

**Fast Look. The sightseeing ritual in monumental cities.
Case study of the monumental city of Girona**

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Abstract

This article contends and conceptualizes that the ritual of sightseeing and the relationship between tourists and tourist attractions in monumental cities is highly predictable and repetitive. Visitors in monumental cities show patterns of a mimetic behaviour. This ritual, which we call “fast look” (an analogy with fast food), has three features: (1) the low number of tourist attractions visited compared to the number that could potentially be visited; (2) the high number of visits to particular tourist attractions, given that the majority of visitors choose to visit the same spaces; and (3) the short time, on average, spent on visiting each attraction. The features underpinning “fast look” are supported by a case study of the monumental town of Girona (Spain).

Keywords: Sightseeing. Attraction model. Fast look. Urban tourism. GPS

1 INTRODUCTION

According to Richards (2018, p.12) “Cultural sights, attractions and events provide an important motivation for travel”. Well-known tourism attractions are an essential part of the tourist experience despite the appearance of new types of tourism and a certain resistance to the traditional tourism model. Certain attractions appeal to tourists in such a way that they stand alone (LEIPER, 1990). This involves visiting

highly popular sights that are considered unique and non-reproducible (LEIPER, 1990; KÖHLER; DURAND, 2007). For example, tourists go to Rome to take photos of the Coliseum, and to Peru to see Machu Picchu. In the same way, visitors to Barcelona consider the Sagrada Familia a must-see, and visitors to Australia feel they have to visit Sydney Opera House.

LEIPER (1990) identified the “tourist precinct” as a space within a town or city where tourists are drawn together by clustered and themed attractions. City tourism is organized in such a way that it connects visitors with these attractions. Tourist buses follow the most efficient routes from one attraction to another; tourist guides select attractions and meticulously organize them in order of importance; guided tours take tourists to the main attractions in the city; and tourist information offices provide information on the main sights. Visitors then share their photos and experiences on social networks (GALÍ; DONAIRE, 2015), elevating certain city attractions over others (URRY, 1990). Sightseeing is, of course, just one way to relate to a destination, and tourists visit cities for many other reasons.

An empirical analysis of tourists' sightseeing behaviour reveals what MacCanell (1976) called a “*modern rituals*”. This refers to a relationship between tourists and tourist attractions which is highly predictable and repetitive. MacCanell (2011) points out that this type of relationship has not changed, noting “the monumental indifference of the world's great attractions to social divisions within the multitude of tourists. I am drawn to the peculiar tendency of sightseeing to democratize desire” (MACCANELL, 2011, p. 5).

The present article proposes that this “modern ritual” can be defined as “fast look” (an analogy with “fast food”), and is characterized by three features: (1) the low number of tourist attractions visited compared to the number that could potentially be visited; (2) the high number of visits to particular tourist attractions, leading to the majority of visitors choosing to visit the same spaces; and (3) the short average time spent on visiting each attraction.

This article is structured as follows: Section one gives a brief overview of the main contributions on sightseeing in the literature. Section two outlines the methodology used. This is followed by the results of the case study, and the outcomes obtained in line with the three features of “fast look”. Finally, the main conclusions of the study are summarized.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW. TOURIST ATTRACTIONS

Cultural tourism is a type of tourism in which tourists are essentially motivated to discover, learn about, experience and consume both tangible and intangible cultural attractions in a tourism destination (RICHARDS, 2018). Hence, tourism attractions and tourism motivation cannot be discussed in isolation (NGWIRA; KANKHUNI, 2018). These attractions relate to a set of distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional features of a society involving arts, architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries, living cultures and their lifestyles, as well as value systems, beliefs, and traditions (RICHARDS, 1996). This

definition confirms the much broader nature of contemporary cultural tourism, which relates not only to sites and monuments, but to ways of life, creativity and ‘everyday culture’ (RICHARDS, 2018).

