

# Tourist or Pilgrim? Modeling two types of travel bloggers

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The typological distinction between the pilgrim and the tourist has often been drawn in tourism studies, either theoretically or through ethnographic research (Cohen 1979, Knox et al. 2014). The current paper aims at complementing said debate by adopting a macro-perspective, applying computational stylistic techniques to analyze discursive differences in a corpus of about 7000 blogs from the Dutch travel blog repository of [waarbenjij.nu](http://waarbenjij.nu). The hypothesis is that tourists and pilgrims share notable similarities in their narratives.

Two sub-corpora are scraped and considered, pertaining to respectively narratives by pilgrims traveling to Santiago de Compostela and by tourists visiting New York City. The great diversity of New York tourists mirrors the diversity in pilgrims found on the Camino, who can travel to Santiago with a variety of backgrounds, expectations, modes of transportation, and amount of time to spend. This term was chosen to ensure that the corpora would consist of texts about journeys that are structurally dissimilar, to capture the important difference in the conception of one's destination between a pilgrim and a tourist.

Several unsupervised computational representations (most notably document-term matrices and topic models; Jockers 2013) are leveraged to analyze the corpora, which yields a bottom-up, data-driven perspective on the differences between these traveler types. A model of ten topics is created based on the part-of-speech tagged corpora, including only nouns. These topics provide a cue to recontextualize the differences found through quantitative analysis. Further interpretation will rely on the application of a qualitative close reading into the indicated themes. (Ramsay 2011)

The analysis shows that pilgrims, in contrast to theory, write far less about sacred topics and much more about the same practical topics that tourists are stereotypically invested in. Conversely, tourists show a notable sensibility to a wide range of highly valued, set apart experiences. The paper ends with the proposal for a new continuum to understand the difference between tourists and pilgrims, based on the continuum between 'condensed diversity' and 'extended engagement'. By doing so, it aims to contribute to both the understanding of the much debated typology of the two figures, as well as to the field of methodological strategies within the humanities.

## References

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