

## Culture, tourism and World Heritage Sites



Francisco González Santa-Cruz<sup>a,\*</sup>, Tomás López-Guzmán<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Agrifood Campus of International Excellence, ceia3, Faculty of Law and Business Administration, C/ Puerta Nueva, s/n, 14071 Córdoba, Spain

<sup>b</sup> Agrifood Campus of International Excellence, ceia3, Faculty of Labour Sciences, C/ Adarve, 30, 14071 Córdoba, Spain

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### ABSTRACT

The recognition of a place as a World Heritage Site (WHS) by UNESCO is fundamental to preserve its historical and artistic inheritance and, at the same time, to encourage visits to that area. The purpose of this article is to contribute to the study of the relationship between WHS designation and cultural tourism, with a markedly sustainable character, through the presentation of the results of research conducted in the city of Cordoba (Spain). The study analyzes the sociodemographic profile of the tourists, the variables that influence their levels of satisfaction and loyalty, and the classification of the travelers through different variables. The principal results of the research show the significant educational level of the surveyed tourists, as well as the high level of satisfaction with the visit, the high number of countries of origin and the outstanding motivation for knowing the city's heritage roots.

### 1. Introduction

Cultural committees of UNESCO in Paris publish annual lists of World Heritage Site (WHS) properties and Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) elements. Furthermore, each inscribed WHS property is identified as a cultural, natural or mixed element; each WHS property or ICH element can be identified as in danger. The inclusion of a certain place or intangible element in the list supposes the consideration of an exceptional universal value and, at the same time, that inscription allows understanding that all the persons of the world are owners of (and are responsible for) that place or intangible element. With this it seeks, moreover, its sustainability. In this way, and according to Saipradist and Staiff (2008), the World Heritage lists reinforce the identification, preservation and transmission towards future generations of extraordinary places and monuments from the perspective of history and of art.

Nonetheless, although the main purpose of these recognitions by UNESCO is to preserve and conserve these sites, it has signified in many cases a significant increase of tourists, especially from other countries, in these places, generating a strong relationship between these lists and tourism (Breakey, 2012). In this way, it is paradoxical that, while the basic objective of UNESCO in the designation of the WHS is to promote their protection and preservation, some destinations are prioritizing their tourist development (Su & Wall, 2011), especially in the new designations, little known by the tourists, where it begins by encouraging domestic tourism and, subsequently, a strong commitment to international tourism is made (Su & Wall, 2011) with the aim of

economically developing these geographical areas. That is to say, with the recognition by UNESCO as a WHS, the area is protected for future generations, but implicitly, at the same time, this mention implies an increase in tourism given the important attraction value (Breakey, 2012; Landorf, 2009), which in some cases can put into danger the very survival of the WHS. In fact, the inscription in the lists of World Heritage is the reason for which millions of tourists visit these places (Yan & Morrison, 2007).

In this regard, culture becomes one of the most significant motivators of tourists in choosing a certain destination (Correia, Kozak, & Ferradeira, 2013), which Di Giovine (2009) defines as heritage-scape. There is an increase in the interest of the impact of tourism on World Heritage Sites in recent years (Landorf, 2009). Thus, it is necessary to reinforce the scientific studies that analyze the characteristics of the heritage tourists (Nguyen & Cheung, 2014). This type of information is basically to know this type of tourist and his or her behavior with the aim of managing these destinations in a sustainable way (Nguyen & Cheung, 2014) since the tourism could affect, and on occasions does affect significantly, the local culture (Abuamoud, Libbin, Green, & Alrousan, 2014).