According to Köhler and Durand (2007, p. 187) the “literature distinguishes two sets of cultural tourism. The first defines cultural tourism from demand (reasons, perceptions and experiences), while the second focuses on offer (consumption of attractions)”. Demand-based definitions, therefore, focus on travel motivations and perceptions, and the personal experiences arising from them. In this context, demand definitions are not based on the attributes of spaces or objects, but rather on interpretations attributed to the tourist experience, which in turn defines whether these experiences can be classified as cultural or not. Hence, cultural tourism based on demand can be defined by classifying personal experiences as cultural, rather than in terms of simply access to objects or places with historical, artistic, or cultural values. A positive point is that these personal experiences stemming from consuming tourism highlight that tourists interpret the same object or destination in different ways (KÖHLER; DURAND, 2007). Definitions of cultural tourism are based on the tourist enjoyment of cultural attractions such as historical places, festivals, local cuisine, heritage centres, and traditional markets and museums. This concept is based on the supply of cultural attractions which, have been classified previously as such and are suitable for consumption (KÖHLER; DURAND, 2007).

For some tourists, the main reason for visiting a destination is a desire to participate in cultural tourism activities (MCKERCHER, 2002). However, for many others, cultural tourism plays only a minor role in their decision to visit cultural attractions, or indeed no role at all in their choice of a destination (MCKERCHER, 2002; MCKERCHER; DU CROS, 2003). When segmenting the cultural tourism market, the depth of the experience, and the level of commitment to the attraction should also be considered. Different people have different experiences of visiting tourist attractions, which will depend on factors such as their level of education, knowledge of the site pre-visit, preconceived ideas about the attraction, interest in what it means to them, and time available for the visit. (MCKERCHER, 2002). In other words, two tourists travelling for similar reasons may have radically different experiences depending on how they interact with a particular tourist site (MCKERCHER, 2002; MCKERCHER; DU CROS, 2003). Research on cultural tourism identified a divide between ‘general’ and ‘specific’ cultural tourists, where the former consume culture as part of a general holiday experience, but attractions are considered unimportant when choosing the destination; the latter travel with the intention of participating in some aspect of the destination’s culture (KÖHLER; DURAND, 2007; RICHARDS, 2018). Therefore, the spectrum of cultural tourists ranges from recreational or pleasure tourists, who participate in some cultural tourism activities to enhance their travel experience, to those who mainly or exclusively travel to engage in cultural tourism activities (MCKERCHER; DU CROS, 2003; GALÍ, 2012).

Despite the fact that the tourism literature frequently mentions attractions, less attention is paid to this topic than to other areas of tourism (LEIPER, 1990). In fact, the literature has not provided a single, unique, or precise definition for “tourist attraction”. The most widespread understanding is that attractions are elements of a tourist space which attract and catch the attention of the visitor (RICHARDS, 1996; PEARCE, 1999;

DONAIRE, 2008; DE LA CALLE, 2013; NGWIRA; KANKHUNI, 2018). Attraction is related to key terms such as “attract”, “draw”, “magnetism”, “gravitational influence”, and “pull factor”, which imply that the thing itself has the power to influence behaviour (LEIPER, 1990). A tourist attraction can be a building, a work of art, a marketplace, or anything that captures a tourist’s interest. Therefore, an attraction only exists if it is incorporated in the tourism dynamic and is visited, admired, photographed, and reproduced. The definition of tourist-attraction focuses on the tourist’s perception, and without tourists, the notion of attractions cannot exist. Leiper (1990) proposes three approaches to categorising tourist attractions: (1) the ideographic perspective, which refers to the general attributes of the attraction; (2) the organisational perspective, which refers to geographical elements; and (3) the cognitive perspective, which involves categorising attractions according to tourist perceptions and experiences.

Most cultural tourist spaces are conditioned by the presence of attractions. In fact, these spaces are made up of the sum of the various attractions they offer, which steer the visit and condition the tourists’ gaze (DONAIRE, 2008). However, not all attractions are recognized equally, or capture the tourists’ gaze to the same degree. This is the reason why different attractions within a space are organized in a sort of hierarchy (or tourist order), comprising the main, secondary and tertiary, or occasional, nodes (GALÍ; DONAIRE, 2010).

