religious tourism' by individuals whose motivations appear to be a blend of both religious and non-religious factors. Pilgrims tend to offer fewer strictly religious remarks and instead focus more on aspects such as the scenery, accommodations, food quality, and the overall experience, highlighting how memorable, enjoyable, physically invigorating, or challenging the route was. For many pilgrims, the 'Camino de Santiago' holds a greater emphasis on physical aspects rather than strictly adhering to traditional religious practices (Kim et al., 2019). In fact, travel connected with religious sites, festivals, pilgrimages, or spiritual expeditions has been a pivotal and essential part of the tourism market for an extended period of time. Pilgrimage sites play a crucial role in the tourism industry, not just at the actual destinations of pilgrimage, but also throughout the routes leading to these revered places. These itineraries often attract people who might not be directly motivated by religious purposes but are captivated by the cultural and historical richness they embody (Richards and Fernandes, 2007, cit. in Fernandes et al., 2011). Furthermore, the 'Camino de Santiago' is recognized as a linear tourist attraction, spanning over 700 kilometres in northern Spain (nearly 2,000 kilometres if including its four branches in France). This route crosses numerous rural communities, villages, and particularly cities that thrived during the Middle Ages (Lois González & Somoza Medina, 2003). One could argue that these specialized tourism routes have the potential to drive local economic development (Lourens, 2007).

Presently, Santiago de Compostela, a mid-sized city with a population of around 95.000 people in the city center and 130.000 in the urban area, lacks significant industry but thrives in its tertiary sector. In the 1980s, the '*comunidad autónoma of Galicia*' invested in the city, leading to the preservation of its historical heritage and the UNESCO recognition of its historical center as a 'World Heritage Site'. The city's emphasis on cultural tourism has contributed significantly to the creation of successful tourist destinations in northern and western Spain, notably exemplified by the popularity of the 'Camino de Santiago' pilgrimage route (González & Medina, 2003). The contemporary pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela merges cultural tourism with an experiential journey, reimagining the medieval route and culminating at the Christian sanctuary of Apostle Saint James the Great's remains. Its success is rooted in a fusion of traditional pilgrimage motives, religious or spiritual, with tourist motivations, encompassing a quest for diverse landscapes and a respite from the stresses of daily life, making it appealing to a wide range of modern travelers (Lois-González & Santos, 2015). As a matter of fact, religious tourism and pilgrimages have increasingly served as driving forces behind the social and economic development of local economies and communities over the years (Romanelli et al., 2021).

3. Methodology

Methodology is defined as a systematic form of research, which contributes to the production of knowledge, and the understanding of phenomena that individuals and organizations encounter in their daily activities (Altinay & Paraskevas, 2008). Moreover, according to Galego and Gomes (2005), methodology, theoretical framework and researcher's skills in the construction of scientific works, altogether make up the triptych, which sustains scientific research.

This study aims to understand how the study of the 'Tourism on the Camino de Santiago' at polytechnic universities can contribute to the sustainable development of tourist destinations. To address this, several semi-structured interviews were conducted to achieve specific study objectives, namely: i) Understanding respondents' perspectives on the Camino de Santiago phenomenon; ii) Exploring respondents' perceptions of the tourism phenomenon; iii) Assessing respondents' opinions regarding the potential integration of a course on 'Tourism on the Camino de Santiago' at polytechnic universities; iv) Determining respondents' interest in such a course;

v) Obtaining respondents' insights into how studying the 'Camino de Santiago' at polytechnic universities could aid in the sustainable development of tourist destinations. Hence, this article encompasses a literature review focusing on the key themes being investigated, specifically: Tourism, 'Camino de Santiago' and sustainable development of tourist destinations. Collis and Hussey (2005) contended that a method's classification as qualitative or quantitative should be based on its application. Therefore, if a data collection method relies on recording the frequency of a phenomenon or variable occurrence, the gathered data are considered quantitative. Conversely, if the primary data collection focuses on interpreting the meaning and comprehension of the phenomenon, the resulting data are qualitative (nominal). In this context, qualitative research typically commences with the formulation of a research question. Additionally, it is essential to inquire about what the existing literature indicates regarding the phenomenon being studied (Resende, 2016).

