

## Computer and quantitative methods in tourism history. A reflection based on the Spanish case

*Méthodes informatiques et quantitatives en histoire du tourisme. Une réflexion basée sur le cas espagnol*

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# Computer and quantitative methods in tourism history. A reflection based on the Spanish case

*Méthodes informatiques et quantitatives en histoire du tourisme. Une réflexion basée sur le cas espagnol*

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

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- <sup>1</sup> In recent years there has been much talk about digital humanities, given the abundant possibilities that have arisen for historians thanks to the digitalisation of documentary resources and even the creation of specific databases. I am not only referring to documentation collections, but also to other elements that are particularly useful for tourism history, such as photographs, postcards, and all of the cartographical material that has been digitalised in recent years. In this respect, it is particularly worth referring to the so-called Geographical Information System (GIS), an essential tool for processing spatial data, enabling us to analyse and represent it in many different ways. In short, it constitutes an instrument for working with geo-referenced information, which, in the case of tourism history, is particularly relevant (Vallejo and Larrinaga, 2018). Evidently, all these possibilities facilitate the research tasks of historians in general and those of tourism historians in particular. In any event, and as will be indicated below, a critical and cautious attitude should be adopted with digital history. At least in the Spanish case, there is a large volume of primary documentation that has not been digitalised, therefore, the historian's task of searching for documents

continues to be fundamental. The historian is able to use these new technologies but must be aware that not all of the documents or information sources are digitalised.

- 2 The history of tourism is no exception and has also benefited from these technical innovations that are contributing to the improvement of our studies. This is particularly visible in the case of Spanish historiography. From an academic point of view, we can say that the earliest studies on tourism in Spain were conducted in the mid-twentieth century by authors such as José Ignacio Arrillaga and Rafael Aguirre Franco, among others. Although these studies were not strictly on the history of tourism, they contain references to history and, thanks to their integrity, today they constitute benchmark texts for the study of this period. In this respect, the studies by Luis Lavour and Luis Fernández Fúster, particularly those published in the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, are essential works of reference. It should be noted that Lavour, Fernández Fúster, and Aguirre Franco were experts specialised in tourism and, therefore, had access to direct sources. In fact, their studies are valuable largely due to the primary sources to which they had access, especially the official statistics. Indeed, tourism historians today still consult these studies, precisely due to the important data that they contain. In truth, these authors did not strictly apply quantitative methods to the study of tourism, but they divulged the official statistics handled by government agencies. From this point of view, their work is still important, since their scientific methods, based on statistics, differed from the other merely qualitative works, when not carried out by amateurs. Some of these studies are digitalised, so it is easier to access them and the figures that they contain. Furthermore, they refer to a period of administrative centralism, during Franco's dictatorship, therefore, prior to the administrative decentralisation of the democratic period.
- 3 Nonetheless, the study methods used by the afore-mentioned authors were very different to those used by tourism historians today. Precisely, one of the main problems currently faced by tourism historians in Spain is the wide dispersion of sources. These pioneers of tourism history did not have to address this aspect as they only used data elaborated by the official entities of the Spanish government. This dispersion is not only due to the division between private and public sources but also due to the variety of the sources of a public nature. The administrative decentralisation in Spain has given rise to a wide diversity of public sources. In the field of tourism, apart from the central government, in many cases the local governments have played a highly relevant role. To these we must also add the regional governments, initially only that of Catalonia in the times of the Second Republic and the Civil War (when the Tourism Office was created in 1932) and, from the Constitution of 1978, those of all the other regions due to the division of Spain into Autonomous Regions.

## Digitalised sources

- 4 In the case of the central government, the archive of reference for Spanish tourism history of the twentieth century is the Archivo General de la Administración [General Administration Archive]. Given that the public sector plays a fundamental role in tourism, without underestimating the role played by the private sector, this archive is evidently essential for the study of the history of tourism in Spain. Obviously, we should not be tempted to identify the history of tourism with the history of the tourism administration of a country. However, it is true that, at least in the Spanish case, the

