

Analysis of Tourist Visits to the Historic Centre of Santa Pau as Part of Visits to The Garrotxa Volcanic Zone (Girona, Spain)

Gabriel Alcalde

Catalan Institute for Cultural Heritage Research & University of Girona
Parc Científic i Tecnològic de la Universitat de Girona
Emili Grahit 91
17003 Girona
Spain

Abstract

The town of Santa Pau is located in the heart of the Garrotxa Volcanic Zone (NE Iberian Peninsula) and includes some of the main attractions of the area, as the volcano Santa Margarita or Fageda d'en Jordà. It is also a population with an interesting medieval old town, which highlight the box and the arcaded square. A survey of visitors to this population has yielded a clear picture of the characteristics and forms of access to the Garrotxa Volcanic Zone. We analyzed the characteristics of people taking the tour, as well as the journeys that others remain in the volcanic flows and flows that are experienced in different seasons. We also examined the various activities during the stay in the volcanic zone.

Keywords: visitor's study, cultural heritage, Garrotxa Volcanic Zone, Santa Pau.

1. Introduction

Active or dormant volcanoes are part of natural heritage and of considerable interest for scientific studies and visits by the general population. Volcanoes and volcanic landscapes have become a tourist resource that is used by a growing number of diverse visitors for varied reasons (Dóniz *et al.*, 2010; Erfurt-Cooper, 2010). In this paper, we present a study of visits to Santa Pau, a town situated in the midst of the Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park in the NE of the Iberian Peninsula. The municipality includes some of the main tourist attractions in this volcanic region, such as the Santa Margarida volcano, the Croscat volcano and the Jordà beech forest. In addition, Santa Pau has an interesting medieval town centre, in which there is a notable castle and a square with arcades. The Garrotxa Volcanic Zone covers 15,000 ha and includes around forty volcanic cones from the Quaternary period that are currently dormant. In 1985, the Catalan government declared this area a natural park, due to the interest in it. The volcanic zone has a high number of visitors: in 2009 a total of 228,663 people were assisted at the Park's information points (Parc Natural..., 2010).

We carried out a visitor study to find out the characteristics and types of visits to the historic centre of Santa Pau. The main results are given here. We focused particularly on the characteristics of excursions that included a visit to this town of 1,601 inhabitants (2011). It is difficult to quantify the number of visitors to historic centres (García, 2003; Alcalde, 2008). However, this figure can be approximated by the number of requests for information dealt with by tourist offices and the distribution of these requests over the months of the year (Troitiño, Calle & García, 2002). In 2009, the Santa Pau tourist office responded to 94,180 requests. There were more in April (10.9% of the total), July (9.2%), August (19.1%), September (10.5%) and October (12.3%) (Source: Santa Pau Tourist Office).

2. Method

The method was based on gathering data through surveys of people who visited the town either individually or in organized groups. Surveys were carried out from January to December 2009 on three days a month (a working day, a Saturday and a Sunday, selected by simple randomization). Between 9 am and 8 pm on these days, we surveyed the people who passed through the main entrance to the town on the hour and every five minutes exactly.

In addition, between the same times on the same days we surveyed all groups of visitors who entered the town. Using this sampling method, we collected data on a significant sample of all of the visitors to Santa Pau during 2009. In total, we surveyed 1,063 individuals and 81 groups.

Figure 1. Location of Santa Pau in the NE of the Iberian Peninsula.