The objective of this paper is to advance in the knowledge of the tourist who visits a WHS. For this, we analyzed the results of a study that presents different aspects of this type of tourism visiting the city of Cordoba (Spain). Thus, we intend to know the sociodemographic profile, the level of satisfaction in relation to the different variables that are defined in the destination and that influence the loyalty and the classification thereof, using different variables such as age, accommodation

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [td1gosaf@uco.es](mailto:td1gosaf@uco.es) (F. González Santa-Cruz), [dt1logut@uco.es](mailto:dt1logut@uco.es) (T. López-Guzmán).

and number of nights he or she remains in the city. To fulfil this objective, this article is structured, after the [Introduction](#), in a [Section 2](#) where a review is made of the literature; a [Section 3](#) that presents a description of the city of Cordoba; a fourth where the [Methodology](#) used is shown; and a [Section 5](#) providing the results of the research and its discussion. This article ends with the [Conclusions](#) of the study and the bibliographical references used.

## 2. Review of the literature

The relationship between tourism and heritage is one of the most discussed subjects in recent years by the academic literature. Thus, most of recent articles accept the idea that heritage tourism is not just anyone who visits the heritage/cultural attractions, with it being necessary to identify different types of heritage tourists (Nguyen & Cheung, 2014). In this regard, Poria, Reichel, and Biran (2006) present a triple focus with respect to this type of tourist: first, all the tourists who visit places with heritage attributes are heritage tourists; second, heritage tourists are those who are aware of the heritage attributes of the site; third, heritage tourists are those tourists who are motivated by the heritage attributes of the site and think that the site forms part of their own heritage. In addition, for Yan and Morrison (2007), it is also essential to consider what importance the tourist gives to this site, that is, if he or she considers the importance of that heritage.

Furthermore, there are different studies in which the relationship between WHS properties and tourism is analyzed. Among others we can highlight those focused on certain sites of Portugal (Correia et al., 2013; Remoaldo, Vareiro, Ribeiro, & Santos, 2014), Canada (Donohoe, 2012), Israel (Poria, Butler, & Airey, 2003), China (Yang & Lin, 2014), Romania (Bucurescu, 2015), Spain (Antón, Camarero, & Laguna-García, 2014) and Vietnam (Nguyen & Cheung, 2014). On the other hand, different books analyze this relationship, and among them we can underscore those of Timothy and Boy (2003), Di Giovine (2009), Timothy (2011) and Park (2014). In any case, we must specify that heritage tourism refers to the activities of visiting or of experiencing heritage areas whether they are natural, cultural or urban (Nguyen & Cheung, 2014) and that involve the visitor seeking a connection with his or her roots and with his or her heritage (Remoaldo et al., 2014).

This signifies that, on occasion, the designation of a certain site as a WHS is perceived as “branding” (Timothy, 2011) or “labeling” (Yang, Lin, & Han, 2010) and that the recognition by UNESCO, in addition to reinforcing the protection of the heritage, has a strong attraction for the tourist, signifying a global recommendation so that a certain type of tourist visits who destination (Poria, Reichel, & Cohen, 2013), especially for those who travel seeking authentic experiences and genuine places (Timothy & Boyd, 2006). For this reason, heritage is seen as one of the most significant and fastest growing aspects of tourism (Poria et al., 2003). According to Vong and Ung (2012), there are four factors related to heritage tourism: history and culture, facilities and services at heritage sites, heritage interpretation and heritage attractions.

Currently two research lines exist in this field (Su & Wall, 2011): first, the classification and the definition of heritage and of heritage tourism; second, the relationship between conservation and preservation of the heritage and the tourism development that is carried out in these areas. On the other hand, and according to Timothy and Boy (2003), the analysis of heritage tourism can be done through two different channels: first, the simple presence of the visitors in sites where the heritage is found, that is, the visit to certain destinations where the tourists find that the heritage is not part of their own history or culture and they are positioned as a mere visitor (Saipradist & Staiff, 2008), which implies that it is necessary to consider the transcultural context of the heritage sites (Saipradist & Staiff, 2008); second, the perceptions that the visitors feel in these places, which means, according to the contributions of Poria et al. (2006), that a visitor in a certain heritage site not only seeks a recreational experience but rather, on occasion and

for certain tourists, he or she seeks part of his or her own roots in the visit to these historical sites. In short, and in both channels, it is necessary to reinforce the understanding of the WHS and clarify the cross-cultural attitudes towards the designation (Poria et al., 2013), especially when it deals with international tourists (Tucker & Carnegie, 2014).