A distinction is often made between the physical dimension of an attraction and its meaning: 'Tourists move through spaces, emotionally engaging with the physical dimensions, simultaneously experiencing and determining the contingent meaning of these spaces' (WEARING; FOLEY, 2017, p. 98).

The literature on tourist attractions is highly influenced by research carried out by MacCanell (1976). The author’s semiological approach argues that a 'Tourist attraction is an empirical relationship between a tourist, an attraction and a marker (a piece of information about it)' (MACCANELL, 1976, p. 41). The author purports that creating an attraction is a social process which goes through five phases: naming, framing and elevating, the enshrinement, mechanical reproduction, and social reproduction. This systemic definition does not apply to all forms of tourist attractions, but does, however, refer to the most common tourism sights (LEIPER, 1990).

MacCanell (1976) argues that the process of sightseeing is a type of “modern ritual”, in that it follows a pattern which is socially created and reproduced, and that by generalizing these guidelines, its original meaning has been lost: “Under condition of high social integration, the ritual attitude may lose all appearance of coercive externality” (MACCANELL, 1976, p. 44). To a certain extent, for MacCanell, the tourist experience is the social repetition of a behaviour that has selected, described and valued elements of a space, reducing the complexity of the space to a list of elements (attractions) which are organized hierarchically.

MacCanell’s (1976) work heavily influenced the proposal by Urry (1990), which highly values the tourist gaze. For Urry (1990), the tourist experience is a visual process which identifies singular elements of space stemming from three tensions: the tension between the ordinary and the extra-ordinary; the tension between the individual gaze and the collective gaze, and the tension between the romantic image and modern image.

According to Urry (1990), the symbolic interpretation of tourism is based on the projection from the origin, that is the ordinary space, of a series of desires, hopes and needs towards a destination, or toward the extraordinary space. Some authors have criticized the visual bias of Urry's proposal (1990). For example, Franklin and Grang (2001) point out that the smells, flavours, sounds or touch of a destination are also part of the extraordinary experience.

MacCanell and Urry's epistemological proposal has also drawn criticism, as it overemphasizes the visual, and projects the stereotypical male *flâneur*, or distanced observer. Wearing and Foley (2017) propose a feminist interpretation of the tourist experience, and Wearing and Wearing (1996) contrast the figure of the "chorister" with that of the *flâneur*; defining the "chorister" as someone who uses and experiences the city, giving it social meaning. Chaney (2002) and Johnson (2001) have also followed the same line of thought.

As new types of tourism appear, tourists themselves question some of the rituals of sightseeing. These "post-tourists" reject the practices of mass tourism. Dujmovic and Vitasovic (2015, p. 52) observed that "post-tourists have very different views and expectations from tourists who are more conventional or traditional. According to some views, postmodern tourists are the opposite to mass tourists. They tend to gain authentic experiences by venturing away from mass tourist sites". Along the same lines, Russo and Quagliari (2011) question the dichotomy between residents and tourists, and propose a series of intermediate categories, which share characteristics of both extremes. Jansson (2018) defines the mediation of the post-tourist using three types of mediation: the aesthetic register, between the self and the culture; the ethical register, between the self and the other; and the geographic register, between the self and the tourist attraction.

Criticism of traditional models which conceptualize attractions and proposals for new ways to relate to spaces seem to suggest that traditional sightseeing rituals are undergoing a crisis. However, an analysis of the effective behaviour of tourists in monumental cities (especially with generalized tourist tracking methods) shows that tourist attractions continue to be important for the visitor (GALÍ *et al.*, 2015).

3 METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study is to conceptualize and demonstrate that visitors to monumental cities follow a ritual, and show patterns of mimetic behaviour which we call "fast look", (an analogy of 'fast food'). "Fast look" can be conceptualized by three features: (1) only a few attractions are visited, (2) the attractions are always the same, and (3) a shorter average time spent at each attraction.

