Tourist points of interest: Analytical relevance, methodological proposal and study case

0.   ABSTRACT

Tourist points of interest are places that have a number of resources which attract visitors towards them. This paper attempts to contribute to scientific research of tourism, approaching to an area of study that is currently a gap in research activity. The knowledge of the tourist attractions of a destination helps analyzing the activities carried out by the tourists and the mobility patterns carried out for it. The objectives of the paper are developing a set of concepts and definitions related to the points of interest and creating a classification of them applicable to the Canary Islands. In addition, tourist points of interest of Lanzarote have been identified and classified, through the analysis of several websites in order to collect them from the perspectives of supply and demand. ISTAC (Canary Islands' official statistics organization) data have been used to know how the characteristics of visitors influence in creating itineraries. The results obtained are interesting from the perspective of the development of certain areas, the mobility of tourists and the creation of tourist products.

Key words: points of interest, mobility, tourist itinerary

1.   INTRODUCTION

Tourist points of interest can be delivered as those places of a tourist destination where visitors go to perform certain activities or to enjoy specific resources. These points generate a series of tourist itineraries within the destination. Improving our knowledge of these movement patterns enables the analysis of tourists' behavior within the destination by tourism managers. However, there is a lack of scientific research studies in this area. Moreover, research has focused on the analysis of the tourist resources that motivate the visit and not in the places visited by tourists.

Tourist resources are often located in certain places visited by tourist in the destination, these places are known as tourist points of interest. Knowledge about tourist attractions in a certain destination has particular importance for public administration and local authorities, as it provides information on how tourist move, how they behave and how they spend in the area. Knowing this, it is possible to implement measures to redistribute the flow of tourists in alternative paths in order to reduce the influx of visitors to certain resources and to encourage the activity in others (Smallwood, Beckley and Moore, 2012). It is difficult to count and compare tourist flows and movements in public spaces, because residents and visitors share certain spaces, but there are methods to do so (Kádár, 2014). One of them is the use of the GPS incorporated in mobile phones, which gives information on where visitors concentrate and where do they go. Another one consists in the implementation of control mechanisms on roads and paths to tourist resources and points of interest (Smallwood et al., 2012).

However, information technologies face some problems when gathering information on tourist movements. GPS, for example, requires a constant Internet connection. In the case of sensors on roads, they can detect the entry of vehicles, but not the number of passengers inside them or if the driver's intention is to stop in this place or simply cross it; or if it is, for example, just one of the vehicles of a worker of the

point studied. That is why new methods to track tourists and gather information continue being developed. Indeed, cameras have become essential devices for tracking tourism flows, and today there are instruments capable of recording data of the position of the visitor when a picture is taken before sharing these images over the Internet. Being able to geotag photographs of a site on a map has enabled to use images as an instrument to measure the activity in specific sights (Kádár, 2014). Although the technique is not perfect, because not all tourists take pictures; neither is any of the others. However, all together can complement each other and provide information about visitors and their behavior patterns.

Several researchers have conducted various studies to try to classify products and tourism resources within different categories. However, these studies have been made independently and with little reference to previous analysis. As a result, there are different classifications that, in many cases, are very similar to each other or present significant variations (McKercher, 2016). McKercher (2016) proposes a taxonomy to classify resources that can also be used for classifying tourist points of interest. To attempt this, the author analyzes previous classifications in the literature and develops a general taxonomy of tourism resources, as a basic framework to be used in future research.

In addition, this type of studies must account for the sort of visitors making each trip to the points of interest that are being analyzed. The literature has proven the influence of motivations patterns in the visits done by tourists. However, more recent studies show that there are other factors to be considered (Shoval, McKercher, Ng, and Birenboim, 2011). Indeed, the location of the recreational structure has a significant effect on behavior patterns during the trip, influencing the probability of visiting certain tourism spot, the hour in which places are most likely to be visited and the sequence of visits. Furthermore, the distance between tourism resources and tourism infrastructure appears to be relevant specially at the level of local destinations, as tourists spend a significant amount of money in the vicinity of the establishment where they stay overnight (Shoval et al., 2011). Interestingly, if the analysis of resources simply focused on the visitors' motivations, they fail to explain why it is observed that similar resources give a wide variation in the number of visitors. In contrast, the collection and analysis of points of interest closed to tourist accommodation companies may help to explain why some places receive more tourist inflows than others (Zoltan and McKercher, 2015).