Moreover, the tourists decide to travel because they have internal and external motivations (Correia et al., 2013) and in some specific types of tourism the culture becomes one of the principal attractions. In turn, one must analyze both the destination, since a great diversity of sites exist, and the different variables that affect each of them (Breakey, 2012). At the same time, there is strong competition between the destinations to attract tourists, especially international ones (Remoaldo et al., 2014). In fact, heritage is one of the attributes that differentiates some sites from others, due to the complex system in which the destination is included and to the sustainable development with many facets in which the cultural inheritance has to be preserved (Bell, 2010; Bucurescu, 2015). In this regard, it is necessary to reinforce in the tourism destination such aspects as the quality of the accommodations, cleanliness, citizen safety and gastronomy, adapting them to the needs of this type of tourist. According to Abuamoud et al. (2014) the demand of tourists in the heritage sites is also influenced by the services provided by the public authorities and by the availability and feasibility of the local community to stimulate tourism in these areas. In this regard, it becomes necessary to identify and understand the types of heritage tourists, their motivations, behavior, perceptions and experiences in order to carry out better management of the destinations and to define the corresponding adapted strategies, seeking as a priority the safeguarding of the heritage that makes them unique. In short, better knowledge of the tourist who visits these places implies an improvement in the management of the destination, seeking, above all, the sustainability of the historical heritage that attracts this type of tourist.

The variety of places and visitors creates significant differences for knowing the visitors' characteristics and, therefore, as indicated earlier, the better management of these places. And all this must also take into account that the behavior model of the tourists visiting these places is different in each case (Poria et al., 2006).

In the studies conducted to define the sociodemographic profile of the tourists, the different authors concur that they have high education, the majority with university studies (Saipradist & Staiff, 2008; Correia et al., 2013; Remoaldo et al., 2014). Likewise, this type of tourist expresses significant satisfaction with respect to the visited sites (Breakey, 2012). This satisfaction is related basically with three groups of variables existing at the destination: novelty, knowledge and facilities (Correia et al., 2013). These variables allow orienting and reinforcing the different tourism management policies.

## 3. Description of the geographic area

The city of Cordoba is situated in the south of Spain, specifically in the region of Andalusia, a geographic area where there is strong sun-and-beach tourism as well as an important focus on cultural tourism with World Heritage cities such as Granada and Seville, in addition to Cordoba. The population of the city is approximately 325,000 inhabitants and its economic structure is based fundamentally on the tertiary sector, with the tourist activity and the public administration being predominant. The city has two declarations of World Heritage Sites by UNESCO, the first in 1984 was the Mosque-Cathedral and, subsequently, in 1994 this classification was granted to its historic center. Furthermore, the Festival of the Courtyards, which is held in the month of May, was declared Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2012. In addition, Cordoba, as the rest of Andalusia, also has the so-called Mediterranean diet and Flamenco declared Intangible Cultural Heritage. All these recognitions imply that, at present, the city is one of the most representative of cultural tourism, both in Spain and in the rest of Europe, and constitutes a meeting point for thousands of travelers

**Table 1**

Evolution of the number of tourists and overnight stays in the city of Cordoba. Period 2010–2014.

Source: Own elaboration based on *NSI (2015)*.

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
National tourists	418,801	446,735	449,032	459,733	478,166
Foreign tourists	278,338	344,899	364,825	364,365	421,703
Total tourists	697,139	791,634	813,857	824,098	899,869
National overnight stays	692,483	737,991	746,064	756,340	777,470
Foreign overnight stays	410,610	511,882	539,985	534,663	615,374
Total overnight stays	1,103,093	1,249,873	1,286,049	1,291,003	1,392,844

who each year arrive in the city, attracted by its rich cultural heritage and historic importance. In *Table 1*, the evolution of the number of travelers and of overnight stays is shown for the 2010–2014 period, in accordance with the data of the Hotel Occupancy Survey conducted by the Spanish National Statistics Institute (NSI).