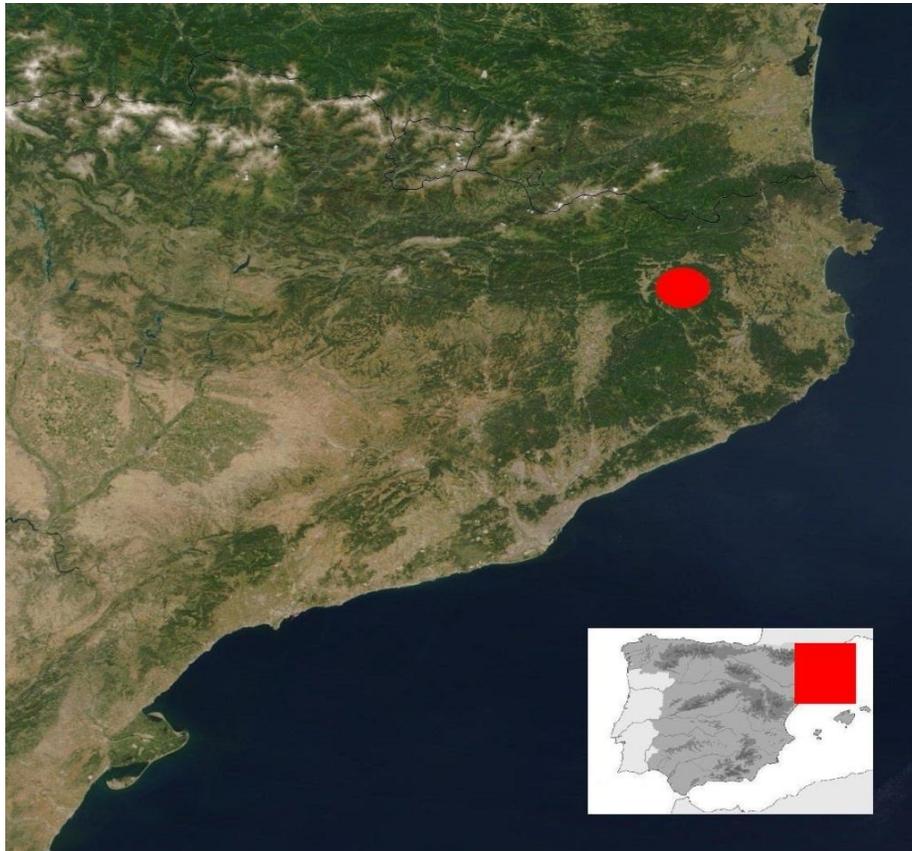


Figure 2. The historic centre of Santa Pau.



On the days of the survey, we counted the total number of visitors who entered the town through the main entrance, and the number at different periods of the day.

3. Individual visits

The surveys of individual visitors provided information on socio demographic characteristics, details of the visits, and their context. Most of the visitors (36%) were aged between 30 and 39 years old. The 40-49 years age range was well represented (27%), whilst there were fewer visitors between 20 to 29 years (12%), 50 to 59 (17%) and 60 to 69 (6%). The proportions of men and women were similar, as 58% of respondents were women. A significantly high proportion of respondents (71%) had a university education. Similar results have been found in studies of visitors to heritage sites (Alcalde, 2012).

Figure 3. Visitors of Santa Pau (photograph by J.S. Carreras).



Most of the respondents (92%) were Spanish residents. Seven per cent of the visitors from outside Spain were from European countries and 1% was from other countries. Most of the Spanish visitors lived in Catalonia (88%). A much lower percentage was from Valencia (3%), which was the autonomous community from which most visitors came, after Catalonia. Most of the residents of Catalonia (77%) were from Barcelona province. Some lived in Girona (15%), a few in Tarragona (7%) and very few in Lleida (1%). In general, the figures obtained for the entire Garrotxa Volcanic Zone are similar, although there are slightly fewer visitors from the Spanish state and Catalonia (86% of the people who went to information points in the Park were from the Spanish state and 89% of these lived in Catalonia) and there was a slightly higher proportion of foreign visitors (10%) (Parc Natural..., 2011).

One of the aspects that characterize Santa Pau visits is the type of companion or companions. The surveys showed that most people visited the town with their partners (42%). In addition, a high proportion of people visited with relatives (39%, excluding visits with partners). The surveys revealed respondents' general profiles and whether they had sought information prior to visiting Santa Pau. Fifty-five per cent stated that they had not carried out any information searches, whilst the remaining 45% had used various media to find information. A high proportion of this second group (27%) had been to tourist information points and offices, whilst another large proportion (19%) had mainly taken information from guidebooks. The loyalty of visitors to Santa Pau was not an important factor, as it was the first time that most respondents (78%) had been to the town. People who had visited the town before had done so recently (21% in the last year and 38% between 1 and 3 years ago). The number of visits to Santa Pau varied according to the time of year. October to December was the three-month period with the greatest number of visitors to the town, whilst January-March was the period with the least visitors. April-June and July-September received intermediate numbers of visitors. The pattern of individual visits during the day was similar in all periods of the year.

In all four of the three-month periods, there was a steady flow of visitors at the start of the morning (13% between 9 and 11 am), with a greater number arriving (30%) at the end of the morning (between 11 am and 1 pm). A low percentage of visitors arrived in the following hours, which coincide with lunchtime in Spain (4% between 1 pm and 3 pm). The flow of visitors was steady in the afternoon (15% between 3 pm and 5 pm and 17% between 5 pm and 7 pm), and finally fell considerably from 7 pm onwards.

