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# Spiritual Tourism like Creative industries? The European Marian Route

By Patrice Ballester, teacher and researcher, Ph.D in geography, planning, landscape and tourism of University of Toulouse Le-Mirail II.

**Preamble.** The *Religious Tourism* mixes culture and devotion, art and spirituality, nature and meditation. For pilgrims and tourist agree, this type of religious tourism is a new way of experience and gain knowledge. In addition, the Religious Tourism can compare like creative industries. Nowadays, the Marian Route can define as “an itinerary of cultural and religious interest that links up the sanctuaries of: El Pilar, Torreciudad, Montserrat and Lourdes. Guided by the faith, spirituality and Marian Devotion, the itinerary possesses a great wealth in touristic spaces, nature, architecture, gastronomy or charming villages with a special enchantment.” (Mariana route, 2012: 2) The route goes through the Autonomic communities (regions) of Aragon and Catalonia in Spain and through the regions of Aquitaine and Mid-Pyrenees in France (see map of Marian Road prospectus in date of 2012). These destinations have adapted to the new traveler tendencies. They are not only ready to receive pilgrims, they are also welcoming tourists and visitors that look for the cultural, artistic and natural heritage that these sanctuaries posses.



How the authorities arrive to reconcile both the expectations of the pilgrims and new tourist secularized in a cross-border environment to adapt to the evolution of globalization of tourism practices from applications?



**Theoretical framework, Plan, and methodology.** Today, the old pilgrimage sites have begun again to attract masses of pilgrims, the difference now being that the pilgrims also come across tourists on holiday. What does this mass movement signify? *First:* A search for salvation or a return to the roots of the past as a form of resistance against the rationality of modern times? A complementary vision of sustainable development? *Secondly:* Given that tourists share the same attitudes as pilgrims - in other words, the search for authenticity at different levels of depth and involvement - it could be said that pilgrims are partly tourists and that tourists are partly pilgrims and so a new management of tourist office and landscaper, architecture. *Third:* The rediscovery of pilgrimages is also a rediscovered economy and a means of reinforcing a European sense “everyday behavior”. This means that the modern individual is seeking transcendental values to overcome the fragments, the discontinuity of modern society. The religious tourist industry and the media are offering as consumerism.

**Methodology:** travel touristic in situ of the author, survey and interview with the professionals and statistics.

## Main findings/arguments.

1. The devotion to the Holly Virgin shown by the faithful and pilgrims is as ancient as it is a fact with a renew grace at the European cooperation region.
2. The solutions reside in a multicultural itinerary with wide variety of additional travelling options to choose from and where each sanctuary has its own qualities and characteristics. These attributes make easier for professional in tourism to organize trips for vacationing or religious groups, associations, pilgrimage groups or individual customers.
3. Nature /religion/ sustainable developpement a new tourist of pelegrin are a new form of religious tourism. Its wide variety of touristic options makes the route very attractive to any kind of traveler. Above all these options, the route possesses a great religious, artistic and cultural heritage, as well as amazing natural resources. This impressive legacy satisfies without doubt, the expectations of any visitor. The *naturality* and the *spirituality* are indexed (hybridization) and the origin of the religion (the cave, the way of water, the tree). As professionals of this business, they think the space, the territory and the economic value like a meet between gastronomy/ good hospitality/ infrastructure like a labeling of new product, new modern hotels... the example of “Asociacion para la Promoción de la Ruta Mariana” and “Red de Alojamientos de la Ruta Mariana” show the impact of this new and ancient interest.
4. It is one of the most popular Marian pilgrimage destinations in Europe, as well as in Central and South America. This route increases the number of visitors each year. Around 12 million people visit the four sanctuaries all together. This result of the importance and great interest generates among pilgrims and visitors but the connection between the site are weakness only for a category of person.
5. The Marian Route mixes culture and devotion, art and spirituality, nature and meditation for the secularized tourist but a paradox is pregnant: the majority of tourists are in question with the religion in spite of temptation of the secularization. The accommodation network is one of those tools created for the professionals to facilitate the search, compiling information and booking process: a capacity to secularize the religious tourism.