As can be observed in *Table 1*, the increase in the number of tourists in the analyzed time period was 29%, with the case of tourism from other countries being > 50%, data that endorse the importance of this cultural destination. A significant increase has also been produced in the number of overnight stays (26%), with the case of the international tourists being 50%.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1. Survey instrument

The survey used in this research is based on different previous papers (*Breakey, 2012; Poria et al., 2003; Vong & Ung, 2012*) and responds to two groups of variables analyzed with respect to the tourists who visit the city: first, the sociodemographic profile of the surveyed tourist and the principal characteristics of the trip organization; and second, the determination of those factors that define the satisfaction of the visit and its repetition. In the survey, questions were used with yes/no type responses as well as open responses. In addition, in others, the five-point Likert Scale (1 = not important; 5 = very important) was used.

As for the questions that appear in the survey referring to the sociodemographic profile of the visitor, gender, age, educational level, professional category, country of origin and income level were analyzed. In order to analyze the satisfaction of the tourist with this destination, a series of variables were considered, such as hospitality, visitors' information points, historic heritage, citizen safety, cleanliness of the city, and the restaurants. Furthermore, these variables are used to determine the loyalty to this tourism destination. Finally, and to characterize the visitor, variables were analyzed related to the type of accommodations in the city of Cordoba, the number of overnight stays of the tourist, the way in which the accommodation reservation had been made and the analysis of how the trip was made.

### 4.2. Data compilation

The researchers, using the questionnaire indicated above, compiled the information on the opinion of the tourists during the months of April to June 2014. The surveys were conducted at five survey points, located within the historic center, and with the premise that the surveyed tourist had already spent some time in the city and, therefore, could give an informed opinion (*Correia et al., 2013; Remoaldo et al., 2014*).

A total of 873 surveys were conducted, of which 816 surveys were useable. The participants filled out the survey with complete independence, although the surveyors were present in case they had any

type of difficulty in filling it out. It was distributed in four languages (Spanish, English, French and German), and was completely anonymous. Previously a pre-test of 30 surveys was conducted to detect possible deviation and errors. Convenience sampling was used, common in this type of research, where the surveyed persons are available to be surveyed in a determined space and time (*Finn, Elliott-White, & Walton, 2000*). Stratification by countries was carried out, according to the percentages of the tourists coming from each of them, according to the *NSI (2015)* data. In this regard, among the countries sending international tourists France (25.1%), United Kingdom (11.1%) and Germany (7.1%) stand out. Therefore, taking into account that the number of tourists staying in hotels of the city of Cordoba in 2013 (latest datum available at the time of conducting this research) (*NSI, 2015*) was 824,098, the sampling error of the research was  $\pm 3.42\%$ .

### 4.3. Data analysis

With respect to the data analysis, in the first place the socio-demographic profile of the tourist who visits the city of Cordoba is presented, in accordance with the variables explained above. Next, a factorial analysis was conducted, with varimax rotation, on the aspects related to the visit; analysis of internal consistency of the factors (Cronbach's alpha), and logistic regression analysis, for the purpose of discovering the probability of a tourist repeating the trip to the city of Cordoba, introducing in the models as independent variables the factors obtained in the factorial analysis to determine which of them makes the cited probability increase/decrease significantly.

Finally, a multiple correspondence analysis is presented that allows studying graphically the relationship existing between the variables to analyze using a multivariate approach. With this, it makes it possible to summarize the information by means of some factors that are obtained from the linear combination of original variables and that constitute the axes of coordinates of the graph in which the information is represented.

The statistical analysis was conducted with the SPSS 22.0 program for Windows. The differences considered statistically significant are those whose  $p < 0.05$ .

## 5. Results of the research and discussion

The first objective of this research was to know the socio-demographic profile of the tourist visiting the city of Cordoba. *Table 2* presents the cited profile in accordance with the following variables: gender, age, income, educational level, country of origin and professional category. It should be recalled that in relation to the country of origin of the surveyed person, the strata established by the *NSI (2015)* was followed in the field work.