Concerning the collection of qualitative data in tourism-related studies, a substantial portion of primary data is derived from various sources, including interview transcripts, focus group sessions, open-ended online surveys focusing on the interpretation of the studied phenomenon, recorded observations, and the analysis of documents, websites, social media platforms, photographs, and multimedia. In the context of this study, primary data were gathered through semi-structured interviews involving seven residents and seven international visitors. These interviews were conducted using digital tools, specifically Google Forms, with the survey link distributed to respondents via messaging applications like WhatsApp and various social networks during the months of July and August 2023. Regarding the selection process for interview subjects within qualitative research, sampling techniques were utilized, often categorized as "purposeful sampling". This method involves selecting participants and cases that align with the emerging theory's requirements, allowing for the collection of the most pertinent data to address the research question (Altinay & Paraskevas, 2008). In this context, the sample consisted of fourteen interviewees, ranging in age from 21 to 59, all directly associated with the subject under study. Specifically, there were nine residents from Portugal and seven foreign visitors hailing from Brazil (1), Spain (1), Canada (1), Ireland (2), South Africa (1), and the USA (1).

Concerning qualitative data analysis in this study, the decision was made to conduct a content analysis utilizing NVivo software. Indeed, content analysis stands out as one of the prevailing techniques in contemporary empirical research within various fields of Human and Social Sciences (Vala, 1986). According to Jennings (2005), within the context of content analysis,

texts undergo a process of reading, annotation, and coding, through which categories are formed. Therefore, the evaluation of these categories involves assessing their relevance within the emerging taxonomy concerning the empirical context from which they originate. This evaluation needs reflection and questioning regarding the assignment of codes and categories in relation to the real-world context. Qualitative data, inherently non-quantifiable and not represented in numerical form, undergoes analysis that entails a conceptual interpretation of the entirety of such data. This analysis employs specific strategies to transform raw data into a coherent and explanatory depiction of the studied phenomenon. It aims to derive meaning from what the data conveys about the research question. In this sense, 'the most significant aspect of content analysis is a clear understanding of the process and the selection of appropriate categories' (Hall & Valentin, 2005, p. 206).

According to Bardin (1977), there are various content analysis techniques, among which category analysis holds the primary mention due to its historical precedence as the oldest technique and its predominant usage in practical application. This method involves breaking down the text into units and categories, organizing them based on similarities and presenting diverse categorization options. On the other hand, thematic analysis, while swift and efficient, is best suited for straightforward and direct discourses. In this regard, the categorization process serves as a means to convert raw data into a textual format, aiming to portray and represent the content encapsulated within. This process involves several stages. Initially, categories are established (a labelling process) based on the interview guide, forming a preliminary framework. Subsequently, during the second stage, the interviews are reviewed, and units of significance (codes) are allocated to various categories. However, it may be necessary to generate new categories or restructure the framework (conceptual map). In the third stage, the texts are revisited, this time organized by category, and potential recategorization might occur based on the interpretation conducted. Finally, preceding the data interpretation, the created categories need to undergo validation (Resende, 2016).

According to Creswell (2007), qualitative data analysis is an intricate methodological process that entails a meticulous approach to data collection, analysis, and the subsequent written report. This report, as presented below (Table 1), encompasses themes, their respective key ideas, and selects quotations from the interviewed subjects derived from the qualitative data gathered through interview transcriptions. Consequently, based on the research question, goals, and objectives of this study, the process of encoding the interview data was undertaken, leading to

the emergence of the following insights. This process facilitated the emergence of the themes delineated in Table 1.