Shoval et al. (2011) concludes that the selection of these sights by tourists is greatly influenced by the location of the recreational structures. Therefore, aside from the main tourist attractions, certain tourist resources can have greater relevance for visitors staying in certain hotels, while they are irrelevant and not visited by those tourists staying in other hotels, depending on ease of access and the distance to reach them. These factors are of special interest for destination managers and hotel revenue departments, as they may segment visitors based on tourist activities and itineraries, as derived by the analysis of points of interest. In particular, small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as local tourism promoters and marketing agencies, can improve profits by segmenting accommodation establishments according to the activities available in their immediate vicinity (Shoval et al., 2011).

Information about the location of tourist attractions in a destination and the influx of visitors to them may improve tourist itineraries models. These models, which are based on the location of the recreational structures and the consumption patterns and the characteristics of tourists, may have a major effect on local tourism management. The analysis of these itineraries could cover the current lacks in studies of tourism, as well as helping to improve decision-making tourism policy, planning and management (Shoval and Isaacson, 2007).

2. OBJECTIVES

To carry out this research, it has been reviewed the scientific literature related to the classification and conceptualization of tourism resources. The purpose is to develop a set of definitions that could serve to explain a number of concepts, including that of points of interest. In addition, it aims to create a taxonomy of these tourist points of interest, based on the classification developed by McKercher (2016), which may be appropriate to the Canary Islands. In order to validate the relevance of the analysis, it has been carried out an application of points of interest to a study case in the island of Lanzarote. Furthermore, the points of interest identified have been classified and placed on a map, differentiating them based on the elaborated taxonomy. After that, we provide information on the differences between the characteristics of tourists who visit each of these places based on certain factors (sociodemographic, location of the accommodation in the destination and motivations of visitors). Finally, current limitations on collecting information about tourists' visits to the points of interest will be explained. In this respect, some improvement measures have been proposed in order to collect more and better information about visitors' behavior. In addition, it has been identified a number of applications and uses that could be given to these data, aiming to improve tourism destinations management and to encourage the creation of new tourism products.

3. METHODOLOGY

To carry out the research, the concepts developed and used by different institutions and researchers have been reviewed. In addition, we have check those ones accepted by the UNWTO (United Nations Organization, 2010). Then, we have been able to study their differences and limitations in order to develop a set of definitions that are valid for this study. Similarly, the taxonomy of tourism resources developed by McKercher (2016) is used as a reference to develop a specific classification of points of interest that may be applicable to the Canary Islands. After identifying points of interest in Lanzarote, they have been classified in a taxonomy. To perform this search, very different resources have been employed. Some of the major sources have been tourism web portals, as the official tourism portal of the island, and statistics and public sources, such as the directory of tourist establishments of the ISTAC (Canary Islands' official statistics organization) or the Centers of Culture, Art and Tourism of Centro de Datos de Lanzarote (Lanzarote Data Center).

All these sources collect points of interest just from the perspective of supply (companies dedicated to characteristic tourism activities). So, we have also analyzed different websites to set them from a demand approach (where tourist actually go, not just official tourist places and companies). Therefore, a compilation

of vacational rental homes available on the island has being also performed (using Airbnb data). Similarly, TripAdvisor has been used as a mean to establish which bars, restaurants, pubs, clubs, etc. are visited by tourist (from a supply approach, all these companies would be included, even those one in which just residents consume). The use of Instasight let us know which are the most photographed places on the island are. This allows the establishment of certain points of interest not included in other sites, such as landscapes.

In order to understand the characteristics of visitors who flock to each point, we have used ISTAC and Centro de Datos de Lanzarote data concerning to the influx of visitors to these places. In addition, ISTAC database has been used to know which are the main factors that encourage visits to points of interest. Specifically, ISTAC Tourist Expenditure Survey for 2015 has been used to obtain information on visitors' sociodemographic features and motivations. This data has been leaked and summarized with the statistical program Statistical Analysis Software. As Shoval et al. (2011), we consider that the location of the recreational structure influences tourist visits. In order to emphasize this factor, we measure the importance of this factor in Canary Islands. Therefore, the percentage of visitors who come to each point has been compared depending on the municipality of overnight for each trip. Points of interest of Lanzarote have also been located in an image of the island, using Quantum Geographical Information System program, version 2.14.

4. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

a. Conceptual framework developed

There are not been official definitions to outline what is a tourist resource or an interest point (United Nations Organization, 2010). However, there are various definitions that have been developed by different authors according to their specific research needs. Therefore, in this paper we attempt to develop a conceptual framework that could serve as a reference when studying the attractions of a destination and the itineraries done by tourists to see these sights.

Tourism resources could be defined from two perspectives, the demand and supply side. From the point of view of demand, it is any element, of any nature, that has the ability to attract visitors to a destination to enjoy it or to improve the visitors experience during their stay. From the point of view of supply, a tourism resource is any element that can be used to generate or produce tourism activities, or which can be used for the management of tourism businesses or destinations. In addition, there are resources that can be enjoyed only at certain times or periods of the year, they are *temporary tourist resources*. There are different temporary resources: annual, occasional and punctual ones. *Annual* are those occurring at least once a year. *Occasional* are those organized events that occur with a frequency less than once a year but greater than once in a decade. Finally, *punctual resources* are those events occurring once after ten or more years. From resources, *tourist activities* are created. They can be defined as any use that is given to one or more tourist resources. This way, activities put in value the resources they use, making them enjoyable to visitors.

A *point of interest* can be defined as a specific location or sight, within a tourist destination, where one or more tourist resources are located and where some tourist activities are carried out. There are also *temporary*

points of interest, which are related to temporary tourist resources. We consider a point of interest as temporary when a significant influx of visitors to them occurs during a given time period and they do not receive a significant amount of tourist during the rest of the year. In all destinations we also find certain places where tourists flock significantly, but these places, however, do not generate interest in visitors. Tourists come to these places because they are essential to enjoy the destination. These places are *tourist concentration points*. They differ from the points of interest because they just serve as a mean to enjoy the latter and do not generate an influx of visitors for themselves.

It is often difficult to delimit a point of interest, as it is possible to find large areas attracting visitors. In these sites, it is not possible to establish which places are those that generate an influx of visitors, making it difficult to establish specific points of interest within them. This is because the existence of the space as a whole is the responsible for motivating the arrival of visitors to it. Therefore, these spaces are *tourist spaces of interest*. They are large areas that can be considered to be formed by several points of interest, but it is the closeness and the existence of them as a whole what explains the interest aroused for the space. Another concept to note is *tourist area*. These are areas where conglomerations of tourists are generated by different points of interest and/or spaces of interest that motivate visitors to go to them in order to enjoy several attractions. As a result, a lot of the tourist activity of the destination are concentrated in these areas.

Finally, there is the concept of *tourist itinerary*. This is the way any visitor links attractions, points of interest and concentration ones, during a day of stay. Just as there are points of temporary interest, there are also events that generate a temporary tourist itinerary (routes with a low repetition rate). They differ from the points of interest in that, to be considered temporary, it is not necessary that places crossed by the routes do not receive visitors during the rest of the year. The reason for this is that tourists modify their travel and mobility patterns within the destination due to these events. Another concept associated with the tourist itinerary is the *connecting pathways*. They are treated in those sections of the tourist itinerary that are used to connect and to visit two particular points of interest.

b.   Classification elaborated

Taking as starting point the taxonomy developed by McKercher (2016), and the list of attractions of Lanzarote, a classification of tourist points of interest applicable to the Canary Islands has been developed. Despite being intended to be used in the archipelago, this taxonomy has also the intention of contributing to develop similar classifications at the international level. The classification elaborated is a taxonomy in which a given category has been assigned to each interest point, which in turn belongs to another category and this one to another. Thus, five categories that include and define the characteristics of each point of interest developed.

Following McKercher (2016) a unique Need Family has been established and it defines the purpose of the classification. After it, seven Product Families can be found. Then it counts with 24 Types of Products identified, assigned to the different Product Families. Among them, 80 Product Lines specify the characteristics of the products classified. Finally, 197 Product Types have been established and they specify

a feature on Product Lines. Within each Product Type, the Object can be found and it contains the name of each interest point classified.