According to *Table 2*, the profile of the tourist visiting the city of Cordoba is a person with university studies, with a quite similar age distribution, although the persons over 40 years of age prevail, with a medium-high income level and with a predominant professional category of employee. As for the nationality of the visitors, in this research profiles were gathered from surveyed persons from 39 different countries. This large number of countries allows concluding that, with an appropriate promotion and given the broad cultural and geographic spectrum of the foreign visitors, an increase in the number of tourists who visit the city of Cordoba could be managed, since its tourism is not limited to a specific and reduced number of countries.

A factorial analysis is presented below to determine what items are related to the satisfaction of the visit to the city of Cordoba. As observed in *Table 3*, three factors with eigenvalue over 1 were obtained, taking as criteria for assigning an item to the factor those in which factorial loading over 0.50 is presented, which explained 64.8% of the total variance. The first factor, responsible for 25.1% of the total explained variance, included the items that reflect the aspects related to the visit and that we call *tourist values*. In the second factor (21.8% of the

**Table 2**  
Sociodemographic profile of the tourists.  
Source: Own elaboration.

Variables			Percentage	Variables			Percentage
Gender (N = 816)	Man		46.7%	Educational level (N = 803)	Primary education	4.8%	
	Woman		53.3%		Secondary education	23.6%	
Age (N = 815)	Under 30 years of age		16.7%	Country of origin (N = 816)	University education	71.6%	
	30–39 years old		19.0%		Spain	52.5%	
	40–49 years old		17.2%		France	9.7%	
	50–59 years old		22.1%		Germany	6.1%	
	60 years old or more		25.0%		United Kingdom	5.5%	
Income (N = 703)	Under € 700		48.1%		USA	4.4%	
	From € 700 to € 1000		21.9%		The Netherlands	2.6%	
	From € 1001 to € 1500		21.1%		Japan	1.8%	
	From € 1501 to € 2500		5.5%		Belgium	1.4%	
	Over € 2500		3.4%		Portugal	1.1%	
					Occupational category (N = 796)	Other	14.9%
				Employee		32.6%	
				Retired		17.0%	
				Civil servant		16.9%	
				Self-employed		15.9%	
				Student		9.4%	
				Housewife		7.6%	
				Other		0.6%	

**Table 3**  
Factorial analysis of satisfaction items of visit to Cordoba (n = 816).  
Source: Own elaboration.

	Factor		
	Tourist values	Stay	Complementary services
Party of the courtyards	0.679		
Hospitality/treatment	0.639		
Preservation of the area	0.779		
Cultural activities and shows	0.697		
Mosque-Cathedral	0.872		
Historic district (Jewish Quarter)	0.833		
Signage		0.821	
Accommodation		0.780	
Citizen safety		0.682	
Cleanliness		0.762	
Ease of public parking		0.848	
Restaurants			0.679
Bars and taverns			0.614
Commercial areas			0.538
Taxis			0.548
Internet connection			0.567
Information and visitor assistance points			0.547
Eigenvalues	2.79	2.10	1.80
% explained variance	25.01	21.83	17.97
% accumulated explained variance	25.01	46.84	64.81
KMO		0.865	
Bartlett sphericity test		p < 0.001	

Note: Extraction method: analysis of principal components. Rotation method: varimax standardisation with Kaiser. The rotation has converged in 5 iterations.

variance) are grouped the items that estimate the dimension called *stay*. The third and last factor was called *complementary services* and explains the 17.9% of the variance. The three factors present Cronbach's alpha over 0.80 and, therefore, we can assume that the items that form them measure the same construct and are highly correlated.