central government has played a key role in its tourism history from 1911 until the present day (Moreno, 2013, p.169; Moreno, 2022). The majority of the existing documents in this archive refer to the official tourism bodies, which were particularly important during the existence of the Ministry of Information and Tourism (1951-1977). With respect to the topic of this study, it should be noted that the process to digitalise the documents of this archive has begun, although to date little progress has been made. Therefore, almost all of the documents stored in this archive referring to tourism still have to be consulted in person. The digitalised documents of this archive are available in the Portal de Archivos Españoles [Spanish Archive Portal] (PARES). This is the principal platform for the diffusion of the Patrimonio Histórico Documental Español [Spain's Documentary Historical Heritage], created and managed by the Sub-directorate General of the State Archives of the Ministry of Culture and Sport. PARES contains descriptive files and digitalised images of the documentary resources conserved in the State Archives and, therefore, also of the AGA-GAA. However, all of the documents contained in these archives have still not been incorporated into PARES due to their enormous volume. The contents of PARES are increasing as the archival work to identify, describe, and digitalise the documents develops, which, in the case of the AGA-GAA with respect to tourism, is minimum.

- 5 Another documentation centre which has also been of interest for the study of tourism since the 1920s is the Instituto de Turismo de España [Spanish Tourism Institute] (Turespaña). This institute is an autonomous body of the National State Administration, responsible for promoting Spain abroad as a tourist destination through marketing and implementing the Spanish tourism strategy. It is attached to the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism through the State Secretariat for Tourism. The Institute incorporates the Tourism Documentation Centre of Spain, considered as one of the most important tourism documentation centres in the world, due to both the number and quality of the documents that it contains. Created in 1985, this service of the Institute compiles, analyses, and disseminates the information and documents relating to tourism in Spain. According to the Annual Report of 2021, it has 143,236 computerised bibliographic references which may be consulted through the OPAC (Online Public Access Catalog). They include tourism posters and leaflets, journals and monographs specialised in tourism, institutional publications and legislation, photographs and audiovisual materials. All of these records are available online, but only some of them can be fully consulted from the catalogue. Specifically, almost 8,700 documents; therefore, representing less than 5% of the collection. Of these 8,700 documents, a little over, 7,400 are in pdf format (almost 4% of the collection), with the rest of the posters in jpg format, which, although with a low resolution, can be seen in full. Undoubtedly, the Institute has carried out an enormous task of computerising its resources, hugely facilitating the work of tourism historians, although a lot remains to be done. According to the Annual Report of 2021, the consultations made have been as follows: access to the catalogue: 2,591 access requests; number of consultations (telephone and email) responded to: 634; number of images provided: 10,125 (9,863 photographs, 120 posters, 23 leaflets, 119 pages or articles). This is valuable information which reveals the relevance of this institution for tourism studies. In this respect, we can highlight the existence of Spanish tourism statistics that date back to 1950 and the excellent graphic material of the Institute.

- 6 Together with the AGA-GAA and the Spanish Tourism Institute the archives of the local governments are another recommendable source for the study of tourism in Spain from the end of the nineteenth century. In this case, we should refer both to the provincial and municipal archives. These administrative bodies sought to boost tourism on a provincial and local level, respectively. For these archive types, we should first note that the documentation is non-uniform across provinces and municipalities. Although modern tourism began to develop as an industry in Spain in the first third of the twentieth century (Norval, 1936), it did not occur in the same way throughout the whole of the national territory. Its development was different in each region and varied between provinces (Vallejo, 2018). This has given rise to disparity in the tourism documentary resources between the different archives. In addition, we should also take into account the investment that the different local archives have made in the digitalisation of their documentary resources. In this respect, there are also large differences.
- 7 The case of the Municipal Archive of San Sebastián should be highlighted. San Sebastián was the capital of Spanish tourism for the most part of the twentieth century. In recent years, this archive has been undertaking the huge task of digitalising its documents, including those relating to tourism. This is also the case of the propaganda and the Attraction and Tourism Centre, an incoming tourism body that has played a fundamental role in the promotion of this city's tourism from its creation in 1928 to the present day. Specifically, researchers were able to request all of this documentation for their research during the pandemic. After digitalising the information, the managers of the archive place it at the disposal of the users, who are able to access it freely. They even provide the option for historians to request the digitalisation of specific documents for research purposes. This represents a great opportunity for the tourism historian (Larrinaga, 2022).
- 8 From a regional point of view, the work carried out by the Generalitat de Catalunya [Government of Catalonia] is noteworthy. It has provided users with the search engine<sup>1</sup>, in which they can search for documents in all of the archives of this autonomous region, and which indicates those documents that are digitalised and those that are not. For the case study of tourism history, we are interested in the Generalitat de Catalunya's resources referring to this field in the 1930s, when, by virtue of its first statute of autonomy (approved by the Courts on 9 September 1932), tourism matters came to fall under its jurisdiction. In the same year, it created the Tourism Office of Catalonia, "the most emblematic tourism institution of the Catalan regional government" (Palou, 2018, p. 429). These resources are kept in the National Archive of Catalonia and part of the documentation referring to the Generalitat's competence for tourism in the 1930s is digitalised. These documents are mainly decrees published by the Generalitat. Many of the documents, however, are not digitalised and must be consulted in person at the archive.
- 9 Another important source for the study of tourism history, in this case from a business point of view, is that provided by the Companies Registries, which were created at the end of the nineteenth century. On the whole, they are organised by province and have the primary objective of officially publicising the legal situations of the companies and entrepreneurs which are of interest for trade and commercial transactions. They depend on the Ministry of Justice. In fact, very little progress has been made in the digitalisation of the resources of the Companies Registries, and only in some cases, such