3.1 Study area

Girona is located north of Barcelona, south of the Pyrenees and close to the Costa Brava and northern Catalonia's largest city. The old quarter has a remarkable medieval heritage with an impressive Jewish quarter, a Gothic cathedral, 12th century baths (a copy of traditional Arab baths), and a large number of Romanesque and Gothic

churches, monasteries, palaces and mansions, all contained within Medieval city walls. This historic city has a rich monumental heritage which has remained practically intact over the centuries. A growing interest in historic sites has converted the city into a centre for cultural tourism. In recent years, Girona's urban tourism strategy has helped strengthen the city's bid as a tourist destination. It has increased the number of hotels beds and emits an image of the city internationally, especially since it appeared in the sixth season of *Game of Thrones*.

3.2 Method

The method used in the case study combined direct visitor observation using GPS tracking with questionnaires, which the visitors were asked to complete at the end of the visit. GPS tracking has been widely used to study the spatial and temporal behaviour patterns of tourists (EDWARDS; GRIFFIN, 2013; HUANG; WU, 2012; TCHETCHIK; FLEISCHER; SHOVAL, 2009; SHOVAL; AHAS, 2016; SHOVAL; ISAACSON, 2007). The main advantage of this method is that it provides very accurate and systematic information on how visitors use the space.

After rejecting trackings with technical errors, the final sample comprised 1,288 cases with a confidence level of 95%, a margin of error of 3%, and maximum variability ($p = q = 0.5$). The sample was stratified by months. The percentage of registrations for each month was obtained from Tourist Information Office registers, museums, spaces charging an entrance fee, guided tours and reservation centres.

GPS tracking devices were distributed in three ways: (1) The primary location was the Tourist Information Office; (2) a small number were distributed through local tour guides accompanying organized groups; (3) a few non-participant tourists were followed by the researchers, who carried the device. These tourists did not pass through the Tourist Information Office and did not have an organized guided tour. Each group of visitors, whether an individual, a couple or a group, received only one GPS device, which they returned to the same Tourist Information Office or to the tour guide at the end of the visit. The questionnaire gathered basic information about the visit and the visitor, and was designed to elicit sociodemographic information, information about the visit itself, and the perceived image of the city.

4 RESULTS. THE “FAST LOOK” IN GIRONA

We consider “fast look” to be a practice characterized by a ritualized relationship between tourists and tourist attractions. “Fast look” means that tourists only see a few attractions for a very short time during their visit, and these attractions are the same as those chosen by other visitors. Sightseeing in Girona is characterized by these “fast look” ritualized behaviours.

4.1 A small number of attractions visited

Galí and Donaire (2005) studied and analysed Girona travel guides and concluded that the old quarter of the city has at least 28 tourist attractions. Girona offers a wide range of opportunities for the tourist, including six museums, civil and religious

buildings from various historical periods, city walls, the university, and other cultural centres. Despite the range of attractions that could potentially be visited, only 5 attractions are visited on average, with a deviation of 2.6 (GALÍ *et al.*, 2015). Results of the analysis, when segmented by demographic factors (gender, age, origin, tourist type), give relatively stable evidence (Table 1). There is, therefore, no external factor explaining a significant difference in visitor behaviour when the number of attractions visited is studied. In line with the thesis by MacCanell (1976), results in this study show that sightseeing in Girona is characterized by the democratization of tourist behaviour.

Table 1 - Attractions visited according to sociodemographic factors

	Sociodemographic Factors	Attractions visited (Mean)	Standard Deviation
Gender	Male	5	2.5
	Female	5.04	2.6
Age	<18	5.4	2.9
	19-30	5	2.6
	31-50	5	2.5
	51-65	5.2	2.6
	>65	5.2	2.5
Origin Country	France	5	2.7
	Spain	5	2.6
	Great Britain	5.2	2.4
	Holland	5	2.2
	USA	4.6	2.3
Staying at/ Coming from	Tourist staying in Girona city	4.9	2.5
	Visitor from Costa Brava	4.9	2.6
	Visitor from other parts of Catalonia (not Costa Brava)	5.3	5.5
	Catalan day-tripper	4.9	2.8
	Visitor on a guided tour	5.6	2.3
Number of visits	First time	5	2.5
	Repeater	5	2.6
Motivation	Visit the old city	5	2.5
	Events	4.8	2.9
	Business	5.3	3