Next, a logistic regression is presented to determine the probability that a tourist may repeat the trip to the city of Cordoba. Thus, the three groups obtained previously through the factorial analysis (tourist values, stay and complementary services) were introduced in the logistic

**Table 4**  
Logistic regression analysis (n = 779).  
Source: Own elaboration.

Variables	B	SE	Wald	Odds ratio	95% CI <sup>a</sup>	p
Tourist values	1.32	0.24	31.14	3.74	2.35–5.95	< 0.001
Stay	0.03	0.22	0.02	(1.03)	0.67–1.59	0.897
Complementary services	0.95	0.10	85.00	2.59	2.11–3.16	< 0.001
Constant	1.39	0.55	6.47		4.0	0.011
Model:						
$\chi^2_3 = 75.78; p < 0.001$						
Hosmer and Lemeshow:						
$\chi^2_8 = 9.59; p < 0.295$						
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> = 0.432						

<sup>a</sup> Confidence interval for odds ratio.

regression model as independent variables, to determine which of them makes the probability significantly increase or decrease of a tourist repeating the trip to the city. In Table 4 the results of the logistic regression analysis are shown.

We observe that the tourist values (OR = 3.74) and the complementary services (OR = 2.59) increase the probability that a tourist will again visit the city. We consider that this result may be due to the actual importance that is given to the cultural heritage of the city and to the complementary services that complete its offer, as a fundamental part that defines the tourist experience and, therefore, as key elements for loyalty and the dedication to the destination in the aspect of a return visit. Furthermore, the stay factor did not present a significant effect (p = 0.897). This is curious since the aspects related to these items, especially citizen safety, are usually valued highly when deciding whether or not to again visit a certain tourism destination, but it could be due to the prior conceptualization of Spain as a country with a high level of quality and safety in the stay. Finally, it should be indicated that the model classified correctly 89.7% of the tourists who affirmed they would again visit the city, and in total it classified 93.1% correctly.

To end this section, below is presented a multiple correspondence analysis, for the purpose of studying the relationships between the variables of age, accommodation, overnight stays, reservations and travel method, with the objective of characterizing the type of traveler. The information related to the studied tourists is grouped around two axes: a first axis is defined by age, distinguishing the tourists with an age equal to or under 40 years and those over 40 years of age, and a

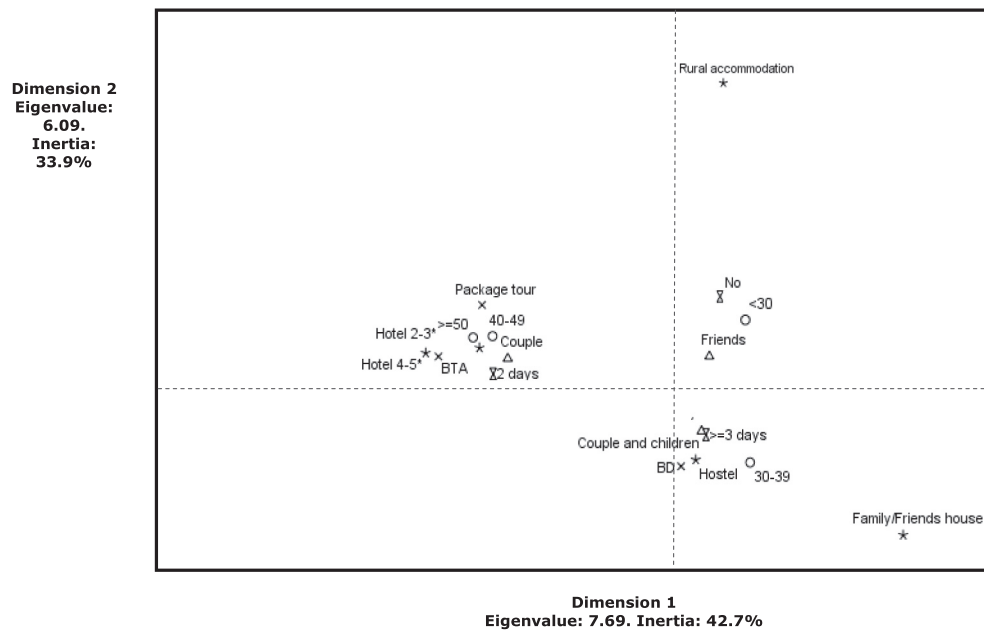


Fig. 1. Relationship between the variables of the study (multiple correspondence analysis).

second axis that is determined by the type of accommodation. These axes explain 76.6% of the variability associated with the qualitative variables studied.