Figure 4. Monthly changes in proportions of visitors to Santa Pau, based on the visitor study carried out in 2009.

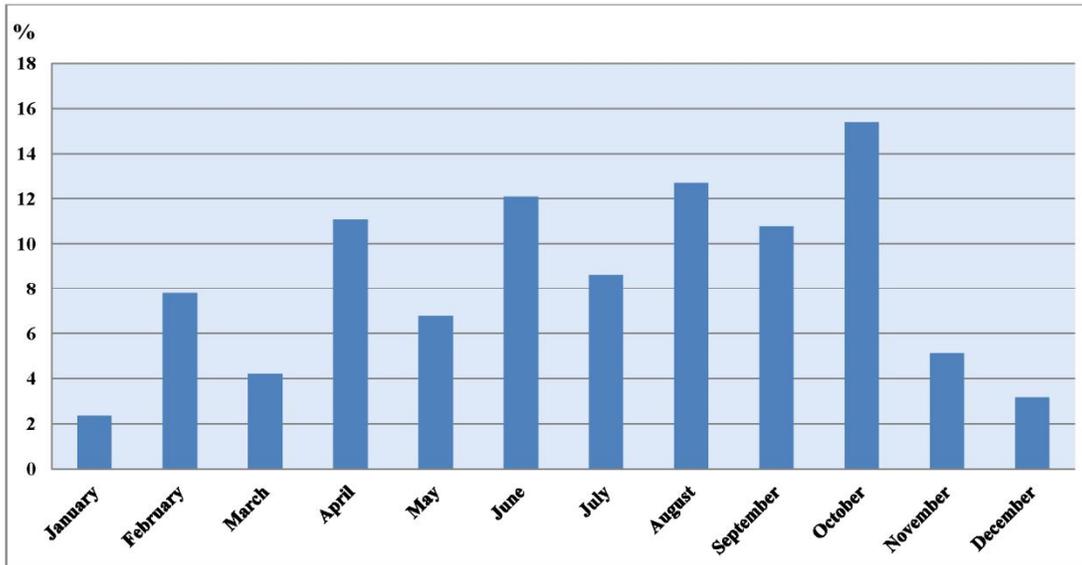
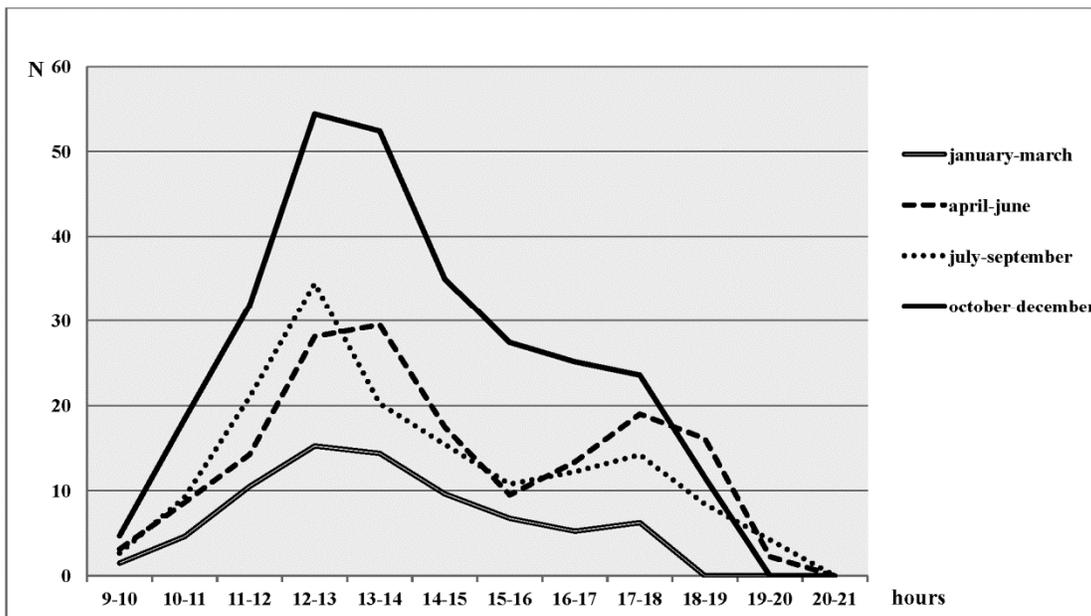


Figure 5. Distribution of the arrival of individual visitors to Santa Pau, according to the time of day and three-month period.