	VFR	5.4	2.4
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Source: own source

4.2 Always the same attractions

The second characteristic of visitor behaviour is that tourists focus on particular attractions and are completely indifferent towards other potential attractions. Half of the tourists surveyed have seen the two most popular attractions in the city: the Cathedral and the Archaeological Walk. In fact, the Archaeological Walk circles the Cathedral and affords views of its impressive buttresses without having to pay the Cathedral entrance fee. In some cases, therefore, this acts as an alternative attraction. 83% of all tourists have either visited the Cathedral or the Archaeological Walk.

In addition to these two main attractions, three secondary attractions are highlighted in travel guides and the various mechanisms “enshrining” the attractions. All three are located very close to the Cathedral: The Gothic church of Sant Feliu, the Arab Baths and the Museum of Jewish History. Although the number of tourists visiting the three attractions is 11.1%, three-quarters of tourists visit at least one of the three sites.

The situation with the walls is very similar. On the eastern side of the old quarter, tourists can visit or walk along the whole length of the conserved Carolingian city wall. The wall is in the old quarter, and divided into three sections which can be accessed from north to south. Only 30% of tourists walk along all the sections of the wall, but more than 60% visit at least one of the three sections.

This means that a selection of attractions in the city are ritualized. This ritualization is based on access to the Cathedral (and / or the Archaeological Walk), with a visit to at least one of the three secondary attractions, and at least one of the three sections of the city wall. Statistically, this canonical selection tends to congest certain attractions, while the rest remain off the tourist circuit.

Table 2 - Percentage of visitors at Girona’s attraction

Girona’s attractions	Percentage of visitors
Cathedral	67%
Archaeological Walk	65%
City wall (north section)	49%
City wall (central section)	50%
City wall (south section)	40%
Sant Feliu Church	48%
Arab Baths	39%
Jewish Museum (Bonastruc ça Porta)	38%
French Gardens	30%
Art Museum	20%
History Museum	4%
Sant Pere Monastery	21%
Agullana Palace	25%

Source: own source

The analysis of visitors' sociodemographic profiles (age, origin, tourist type) at the main attractions in the city does not reveal any significant differences. The pattern of consumption remains unchanged despite differences in criteria based on gender, origin, knowledge of the attraction and motivation. Table 3 shows the percentage of tourists visiting the main city attractions according to sociodemographic factors.

Table 3 - Percentage of visitors according to sociodemographic factors in each main attraction

		Cathedral	Arche o. Walk	Wall (north)	Wall (central)	Wall (south)	St. Feliu Church	Jewish Museu m
Gender	Male	67%	65%	39%	49%	48%	49%	39%
	Female	67%	66%	40%	53%	51%	48%	37%
Age	<18	62%	33%	50%	58%	62%	54%	33%
	19-30	62%	37%	42%	53%	50%	48%	37%
	31-50	67%	37%	38%	50%	47%	47%	37%
	51-65	69%	41%	42%	51%	51%	50%	41%
	>65	71%	34%	35%	48%	49%	49%	34%
Origin	France	70%	63%	36%	56%	54%	48%	40%
	Spain	67%	68%	40%	49%	49%	50%	44%
	Great Britain	74%	64%	44%	56%	53%	45%	27%
	Holland	63%	49%	44%	58%	53%	56%	44%
	USA	64%	67%	27%	42%	45%	39%	24%
Staying at	Staying in Girona	67%	65%	40%	53%	49%	47%	37%
	Staying in C. Brava	66%	61%	37%	49%	47%	49%	40%
	Staying in Catalonia (not C. Brava)	67%	69%	47%	54%	54%	47%	34%
	Catalan day-tripper	67%	67%	38%	46%	45%	50%	38%
	Visitors on a guided tour	68%	71%	26%	59%	62%	50%	50%
# of visits	First Time	66%	65%	41%	53%	51%	47%	37%