The qualitative data analysis presents a comprehensive view of respondents' perceptions within five distinct themes. In Theme 1, varying perspectives emerge from residents and foreign visitors regarding the significance of Camino de Santiago. While residents exhibit mixed views, foreign visitors express enthusiastic and positive sentiments. Theme 2 highlights diverse perceptions of tourism, showcasing its multifaceted nature for both residents and foreign visitors. Moving on to Theme 3, unanimity is observed among residents supporting the idea of studying Camino de Santiago and tourism at polytechnic universities, whereas foreign visitors display a more varied response. Theme 4 showcases respondents' interest in studying Camino de Santiago, reflecting a mix of enthusiasm and disinterest among residents and foreign visitors. Finally, Theme 5 explores opinions on Camino's potential contribution to sustainable development. While residents highlight positive aspects, foreign visitors present differing views, emphasizing sustainability, knowledge, and development, albeit with some scepticism among a few. This data analysis provides insight into the varied perspectives of respondents, capturing the essence of their opinions on the studied topics.

4. Findings

The findings of this study delve into comprehending how the study of 'Tourism on the Camino de Santiago' at polytechnic universities can significantly impact the sustainable development of tourist destinations.

Table 1: Summary of Themes and Key Ideas from Qualitative Data Analysis

Themes	Key Ideas (some citations)
Theme 1: Camino de Santiago	<p>Residents:</p> <p>‘Camino represents various meanings such as a religious path, iconic route intertwining religion, culture, and friendship, and a spiritual pilgrimage. However, some residents find no special significance’.</p> <p>Foreign Visitors:</p> <p>‘Foreign visitors express enthusiasm, viewing Camino as a journey for self-exploration, reflection on life, an amazing spiritual experience, and a path to self-discovery’.</p>

Theme 2: Tourism	<p>Residents:</p> <p>‘Residents perceive tourism as an economic driver, a means of personal and professional enrichment, happiness, exploration, leisure, and cultural immersion’.</p> <p>Foreign Visitors:</p> <p>‘Foreign visitors view tourism as an industry, a source of knowledge about different cultures, a leisure activity, and a way to explore diverse cultures. However, one respondent expresses displeasure with tourism's commercial aspects’.</p>
Theme 3: Courses on Tourism on Camino Santiago	<p>Residents:</p> <p>‘All residents advocate studying Camino de Santiago and tourism phenomena at polytechnic universities.’</p> <p>Foreign Visitors:</p> <p>‘Most foreign visitors support studying these subjects at universities, but some suggest differences in approach or oppose the idea’.</p>
Theme 4: Interest in Studying the Camino Santiago	<p>Residents:</p> <p>‘While most residents express interest in studying Camino de Santiago, some lack interest due to personal reasons’.</p> <p>Foreign Visitors:</p> <p>‘Mixed responses from foreign visitors: some express interest, citing spiritual exploration, sustainability, and understanding tourism's impact, while others lack interest’.</p>
Theme 5: Contribution to Sustainable Development	<p>Residents:</p> <p>‘Residents offer positive perspectives on Camino's contribution to sustainable development, emphasizing various aspects. However, some express reservations’</p> <p>Foreign Visitors:</p> <p>‘Mixed opinions on sustainability, some emphasize knowledge and infrastructure development, while others express scepticism or minimal information to comment’.</p>

Source: Self-elaboration based on interviewees' responses.

The study aimed to address the central research question: "How might the study of 'Tourism on the Camino de Santiago' at polytechnic universities contribute to the sustainable development of tourist destinations?" To answer it, the study synthesizes insights from both the literature review and qualitative data analysis. Both scholarly discussions and interviews underscore the 'Camino de Santiago' as a vital cultural and historical pilgrimage route, attracting diverse travelers seeking transformative experiences. As more than just a religious journey, qualitative data accentuates its role as a catalyst for cultural exchange and tourism development, consistent with the literature. Both sources emphasize the 'Camino' as an exemplary of sustainable tourism.

The literature underscores its role in leveraging internal resources and cultural heritage for sustainable practices, echoed in the interviews. Interviews highlight Camino's ability to promote economic growth, preserve local culture, and respect natural resources.