To analyse the characteristics of Santa Pau visits, we also found out how long visitors spent in the historic centre. Most people did not remain for long (53% less than an hour) and only a small percentage of visitors spent more time in the town. Visits that took place between 2 pm and 4 pm tended to be longer, probably because some of them would have included lunch at an establishment in the old centre.

The historical centre is quite small and does not have services directly related to tourism, so visits generally involve a walk through the streets followed by a drink or something to eat in one of its establishments.

Figure 6. Length of the visit to the historic centre of Santa Pau (individual visits).

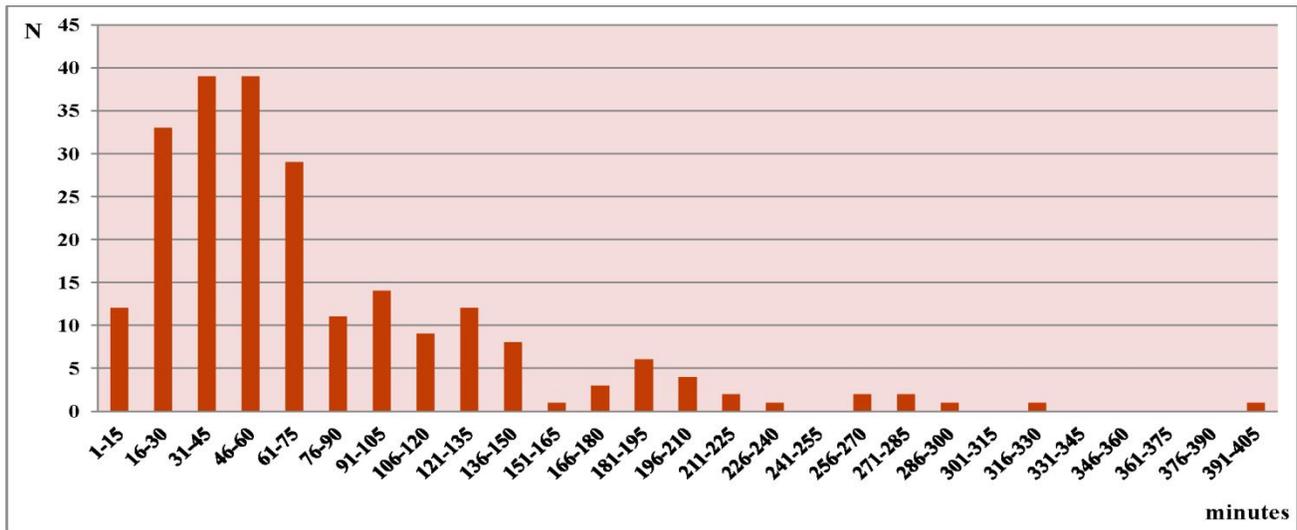
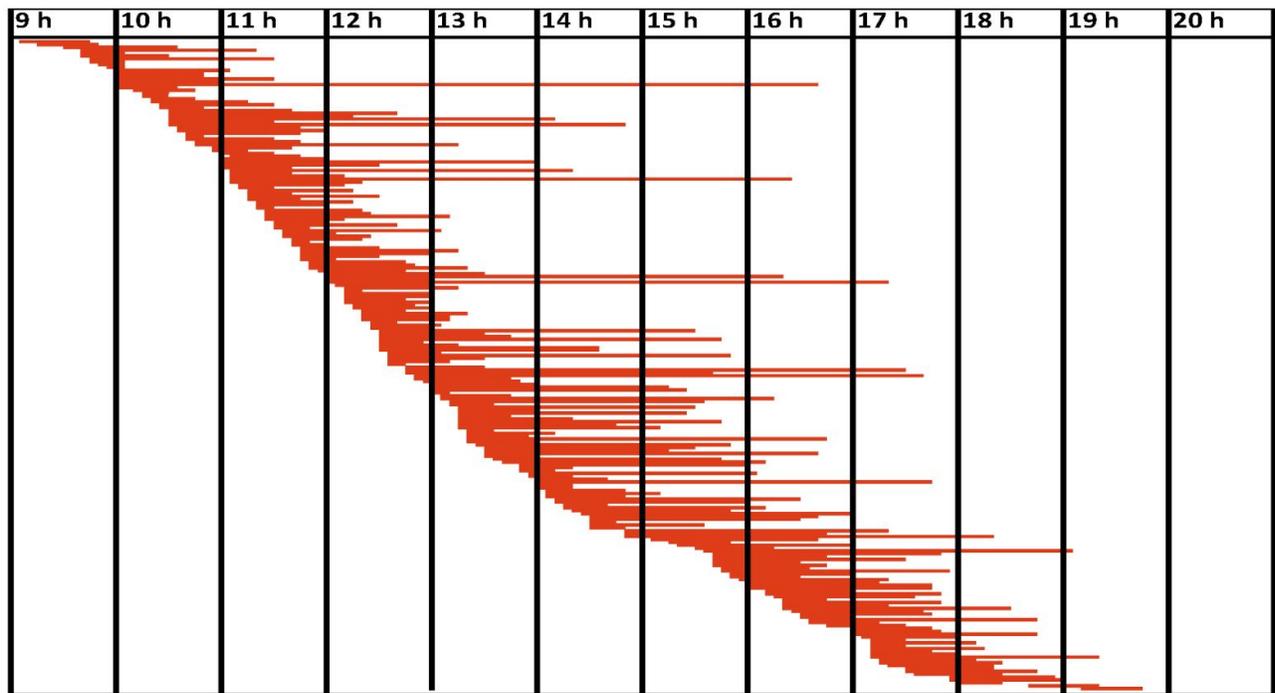