Therefore, in the first quadrant are grouped the tourists under 30 years of age who travel with friends and who do not stay overnight in the city. The second group of travelers (quadrant II) are characterized by having an age starting at 40 years who travel as a couple, stay in hotels, manage their trip through tourist intermediaries and spend two nights in the city. The last group of travelers (quadrant IV) is formed by tourists with an age between 30 and 39, who travel as a couple with children, choose hostels or apartments for their accommodation which is managed personally and who spend at least three nights in the city. These results are presented in Fig. 1.

## 6. Conclusions

Granting a certain city or area the classification of World Heritage Site by UNESCO means, in addition to a cultural recognition and the obligation of its preservation by the different public administrations and private companies, an important attraction for promoting a destination in relation to a certain type of tourist and, therefore, it also implies the need to correctly manage this area, prioritizing in this development, above all, its safeguard and maintenance for future generations. In this paper, research is presented that undertakes the study of the tourism demand in the city of Cordoba, a World Heritage city.

Therefore, the results are presented of a study that encompasses the sociodemographic profile of the tourist who visits the city, the variables that influence his or her satisfaction and the classification of said tourist. Among the principal conclusions it is interesting to highlight the predominant sociodemographic profile of the tourist, specifically a person with university-level education, with a medium-high income and who works for others, who has known the city of Cordoba through recommendations of friends and family, and who has a high degree of loyalty to the destination. On the other hand, three grouped factors have been detected (tourist values, stay and complementary services) that explain the satisfaction with respect to the visit to Cordoba, with the first and the third standing out among them. Furthermore, the multiple correspondence analysis clearly groups the travelers by age, where the younger ones (< 30 years of age) travel more informally and without overnight stays in the city, going on to the range of 30 to 40 years who travel with the family and prefer the hostels and

apartments that they themselves organized and, finally, those over 40 years who, in addition to using tourism intermediaries, stay in hotels of the city.

We consider that the main practical application of this research is to contribute to understanding the sociodemographic characteristics of the tourists who visit the city and the variables that most influence their satisfaction, as well as their classification, with the aim of conceiving tourism and cultural products that satisfy better the needs of the tourists and that, at the same time, is compatible with the sustainable management of this tangible heritage.

As with all research, this study also has a high number of limitations. Among them we highlight, basically, the date of conducting the surveys to the tourists, which was during the months of April to June 2014, that is, during the months when the city attracts the greatest number of visitors; therefore, the rest of the months of the year should be considered during which the inflow of tourists is not as high.

As future lines of research, we pose going into depth in the study of heritage tourism, carrying out similar studies in other cities declared by UNESCO as World Heritage Sites, in order to be able to identify common links and differentiating features among the visitors.

## Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2017.08.004>.

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**Francisco González Santa-Cruz** holds a PhD in Business Administration and is a Lecturer in Business Organization at the University of Cordoba, Spain. His main area of research is the relation between human resources and tourism. He has written more than 20 articles that have been published in different academic journals related to Tourism such as *European Journal of Tourism Research*, *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism*, *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration*, *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, *Journal of Culinary Science & Technology*, *Tourismos*, *Journal of Gastronomy and Tourism*, *Journal of Heritage Tourism*.



**Tomás López-Guzmán** is a Lecturer of the Department of Applied Economics at the University of Cordoba (Spain). Formerly, he used to work as a Lecturer at the University of Granada (Spain). He has got a Degree in Law and a Degree in Economics and Business Administration. He has also a Doctoral Degree in Economics (Ph. D). He has written more than 60 articles that have been published in different academic journals related to Tourism such as *British Food Journal*, *Tourism Economics*, *Anatolia*, *Tourism Management Perspectives*, *Current Issues in Tourism*, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, *Tourismos*, *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *Acta Turística* or *Tourism Management Studies*.