as the Companies Registry of Madrid, can we find digitalised documents. Undoubtedly, this constitutes a serious obstacle for the work of economic historians of tourism, who are obliged to compile information from different companies registries in order to be able to conduct analyses on a regional or national level on tourism companies in Spain. This task may be further hindered because some companies registries charge for the information.

- 10 Evidently, the advances being made in the digitalisation of all of these sources of public archives are highly important for tourism historians, as they provide researchers with highly useful databases for their work. However, we cannot stop here, it is necessary to go a step further. Therefore, it is important to highlight that such a database would also require a metadata section with a critical summary of the sources and methods used to produce the series, allowing researchers to discuss the historical evolution of statistical categories and how the series were constructed.
- 11 In general, there is still a long way to go in terms of the digitalisation of archive documents that are useful for tourism historians in Spain, although much progress has been made in the digitalisation of newspapers, journals, and a good number of books of the period (from the end of the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century). This is providing tourism historians with a source, namely the press, which has been little exploited on a local level. It is not only the newspapers with a long historical trajectory that have digitalised their archives, but some institutions have also digitalised a good part of their respective collections. Evidently, not everything has been digitalised, but we now have digital newspaper libraries of great value, such as the National Newspaper Library of the National Library or the Virtual Library of Historical Press of the Ministry of Culture. There are other digital newspaper libraries of the different local governments that can also be highly useful for the tourism historian, particularly when conducting case studies, for example. Therefore, with this intense digitalisation of the press and, to a lesser extent, books, a highly interesting field has opened up for tourism historians in Spain. Here, it is worth mentioning that with respect to the relevance of digitalised press articles for research in the history of tourism, most of the uses made by historians of these databases are qualitative, which does not make them any less rigorous or relevant.

## Examples of quantitative and digital methods in historiography

- 12 Quantitative, mathematical, and statistical methods are not new in tourism history. However, observing the degree of digitalisation of the sources reported in the previous section, it should be noted that in the Spanish case little progress has been made for two fundamental reasons. First, due to the dispersion of the sources and the problems that this entails for location, systematization, and digitalisation, as we have already seen. And second, due to the lack of databases. Digitalisation has constituted an undeniable step forward in this field as it provides information that can be accessed online, but the work for the tourism historian is incomplete. For example, the statistical data referring to the movements of foreign tourists during a good part of the Franco period have been digitalised by the Spanish Tourism Institute, but they have not been registered in a database with which they can be operated. There is also a collective work titled *Estadísticas históricas de España (Historical Statistics of Spain)* for the

nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Carreras and Tafunell, 2005), but it is in printed format only and there is very little information about tourism. All of this hinders considerably the task of tourism historians and little progress has been made in this respect in the Spanish historiography. The situation is even worse for the years prior to the Civil War, for when there are few statistical data. Furthermore, we find another added difficulty when studying internal tourist movements. The lack of statistics in this respect means that, to date, there are no long-term studies on the holidays of Spaniards in their own country. The information that we have on the entry of foreign tourists in Spain is greater than that of national tourism, for which we only have estimates. This is because foreign tourists brought in currencies to a Spanish economy that was in great need of them, particularly during the early decades of the Franco regime. Obviously, the abundance and availability of data on foreign tourism is interesting for the balance of payments, both in the case of Spain and the rest of the European countries, for example. But if we contemplate the tourism activity, analysing only the inflows of foreign tourists, our knowledge of the reality will not be complete as, until the mid-twentieth century, there were more national tourists spending their summer holidays in Spain than foreigners.

- 13 To give a specific example of the use of quantitative methods, in order to palliate the problem of the statistical sources in the first third of the twentieth century, the Tourism History Research Group<sup>2</sup> constructed a Tourism Media Intensity Index (Vallejo *et al.*, 2016; Vallejo, 2021b). This index consists of the elaboration of a historical series based on the number of citations of the word “tourism” in the digitalised press of the period (1900-1936). It enables us to identify the beginning of media interest in tourism and the tourism industry. In short, it simply shows how tourism gained a presence in Spanish society, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s, through the written press. Therefore, it is an exercise involving the construction of a statistical series based on a qualitative source, namely the press. This could only have been achieved with the digitalisation of a good number of newspapers. It is, in short, a clear example of the many possibilities offered by the digitalised press. Obviously, certain problems arise with the use of this index. For example, was “tourism” really the only word in Spanish to describe what we now call “tourism”? Even if “tourism” was the only word, does this index really reflect media attention or also the evolution of language? Or is the sample representative? These aspects are not clarified by the authors. Furthermore, other terms, such as travel agencies, tourist hotels, or sightseeing tours are not included in the index. Besides, this index has a clear limitation, since it does not show the country’s tourism development in terms of infrastructure or number of tourists. It only indicates the extent to which tourism began to attract the attention of the press of the time. In other words, from my point of view, it is an interesting and valid exercise to, at least, observe how the tourism phenomenon gradually gained more prominence in the press from the first third of the twentieth century and, as claimed by these authors, presumably also in Spanish society in these years. This is why it is necessary to complement this index with other studies that analyse tourism companies, active and receptive tourism associations, tourist flows, or official tourism organisations. (Vallejo and Larrinaga, 2018; Moreno, 2022). In this respect, the Tourism History Research Group is exploiting these possibilities in order to advance the tourism history of Spain and place it on a level with the most cutting-edge historiographies in Europe.



- 14 This research group has, to date, received finance for four research projects from the Spanish government and European funds to study the tourism history of Spain in the twentieth century. The group has changed over the years, although many of its members have participated in it from the outset. It is a multidisciplinary group in which researchers from different disciplines collaborate and it has become the group of reference in Spain for tourism history studies. If we understand tourism as a multi-dimensional reality that can be addressed from different points of view, it is logical that the group includes different specialists. Therefore, there are experts in economic history, contemporary history, human geography, anthropology and communication sciences. As well as being multidisciplinary, the research group has also experienced an internationalisation process. In this respect, we can highlight the organisation and presentation of papers in international congresses, research stages in foreign universities, and publications abroad. Furthermore, a decisive step in this internationalisation process took place with the third research project with the incorporation of three Italian professors. The different members of the research group have sought to exploit the new opportunities offered by the digitalisation of these sources in order to make significant progress.
- 15 The digitalised press now constitutes a source of the first order for new studies on tourism history in Spain focused on the first half of the twentieth century. For example, network analysis or prosopography have benefited from this new opportunity. These are studies referring to entrepreneurs, travel agents, professionals who, in their day, were important for the promotion of tourism, certain hotels, etc. The study of the pioneers of travel agencies in Spain, given the lack of business documentation, has used the digitized press (Larrinaga, 2021b). Likewise, the analysis of the digitized press has served for the study of one of the most important tourist agents in Spain between the 1920s and the early 1950s, Luis Bolín (Larrinaga [ed.], 2021). The digitalisation of the press is providing highly valuable information for tourism historians about tourism during the first third of the twentieth century, for example. In fact, it is playing a determining role in the renovation of the Spanish historiography taking place in recent years. The members of the group have also benefited from the digitalisation of images and the Geographical Information System. This can be seen in some of the publications that represent a considerable step forward in the study of the economic and social history of tourism in Spain. The most important examples derived from the research projects with which this group has been financed and in which digitalised sources have been used are the following: Vallejo and Larrinaga, 2018; Berrino and Larrinaga, 2021; Vallejo, 2021a; Larrinaga, 2021a; Larrinaga and Strangio, 2022.
- 16 In general terms, the Spanish historiography in tourism has been experiencing strong growth in recent years, under the leadership, fundamentally but not exclusively, of the Tourism History Research Group. Some of the most important advances made in this field of the Spanish historiography have emerged from this research group or have been led by it. It is true that in the historiography, we can find other tourism historians unrelated to this research group who are also using digital methods in their research, although they are very few (Sánchez Picón and García Gómez, 2018). Our research group is attempting to carry out a systematic research project on the history of tourism between 1900 and 1960, that is, the decades prior to mass tourism about which we know the least. For the 1960s onwards, there are many studies and more sources, although, as already mentioned, there are still no databases that facilitate the work of the historian