Figure 7. Times (entrance, length of the stay and exit) of individual visits to Santa Pau.



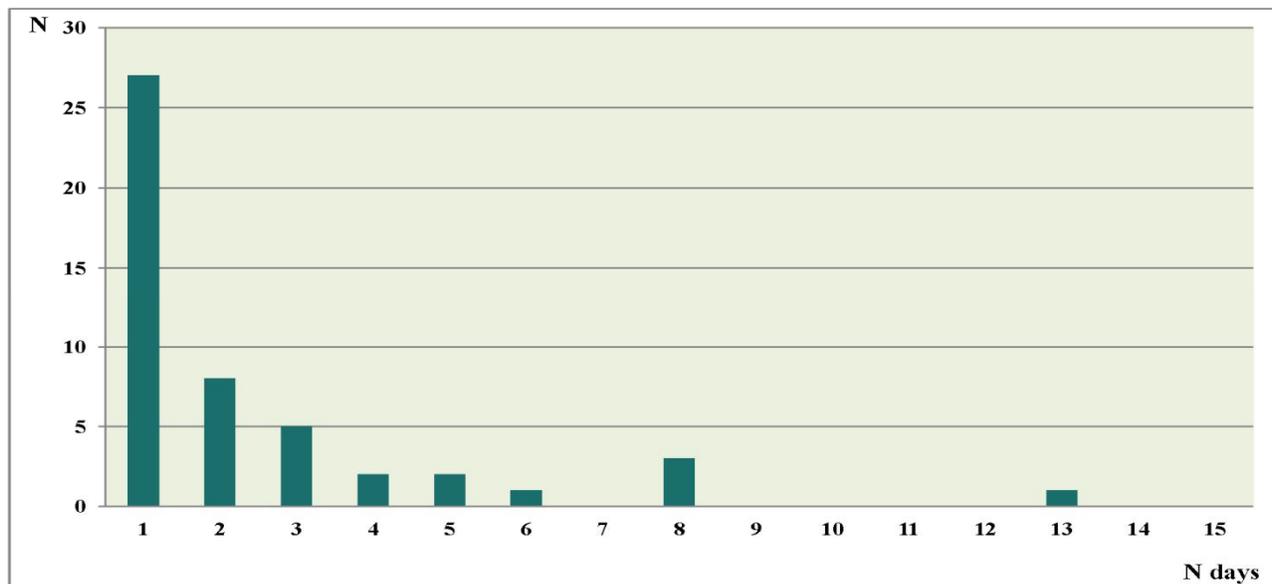
Most of the respondents who visited the historic centre of Santa Pau (52%) were on a one day trip and therefore did not spend the night away from their usual residence. However, a certain number of visitors were on one or two night trips (14% and 17%, respectively). A smaller proportion was spending more than two nights away from their homes; some (12%) were on a 3 to 7 night trip, and very few (1%) on an 8 to 14 night trip. Trips of more than 14 nights were very unusual (0.2%) among visitors of the historic centre of Santa Pau. Many of the people (88%) who were away from their homes for one night or more when they visited Santa Pau spent at least one of these nights in the Garrotxa area. A high number of these visitors used campsites (24%), hotels (21%) and country lodges (16%).