In the case of restaurants, points of interest were divided according to the type of food offered. In the case of accommodation, points differ according to the official quality classification of the establishment. For public transport, it is interesting to know if the place is a station exchanger or stop due to the different connections they generate. In the case of leisure companies, they are differentiated according to the type of product they offer (such as the type of product that sell or music or primary audience of clubs). The classification developed for the category of culture is strongly linked to the Canary Islands history. The same applies to Nature section, due to the existence of beaches and volcanoes. Finally, temporary points of interest have been subdivided according to the repetition frequency of the event that motivates the visit and their characteristics.

c.   The case of Lanzarote

Interest and concentration points of the island of Lanzarote (2,534 points) have been identified through a search on various websites and databases. After that, they have been classified in the taxonomy elaborated. In this paper, it has not been done a search for punctual points of interest, because it would only be useful if it would have been done before the event had taken place. By referring to events held before 2016, the inclusion of these concerns would not bring improvements to tourist managers. The Illustration 1 presents all the points located on a single map. They are separated in four categories: Restoration, Accommodation, Transport and Leisure, Culture and Nature.

Illustration 1. Tourist points of interest of Lanzarote
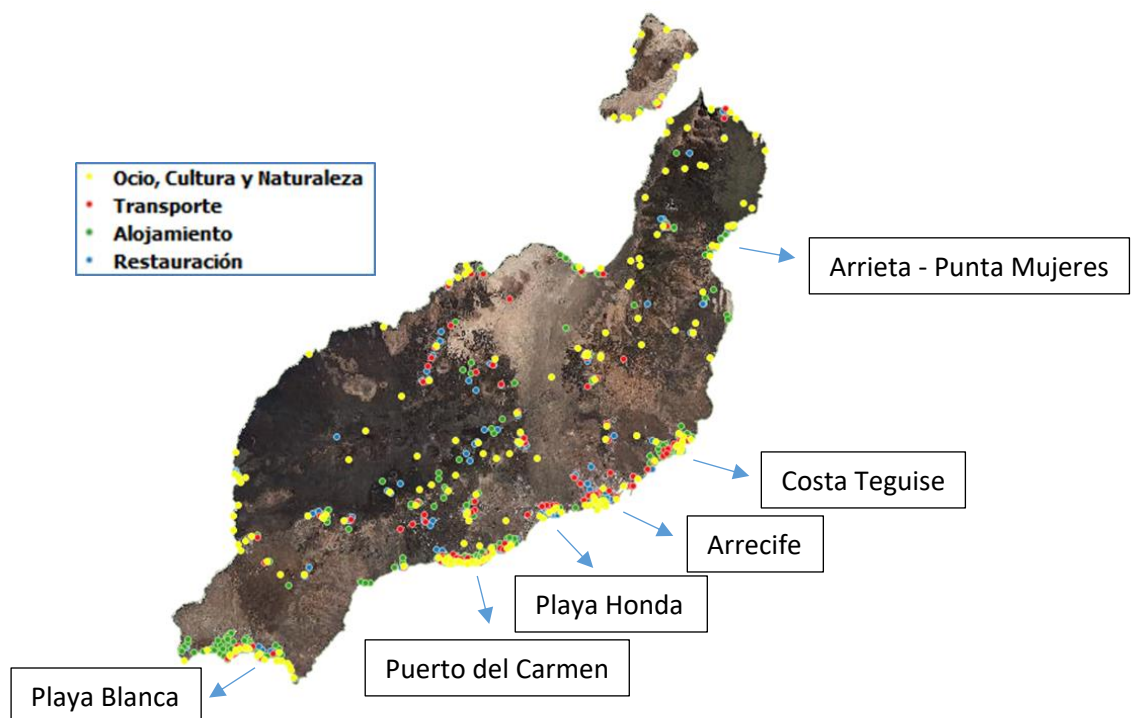
Source: Author's elaboration

Several maps have been developed to locate and establish tourist areas in the island. Once they were defined, they have been compared with the official microdestinations defined by ISTAC. This has revealed that the main tourist areas identified by our analysis correspond to the microdestinations delimited by the ISTAC. However, it is also possible to appreciate some differences between them. First of all, we have identified a greater number of tourist areas (6 in total) than ISTAC microdestinations (there are currently 3). Moreover, our analysis does not consider Puerto Calero as a major tourist area because it does not contain a significant number of points of interest (ISTAC considers this area as a microdestination). On the contrary, our analysis identifies Playa Honda, Arrecife and Arrieta-Punta Mujeres as tourist areas (they are not microdestinations for ISTAC), given the number of points of interest found. Indeed, the comparison between microdestinos and attractions shows that, from the demand perspective (tourist areas), the enclosed space is lower, as only those sights where there is a higher concentration of attractions of visitors were considered. However, from the perspective of supply (microdestinations), this space is greater by grouping all tourist establishments located in the same urban core.

