Chapter 3
Holy Grail Route:
A Sociological Analysis of a Spiritual and Religious Tourist Route

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ABSTRACT
This chapter describes and explains the Holy Grail Route, its process of design as a tourism product, and the tools and methodologies that proved very useful in coming up with new tourism services for the route. This was based on a European research COSME project within the H2020 program, which ran from 2014 to 2016, with the objective being to plan and promote a European thematic, tourist, and transnational route. The basic idea arising from the project is the international collective imagery surrounding the Holy Grail and its traditions, legends, and culture (novels, films, tales), and creating a European route in which different countries and partners are represented: Bulgaria, Greece, Malta, Spain, and Great Britain. The route explores different ideas and topics such as the Arthurian legends, Cathar stories, and Christian traditions. In the case of Spain, the Christian traditions are very deep and have a huge popular appeal. The authors have found modern novels, historical representations, and cultural movements created specifically around it, and a great many Christians wanting to work in the sphere of this important relic, the Holy Grail, which is kept in Valencia cathedral and, for centuries, was in the territory of Aragon. What are the main goals of this project? What kind of social and economic agents have been involved in it? Both the theoretical framework and methods used will be explained in this chapter.

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INTRODUCTION

Legend has it that the cup with which Jesus Christ supposedly celebrated the Last Supper was taken along the route of the Holy Grail as its guardians took sudden flight long ago. This route has been revived, which in Spain passes along roads connecting towns in Aragon and Valencia and many pilgrims have travelled it to find the Holy Chalice (Martínez, 2008). The historical paths travelled have synergies with other European pilgrimage routes, since in medieval times people traversed these as the only way to reach their destinations or, as is the case, to look for treasures as they longed for a better life.

The guardians of the Chalice hid it from those who tried to desecrate it, in places that today are considered emblematic on the route. It is a chimerical journey, an archaic model of the rich inheritance passed down through the centuries. It is a path documented by the stones of unique buildings, all of which takes us back to times past and shows us the annals of an exemplary and complex life, representative of love and the highest virtues fighting against hatred and base passions. The European collective imagination of the Holy Grail is concentrated in the Cup, a vessel that contains a thousand and one unsolved mysteries, representing a history of persecutions and conflicts constantly updated, as they are inherent in human nature (Sherif, 2010). The Holy Grail bonds the European identity around the core of a tradition which reads: “If, as we believe, this is the cup that Jesus used at the Last Supper and some say that Joseph of Arimathea also collected drops of blood of Our Lord in it, this is a unique relic. There are even those who promise it can give life and even immortality” (Adell, 2014). This vessel constitutes the great symbol of Christianity and furthermore, lays claim to a paradoxical enigma, life and death, which is a determining factor constantly reiterated in western culture; the Grail emerges as a cultural attribute allegorically transcending this dichotomy in an infinite universe of eternity.

In twelfth-century Europe, with events such as the Crusades with their huge influence, stories and legends of the Holy Grail appear throughout the West spread by The Grail Tales by the troubadour, Chrétien de Troyes. That is why, from the Early Middle Ages until today, there are many works built around the legend and history of the Holy Grail. At the same time as these stories and legends spread, many relics relating to Jesus Christ were sold in markets in Europe, the Holy Grail being one of them. This led to the appearance of several, supposedly genuine, grails all over Europe. However, in 1883, an art historian proved that the only true one was in Spain. (Martínez, 2008).

There is also another version of the history of the Holy Grail. According to many studies, it is believed that the family of St. Mark had owned the Holy Grail and Cenacle where the Last Supper took place. At that time, St. Peter was the head of the Church, and for some reason, St. Mark gave the Holy Grail to St. Peter and the first Christians, who would use the relic in the liturgy. In Spain, there is also a more detailed story about the Holy Grail. According to the dean of the cathedral of Jaca in his work published in the journal Aragon from 1927 to 1931, St. Peter picked up the Holy Grail, then took it to Rome and passed on to subsequent popes. In 258, the pope delivered the Holy Grail to St. Lawrence, a deacon born in Huesca, to free him from persecution against the Christians by the Emperor Valerian. St. Lawrence took it to his parents in Loreto, a place near the capital of Huesca, for protection. This was how the Holy Grail moved from Italy to Spain and its first resting place was the Monastery of Loreto (Sanctuary of Loreto) in the province of Huesca.
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