4. Group visits

Respondents included groups of elderly people (21%) and schools (17%). However, most common were groups of mixed composition (62%). The number of people in the organized groups was directly related to the use of a collective means of transport (coaches). Most groups were comprised of between 21 and 50 people (59%), followed by those with a maximum of 20 people (23%), from 51 to 80 people (14%) or over 80 people (4%).

The origin of the group organizers was notable. In the set of groups that were surveyed, 67% of the organizers were from Catalonia (from a wide range of towns and cities, including Barcelona and its surroundings) and 20% from other Spanish regions. The rest of the group organizers were from European countries, in particular Holland (8%), followed by England (3%) and France (2%).

Figure 8. Duration of the organized group trips that includes a visit to Santa Pau.



Most of the groups who visited Santa Pau (55%) were on one day trips, as in the individual visits. However, a considerable proportion of the groups (27%) visited Santa Pau as part of a one or two night trip. Two to seven night trips were less common (16%), and there were very few groups who visited Santa Pau as part of a trip for longer than seven days (2%). These longer trips tended to be made by school groups staying in the area.

An analysis of the times at which groups visited the town shows that a certain number arrived at the start of the morning (17% between 9 and 11 am) in all periods of the year. The number of group arrivals increased around midday (43% arrived between 11 am and 1 pm), which is related directly to the origin of the groups and the travel time needed to reach Santa Pau. During the following hours, there was a notable drop in the number of group arrivals (12% between 1 pm and 3 pm) and the rate remained stable throughout the afternoon (12% between 3 and 5 pm; 8% between 5 and 7 pm; 8% between 7 and 9 pm). This pattern in the arrival times of groups is similar to that observed for individual visitors. Groups of visitors did not spend a long time in Santa Pau; most of them (63%) remained in the town for periods between 15 to 60 minutes.

5. Santa Pau visits in the context of tourist trips

The Croscat volcano, the Santa Margarida volcano and the Jordà beech forest are the most frequently visited sites in the Garrotxa Volcanic Zone. Visits to the medieval centre of Santa Pau also form an important part of trips to the area. The main reason that individual respondents gave for visiting the historic centre of Santa Pau was, almost exclusively, a visit to the Garrotxa Volcanic Zone. A very high proportion of visitors (47%) spent all day in the municipality of Santa Pau and went to the beech forest and some of the volcanoes, including Croscat and Santa Margarida in almost all cases. Another high proportion of individual visitors (23%) spent the entire day visiting the volcanic zone. Some of these people also visited Castellfollit and many went to Olot (towns that are also situated within the Garrotxa Volcanic Zone).

Therefore, three quarters of the respondents spent their entire day trip visiting the volcanic zone. Consequently, we can state that for a large proportion of people who visit Santa Pau, the Garrotxa volcanic area is the main and only reason for their trip. Some people (19%) combined a visit to Santa Pau and the Garrotxa Volcanic Zone with a visit to other places in the Garrotxa area. Of these, almost a third went to the town of Besalú (situated 30 km from Santa Pau). Others (just over a third) visited relatively close towns of heritage interest (for example, Banyoles and Ripoll, at 24 and 43 km from Santa Pau, respectively) as well as the volcanic zone and other places in the area. We also obtained data on the activities carried out by groups on the day they visited Santa Pau. Most of them spent the entire day visiting the municipality of Santa Pau (64%). Some (4%) combined a visit to Santa Pau with a visit to the neighbouring town of Olot (situated 9 km from Santa Pau). Others (11%) went to Santa Pau and other places in the Garrotxa area (such as Les Preses and Vall d'en Bas). Finally, some groups' programmes for the day (19%) included a visit to Santa Pau, another town in Girona province (such as Banyoles, Ripoll and Tossa de Mar) and Olot, in some cases.

6. Conclusions

Many studies of visits to heritage sites have focused exclusively on the visitors themselves and on the characteristics of the visit to the particular heritage item. However, a high proportion of such visits are part of tourist trips, in which the heritage site analysed in the visitor study is not the only or, on many occasions, the main activity in the programme. Therefore, although visitor studies can help us to find out about the use of heritage sites, to gain a full picture of this use, we must put visits into the context of the entire trip of which they form a part. Consequently, in this study we analysed visits to the historic centre of Santa Pau, in the context of visits to the Garrotxa Volcanic Zone, which was generally the main attraction and reason for the excursion. The results obtained show the importance of contextualization in visitor studies.

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