d.   Most influential factors in visiting tourist points of interest

Tourist itineraries made up by visitors depend on the characteristics of each visitor. Therefore, in order to reach a tourism segment, it is necessary to estimate which sites are mostly visited for that precise segment. Moreover, it would be useful to know how these profiles influence of visitors features in their travel patterns. Using the ISTAC survey on tourists' expenditure, we have taken three main features (as a reference) in order to contrast this hypothesis: the nationality of the respondent tourists, the reasons why they chose the Canary Islands as a tourist destination and the location of the accommodation where they stayed.

One of the hypothesis to contrast was that the location of the tourist accommodation is a factor influencing the decisions on the visit of tourist attractions in the Canaries. This fact has already been studied by Shoval (2011) in other destinations, but the significance of this factor can be also verified in the islands. The data showed that there are differences concerning the places visited by tourists depending on the location of their accommodation. Indeed, these differences are significant in all the Canary Islands and there are significant differences depending on the location of accommodation. For example, in the case of La Palma, 40% of tourists staying in Puntallana practice astronomic observation, while only 5% of tourists staying in Tazacorte carry out this activity.

It draws attention the fact that there are some municipalities where their visitors are more likely to visit a bigger number of attractions that others. Tourists staying in Haría, for example, are more likely, in general, to visit all the sights (with data available) of Lanzarote. They are only outweighed by those ones staying in Arrecife (they visit the city of Arrecife more frequently) and tourists hosted in San Bartolomé (they are the tourists who tend to visit more the Museo del Campesino). It all means that there are some municipalities in which visitors are more likely to sightseeing and it generates two hypotheses. On the one hand, tourists could choose the location of the accommodation because they like the area and, therefore, those staying in a certain place are more likely, due to their motivations, to visit different attractions of the destination. On

the other hand, they could choose the accommodation because it is relatively close to the places they want to visit and the closeness to them is what motivates them to choose that precise accommodation or location. Nevertheless, it seems that motivations have a fundamental role in encouraging tourists to visit attractions.

Our analysis shows that motivations are not the only factor influencing tourists to visit a particular place. Tourists staying in Tacoronte (Tenerife) are the most likely to visit the Drago Milenario and, in a second order, to visit El Teide. However, according to the survey, these tourists reveal a very low interest in Canarian landscapes, environmental quality, active travel and knowing new places. Similary, in the case of Haría (Lanzarote), none of the tourists staying in the municipality declared that visiting amusement parks was one of their motivations and they are less motivated to get to know new places. However, they tend to visit more Jameos del Agua (amusement park), Jardín del Cactus (a cactus garden) and Fundación César Manrique (art museum). The same happens in the case of La Palma, where visitors staying in Puntallana are the ones who performed mostly the astronomical observation. However, tourists staying in Villa de Mazo are more encouraged to visit landscapes and enjoy the environmental quality of the island, but they do not tend to practice the astronomical observation.

We have also compared the motivations of visitors and the points of interest actually visited. The data shows that tourists visiting Montaña del Fuego (Timanfaya National Park, in Lanzarote) are among the least interested in the Canarian landscape, while the most interested in it are those who visit Castillo de San Jose and Monumento al Campesino (museum of contemporary and Canarian art, respectively). This could imply that the motivations of visitors do not have a significant influence on their visiting patterns. However, in some cases, motivations influence the sights that are visited. For example, the data shows that tourists interested in cultural offerings tend to prefer to visit places like Castillo de San José, Fundación César Manrique and Monumento al Campesino. In this case, the location of the accommodation plays a very important role in making decisions concerning the visit of sights. However, as it has been proven, motivations are not the only influencing factor in the decision of visiting points of interest.

In addition, we have analyzed the influence of certain cultural traits in the choice of itineraries. To do so, data about points of interest visited by tourists was crossed with data relating to tourists' nationality. The analysis shows that Danish, British and Irish tourists are less likely to visit the main tourist attractions in the island. By contrast, Spanish, French and Italians visitors are the ones who visit a bigger amount of sights and they do so with a higher frequency. However, the most visited places match for all nationalities, not finding significant variations in the places they prefer to visit.