when conducting searches. In any case, the work of Carles Manera stands out. In his comparative studies for the different countries and regions of the Mediterranean, he has benefited from the statistics and databases of the World Tourism Organization. (Manera *et al.*, 2020; Manera *et al.*, 2016). The Tourism History Research Group has had to combine an intense archival work, recurring to primary sources, with the exploitation of the possibilities provided by the digitalisation of certain sources. Only in these cases can the quantitative, mathematical, and statistical methods be applied.

## Possible developments in the field of tourism history

- 17 There are basically two challenges for tourism history in Spain when applying these methods. First, the construction of easily managed databases that are available to historians and second, the continuation of the digitalisation of primary sources. With respect to the first aspect, we have already mentioned the need to digitalise sufficient data in order to develop good databases. With respect to the data stored by the Spanish Tourism Institute, it would be ideal if this official body registered this information in an agile, user-friendly database. This would be an excellent instrument so as to make progress in aspects such as the arrival of foreign tourists from the mid-twentieth century, their nationality, the destinations chosen within the country, the mode of transport used, the accommodation, etc. This would enable us not only to advance in terms of the characteristics of foreign tourism, but also with respect to its wide diversity. In the absence of an initiative of this nature, a proposal such as the one defined in this article could be undertaken by a research team responsible for entering the data and systematising it in a database to be used by researchers. At the same time, the documentary richness of the Spanish archives on different aspects related to tourism warrants a larger investment in the digitalisation of resources. The actions taken in this respect by the AGA-GAA, for example, are insufficient, due to the large number of documents that it conserves.
- 18 On the other hand, and as previously mentioned, the first results of using digitalised press sources are extraordinary. Precisely, one of the most important possible developments for tourism history in Spain is based on their systematic exploitation. The press reports events, provides information about public figures, publishes reports, conducts analyses and studies, publishes interviews, etc. It includes a wide variety of information, rich in nuances, which should be systematically studied by the tourism historian. As we can see in some of the studies previously mentioned, the press constitutes the ideal complement for primary documentation. In some cases, in these private activities for which we have no archival source, the press can constitute the only instrument of knowledge. Fortunately, in this respect, much progress has been made in Spain. Therefore, the tourism history studies of the coming years cannot ignore this source. The digitalisation of important newspaper libraries enables us to gain access to a large number of newspapers and journals from across the whole country. In this way, not only can we obtain much more information, but we can also apply a comparative perspective, which has been very difficult until now. Until very recently, the researchers who used the press were usually conducting local studies. With the implementation of the digital newspaper libraries and their user-friendliness, possibilities have opened up for advancing tourism history in Spain. Going a step further, it would be desirable to create a database that would contain the titles of the

articles referring to tourism in this digitalised press. This would undoubtedly be a very ambitious and long-term project but would open up new potential for tourism history in Spain, particularly with respect to the first half of the twentieth century. It would especially facilitate comparisons with other countries.