The convergence of polytechnic universities and sustainable tourism emerges as an intriguing area. The literature identifies academic institutions as catalysts for promoting sustainable tourism through education and research. Interviews reflect this, with respondents keen on studying 'Tourism on the Camino de Santiago' at polytechnic universities. Their enthusiasm underscores the potential for such academic pursuits to deepen the understanding of sustainable tourism practices and contribute positively to preserving the cultural heritage along the Camino.

In summary, the amalgamation of literature insights and qualitative data confirms that studying 'Tourism on the Camino de Santiago' at polytechnic universities holds promising prospects for contributing to sustainable tourism development. Such academic endeavours have the potential to raise awareness, encourage responsible tourism practices, preserve cultural richness, and bolster economic growth within regions connected by the 'Camino de Santiago'.

5. Conclusion

As a conclusion, it might be said the findings of this study illuminate the potential impact of studying 'Tourism on the Camino de Santiago' at polytechnic universities on the sustainable development of tourist destinations. In seeking an answer to the central research question - *"How might the study of 'Tourism on the Camino de Santiago' at polytechnic universities contribute to the sustainable development of tourist destinations?"*, - this study synthesized insights from literature review and qualitative data analysis.

The 'Camino de Santiago' emerged as a cultural and historical pilgrimage route of significant importance, attracting a diverse range of travelers seeking transformative experiences. Beyond its religious roots, qualitative data highlighted its role as a catalyst for cultural exchange and the development of tourism, echoing the sentiments present in the literature. Both sources emphasized the 'Camino' as an exemplary model for sustainable tourism. Literature underscored its capacity to utilize internal resources and cultural heritage for sustainable practices, a sentiment echoed by interview responses that highlighted the 'Camino' as fostering economic growth, preserving local culture, and respecting natural resources.

The convergence of polytechnic universities and sustainable tourism emerges as a compelling area for exploration. Literature views academic institutions as pivotal in promoting sustainable tourism through education and research. Interviews validated this view, with respondents expressing keen interest in studying 'Tourism on the Camino de Santiago' at polytechnic universities. Their enthusiasm underlines the potential for such academic endeavours to deepen insights into sustainable tourism practices and contribute positively to the preservation of cultural heritage in said regions.

In summary, the synthesis of literature insights and qualitative data confirms that studying 'Tourism on the Camino de Santiago' at polytechnic universities holds substantial promise for enhancing sustainable tourism development. These academic pursuits offer opportunities to heighten awareness, encourage responsible tourism practices, safeguard cultural heritage, and stimulate economic growth within the regions connected by the 'Camino de Santiago'. The outcomes of this study suggest a compelling case for further exploration and investment in the study and promotion of sustainable tourism along historical pilgrimage routes.

Following this conclusion, several **recommendations** can be proposed, namely:

- **Academic Integration:** Encourage universities to include courses or modules on 'Tourism on the Camino de Santiago' in their curriculum to offer students insights into sustainable tourism practices.
- **Research Focus:** Promote interdisciplinary research on historical pilgrimage routes like the 'Camino de Santiago' to deepen understanding across areas such as history, culture, tourism, and sustainability.
- **Collaborative Initiatives:** Foster partnerships among academic institutions, local communities, and tourism boards to develop sustainable tourism strategies along the 'Camino de Santiago'.
- **Educational Programs:** Develop awareness campaigns for tourists to promote responsible and sustainable travel practices while traversing the 'Camino de Santiago'.
- **Financial Support:** Advocate for funding to support research, education, and conservation efforts directed towards sustainable tourism development along pilgrimage routes.

- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Involve local communities, tour operators, and travelers in decision-making processes for preserving historical routes.
- **Long-Term Sustainability:** Emphasize continual monitoring and evaluation of sustainable tourism practices for ongoing preservation efforts along the 'Camino de Santiago.'

Implementing these **recommendations** can contribute significantly to the preservation, promotion, and sustainable development of tourist destinations along historical pilgrimage routes, such as the 'Camino de Santiago.'

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