Therefore, we may conclude that there are no outstanding preferences between nationalities regarding to the visit of some resources or places. However, we find that some nationalities have a strong tendency to travel within the destination in order to visit several sights. Indeed, as it has been proven in the case of the location of the accommodation, people from certain countries tend to visit more points of interest on the island than others. This information could be crossed with the data about visitors' patterns depending on the location of their accommodation. Notice that this type of information may enrich the itinerary design and help market segmentation by the country of origin. For example, it is possible to know the willingness

of tourists to visit different places (and which of them) in the island if their nationality and accommodation location are known.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper contributes to scientific research of tourism, approaching to an area of study that is currently a gap in the literature. The knowledge of the tourist attractions of a destination helps analyzing the activities carried out by the tourists and the mobility patterns carried out for it. The objectives of the paper are developing a set of concepts and definitions related to the points of interest and creating a classification of them applicable to the Canary Islands. A taxonomy of points of interest of the islands has been developed. This taxonomy may not be exportable to other destinations; however, it can be taken as a reference. It has been also used the island of Lanzarote as a study case for the identification and classification of points of interest. Additionally, these points have been noted on an image of the island to see where they are concentrated. This has helped to establish some tourist areas that have been compared to the microdestinations defined by ISTAC.

The use of ISTAC survey on tourists' expenditure has revealed the main characteristics and motivations of tourists influencing their visits to points of interest. The analysis concludes that both the nationality of tourists and the location of their accommodation are important factors determining the sights that tourists tent to visit. We find that tourists of certain nationalities are more likely to visit Canary points of interest. However, there are other nationalities showing with a lower tendency to visit these same places. In addition, the location of the accommodation encourages tourists to visit more some attractions than others. Therefore, it is possible to assess the propensity of a given segment to sightseeing the destination. Moreover, knowing where they stay, we can estimate the places they are most likely to visit. Nonetheless, it seems that the motivations do not exercise such a significant role regarding to their visitation patterns.

Knowledge of the main tourist attractions of a destination may have multiple applications. First, it provides information that can be used to improve public management of the activity regarding problems such as congestion, infrastructure design, or pricing. Second, our research provides information that can be used for product design and the development of new management tools by private agents. However, there is a strong limitation due to the difficulty to obtain information. Indeed, ISTAC survey is not able to collect all the points of interest of a destination, so the collection must be carried out using different techniques.

The combination of different tools to gather information on frequency and interest sights is key for obtaining more information, as the shortcomings of one of them can be covered by another (Shoval, 2007). One of the main techniques used is the tracking of the photos uploaded to social networks (Kádár, 2014). Another one has been to track visitors on the basis of their spending with credit cards (Zoltan and McKercher, 2015). However, the method performed most often consists of monitoring tourists through mobile phones, tracking electromagnetic frequencies emissions (Shoval and Isaacson, 2007) or the GPS function incorporated in such devices (Shoval et al., 2011). However, the use of mobiles as tracking tools presents certain problems. First, the mere fact of tracking mobiles is a violation of the right to privacy of

individuals. In addition, current data protection laws limit the use of information that could be obtained (Renenger, 2002). Therefore, the consent of phone users is needed in order to use the information in the investigation, despite the risk to change their behavior because they know they are being tracked.

Despite these limitations, the knowledge of points of interest and itineraries generate a number of benefits for tourism management at local level. Tourism destination managers can identify which are the main tourist areas in a destination. This information allows to implement measures intended to increase or decrease the influx of such visitors to a particular area. Similarly, it allows to know the impact of an increase in the range of accommodation in a particular area (accommodation location influence the points of interest visited). It may also help to estimate which places are linked by tourist itineraries.

Moreover, this research may help firms creating new tourist products and improving certain activities management. If hotel companies know where their customers often go when they stay overnight, they can collect a larger number of brochures or maps of those areas in order to offer them and improve their stay. In addition, the knowledge of routes and connecting paths used by visitors can be used by companies to know which sites they should promote in order to capture any particular market segment. What is more, if companies offering tourist activities may use the information on how visitors link the services that each of them provides, they could ally in order to improve customer's experience and to reduce overall costs. For travel agencies and tour operators, our research may improve knowledge of which attractions (sometimes difficult to identify) are mainly frequented by different segments in order to include them in their packages.

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