	Repeater	69%	67%	38%	46%	46%	51%	39%
Motivation	Visit the old city	68%	66%	40%	51%	50%	49%	38%
	Events	65%	57%	37%	45%	43%	37%	31%
	Business	77%	77%	46%	54%	31%	46%	46%
	VFR	54%	62%	46%	51%	59%	57%	46%

Source: own source

4.3 Limited time

The average time spent visiting all the attractions is under an hour. Although the survey pinpointed “visit the old city” as tourists’ main motivation for visiting the city, they only spent 50 minutes on sightseeing (deviation 42.68 minutes). The average time at each attraction was 10 minutes (9.88 minutes, with a deviation of 7.11 minutes). Again, there are no sociodemographic factors showing a significant difference (Table 4).

Table 4 - Average time spent at an attraction according to sociodemographic factors

	Sociodemographic Factors	Mean Time (minutes)
Gender	Male	10.8
	Female	9.7
Age	<18	8.79
	19-30	9.85
	31-50	9.92
	51-65	10
	>65	9.48
Origin Country	France	10.24
	Spain	9.89
	Great Britain	11.17
	Holland	10.13
	USA	8.70
Staying at	Tourist staying in Girona city	10.19
	Visitor from Costa Brava	9.92
	Visitor from Catalonia (not Costa Brava)	9.15
	Catalan day-tripper	10.06
	Visitor on a tour	11.12
Number of visits	First Time	9.94

	Repeater	9.73
Motivation	Visit the city	9.88
	Events	8.34
	Business	10.97
	VFR	10.38

Source: own source

5 CONCLUSIONS

Despite critics of traditional models seemingly suggesting that traditional sightseeing rituals are undergoing a crisis, an analysis of the effective behaviour of tourists in monumental cities (especially with generalized tourist tracking methods) shows that traditional sightseeing behaviour continues to be important for the visitor.

In this paper, the authors demonstrate that tourists follow a “modern ritual”, and “use space” in a certain socially constructed way that is replicated in each new tourist experience. We can sum up this practice as “fast look”, using an analogy with the term “fast food”. The paper conceptualizes “fast look” behaviour, which combines three factors which operate simultaneously. First, tourists cut down the maximum number of visits, even though there is a wide range of opportunities. This was also observed in a similar study by Donaire, Galí and Royo (2015). Second, the selection of attractions is not random, but follows a very precise hierarchy. This creates a homogenous model as everyone visits the same attractions while following similar itineraries. Third, the average time spent on the visit is extremely short; under an hour for a whole visit, and 10 minutes average at each attraction.

The study highlights that this behaviour does not vary when visitors are differentiated by socio-demographic criteria. Neither gender, age, origin, tourist type, type of motivation, nor degree of knowledge significantly differentiates one group from another. The pattern remains unchanged and social heterogeneity produces surprisingly homogenous behaviour.

These results show that visitors in medium- and small-sized historical cities have a very superficial relationship with the city’s heritage. This has significant implications for destination management and planning. This not only involves rethinking the tourist experience in the city, but also how to manage in-situ marketing.

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***La mirada rápida. El ritual turístico en las ciudades monumentales.
El caso de estudio de la ciudad monumental de Girona***

Resumen

Este artículo sostiene y conceptualiza que el ritual de la visita turística y la relación entre turistas y atracciones en ciudades monumentales es altamente predecible y repetitivo. Los visitantes de las ciudades monumentales muestran patrones de comportamiento *mimético*. Este ritual, al que llamamos *mirada rápida* o “*fast look*” (por analogía con la comida rápida o “*fast food*”), tiene tres características: (a) el bajo número de atracciones turísticas visitadas en comparación con el número que podría visitarse potencialmente; (b) el elevado número de visitas en unos determinados atractivos turísticos, pues la mayoría de visitantes opta por visitar los mismos espacios; y (c) el poco tiempo, en promedio, dedicado a visitar cada atracción. Las características que sustentan la *mirada rápida* o “*fast look*” se respaldan con el caso de estudio de la ciudad monumental de Girona (España), planteado en este artículo.

Palabras clave: Visita turística. Modelo de atracción. Mirada rápida. Turismo urbano. GPS.

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