- 19 In order to study comparative history in even greater depth, it would also be interesting to digitalise all kinds of images, and make greater use of the GIS in particular to make representations which, in a visual way, would enable us to establish parallelisms with the tourism history of other countries. All of this should take into account that tourism is a transnational phenomenon and, therefore, should be studied from this perspective.
- 20 That said, the research agenda for the coming years cannot be completed if progress is not made towards fully opening and digitalising private archives (Humair and Chiarelli, 2021, p. 6). In Spain, progress has been made in this respect in the case of the archives of the large financial entities, such as BBVA and the Banco de Santander, but not those of companies related to tourism: hotels, travel agencies, transport companies, etc. In this case, their archives cannot be freely accessed by researchers. Therefore, we do not know their degree of digitalisation, although we can sense that it is very low. Hence, it would be recommendable for government institutions (national or regional), or universities and research centres, to reach agreements with these private companies to classify their documentary heritage, digitalise it, and place it at the disposal of tourism historians. This is undoubtedly a long-term objective and today still unattainable, but it is fundamental in order to continue advancing in tourism history. If we want to gain an in-depth understanding of this field that goes beyond the official sources or the press, it is necessary to access private documentation. Currently, this is very difficult, although in cases where it has been achieved, the results have been excellent (San Román, 2017). This shows that there are still primary sources that have not been explored and which constitute a stimulus for the tourism historian.
- 21 However, in addition to assessing the volume of data that has been digitalised, it is also important to note that quantitative methods may also allow estimations and extrapolations. Leaving aside the methodological discussion existing on this subject, which is interesting but unrelated to this article, it is true that only an effort to actively transform sources into data, by means of a critical assessment of their representativeness and significance, can make statistical methods applicable to historical materials (Rowlinson *et al.*, 2014).

## Conclusions

- 22 The history of tourism as an academic discipline has suffered a certain degree of marginalisation until fairly recently. This was condemned in its day by Professor John Walton (2009), one of the pioneers in the field. Fortunately, this vision is changing and tourism history is becoming consolidated as a discipline. The specialised journals, international congresses, and publications in high-impact journals have clearly contributed to this. In this respect, the access to sources through digitalisation is not only revolutionising the way in which history in general is approached, but also tourism history, in particular. The sources constitute the raw material for the work of historians. This explains the importance of the digitalisation of documentation. With increased access to information, the studies on tourism history are more credible and

reliable. In fact, today it is a much less fertile world for amateurs than it was in the Spanish historiography of the 1980s and 1990s.

- 23 In this sense, we can say that Spanish historiography has experienced significant growth over the last decade with respect to the history of tourism, thanks largely to the research projects financed by the Ministry of the Economy and the European Regional Development Fund. Much progress has been made since Walton's denouncement and there is an evident recognition by the rest of historians of the research work being carried out by tourism historians in Spain. Digitalisation has played a fundamental role in this recognition, as we have seen in this study. However, there is still much to be done and the research agenda for the coming years can only be understood by applying quantitative, mathematical, and statistical methods. This is the challenge that the tourism historians in Spain and other countries around the world are currently faced with.

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## NOTES

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## ABSTRACTS

Quantitative methods are an increasingly used instrument among historians due to the enormous possibilities they offer. From the Geographical Information System to the digitization of archival documents, researchers have managed to access information that was unthinkable until a few years ago. Starting from this basis, this article aims to analyze the possibilities that these methods offer for the historian of tourism in Spain. Specifically, a critical analysis is made of these sources, their use, the possibilities that exist, and the shortcomings that the researcher must still face.

Les méthodes quantitatives sont un instrument de plus en plus utilisé par les historiens en raison des énormes possibilités qu'elles recèlent. Grâce aux systèmes d'information géographique ou à la numérisation de documents d'archives, les chercheurs sont parvenus à accéder à des informations impensables il y a encore quelques années. Cet article vise à analyser les possibilités offertes par ces méthodes à l'historien du tourisme en Espagne. Plus spécifiquement, il propose une analyse critique de ces sources, de leur utilisation, des possibilités qui existent et des lacunes auxquelles le chercheur doit encore faire face.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** humanités numériques, sources numérisées, histoire du tourisme, Espagne

**Keywords:** digital humanities, digitalised sources, tourism history, Spain

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