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Social networks as a way of image communication by Girona's exchange students

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX OF GRAPHS

INDEX OF FIGURES

INDEX OF TABLES

INTRODUCTION

Who remembers developing pictures after coming back from an amazing trip? Sharing them with the family and friends and showing them how good that place was and how fun did we have. The word-of-mouth has always had an important role in the communication or promotion of a tourist destination (Stepchenkova and Zhan, 2013), and sometimes it is thought to be one of the most valuable ones. Who would rely more on a DMO brochure when her or his sister is telling the opposite about a beach from the Costa Brava, for example?

And what could happen if instead of developing these pictures, they were posted in Facebook or Instagram, where not just the closest relatives could see them, but a whole online community? This is nowadays a reality (Stepchenkova and Zhan, 2013). The word-of-mouth is evolving together with the society and with the developments of websites 2.0, particularly, social networks. Therefore, the promotion of destinations' image is changing as well and is being done by the internet users themselves (Connell, 2005).

And what about if this amazing trip we were talking about was a six months trip? Then, would the information shared have different connotations? Finally, it would even imply more differences if these six months' travellers were university students. Everyday more and more students are deciding to take part of their studies abroad, each of them motivated by different reasons, like learning languages, having a better international insight of the society, a better curriculum or meeting new people (Byram and Dervin, 2008). But one of the most common ones includes the word "experience"; educational experience, experience new cultures and societies, experience a new way of life, experience unknown study environments, among many others (Pawlowska, 2011). And what is more valued when travelling than living a complete experience?

According to the UNWTO (2000), being a tourist involves travelling no more than one consecutive year. Therefore, exchange students are tourists, but they have the opportunity to gain insights from a destination that other tourists do not have. Which can be those insights? Even though they have their own cultural identity and see the world though their own culturally tinted lenses, it might be significant to investigate how their experience in Girona is.

Therefore, and to do so considering the nowadays situation in tourist image communication, regarding the ways that it is done thanks to the 2.0 technologies and from a point of view of a very powerful type of tourists, exchange students, this study aims to discover:

Which image do the exchange students that go to Girona transmit through the pictures they post in social networks for the destination?

It is essential to deal with the aforementioned problem statement to determine which the transmitted image of the destination is from a very concrete, but also relevant point of view.

METHODOLOGY

In order to give the most accurate answer to the problem statement, and after having analysed which aspects are directly related with its topic, the following research questions have been designed:

1. Which elements prevail in the pictures exchange students – who go to Girona - post in the social networks?

2. What touristic and travel experiences have the students lived thanks to their exchange students condition in the University of Girona?

3. How colours of the pictures published by the exchange students in social networks affect to the transmitted image of the destination?

4. Which is the evolution in the content of the pictures published by the students in Facebook and Instagram during their whole stay?

So as to answer these questions, an extensive research will be conducted, involving primary and secondary research. First of all, a literature review will be developed to know in depth about those terms that implicitly need to be analysed for a later stage of the study.

Therefore, the study will be conducted through qualitative techniques. The sample used will be a number of 604 pictures posted on the social networks Instagram and Facebook from 15 different exchange students that have enrolled to courses in the Faculty of Tourism of the University of Girona during the period from September to February on the courses 2015/2016, 2016/2017 and 2017/2018, in order to have a better insight of the images published.

In order to get the pictures, even though some of them are public, an email to the students was sent, asking for permission to follow them in the aforementioned social networks and use their pictures for this study with a non-profit purpose, just academically and anonymously, so as to respect the so called ethical research, with integrity and quality, according to Wiles et al., (2008). The copyright of the pictures has been considered as well, as user-generated pictures belong to the person who took them, so they are the copyright owners (Rose, 2007).

The number of pictures has been considered accurate, as other investigators used a similar number of pictures to analyse user-generated content, like Stepchenkova and Zhan (2013) in their research "Visual destination images of Peru: Comparative content analysis of DMO and user-generated photography", where they used a sample of 500 pictures from Flickr; Garrod (2008), in his research "Understanding the relationship between tourism destination images and tourist photography", where he studied a total number of 164 pictures and Stylianou-Lambert (2012), in her research "Tourists with Cameras:. Reproducing or Producing?" where she analysed a number of 400 pictures.

Finally, the chosen social networks from where the photos have been taken are Instagram and Facebook, as are those ones where users publish more pictures and that are more commonly used amongst university students.

Photographs have been chosen as a source of information as thanks to them more information can be deducted, compared to speech and written sources (Rose, 2007). This is why many researchers in social sciences have trusted in this source, like John Collier (in Rose, 2007), who stated that "*photographs are precise records of material reality*". For these reasons, different researches and this study will as well, analyse pictures. Therefore, the travel experience of the people publishing them will be better understood and the representation made will be more trustful. This study is based on a visual supporting research methodology, as photographs will be used as a documentary data, the so-called *photo-documentation*, because photographs can only be significant and content-carrying thanks to the researcher's interpretative work (Rose, 2007).

Both components of the pictures will be analysed, the content and the composition. The content, all the features or signs that appear in a picture (Albers and James, 1988) can be divided into manifest and latent content. The first one will be analysed in order to give answer to the 1st research question, whilst the analysis of the latent content (Kim and Stepchenkova, 2015) and composition, how these features and signs are connected to each other and as a whole represent the image that viewers see, will give answer to the 2nd, 3rd and 4th questions. The same will stand for the type of perspective given to the meaning of the photos. For the first research question, the metonymic perspective, when all photograph' signs have an own meaning and are understood at face value, will be considered, while for the next three ones, the perspective will be metaphoric, understanding this word as what the image means beyond just appearances (Albers and James, 1988).

The pictures will be analysed through the content analysis method, as because thanks to it researchers are capable to manage qualitative information sources, like pictures, in three different ways, provable, replicable and precise (Skalski, Neuendorf, and Cajigas, 2017). And more specifically, authors that have obtained reliable results thanks to this analysis method are Pritchard and Morgan (2003), Galí and Donaire (2005), Choi, Letho, and Morrison (2007) and Galí and Donaire (2015).

To do so, the software Nvivo 11 will be used to codify those pictures, in order to find association rules, connections, linkages and relations amongst different variables, so to later extract results.

Finally, it needs to be mentioned that a specific section on the literature review has been dedicated to the feelings colours transmit so as to be able to have enough knowledge to interpret the published pictures.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter of the project will have a deeper look on those aspects that are relevant for the future analysis that will be carried for this study. Therefore, the topics that will be theoretically contextualised are, in Chapter 1, the ones related to the destination image, including the projected and perceived image and the emotions in the destination's communication.

In Chapter 2, those topics related to a digital and online environment, so the digital photography society related to tourism. Within it, the topics of the digital technologies and photography and the web 2.0 will be explained, making a special mention to the online shared content and the social media.

Finally, the 3rd chapter will be about those who post the pictures, students. A theoretical review will be done to the student mobility history, benefits, motivations, characteristics, types and impacts.

Chapter 1. Destination image

'The camera and tourism are two of the uniquely modern ways of defining reality.' (Horne, 1984:21, in Urry and Larsen, 2011).

And defining reality can also be understood as projecting an image. According to Lawson and Baud-Bovy (1977), in Baloglu and McCleary (1999), photographs can be considered as condensed destination images. Images are signs of emotional thoughts, empirical wisdom, prejudices and representations judged by a person or a group of people towards a determined place or object.

1.1 Projected image

Nowadays, this group of images is being delivered by at least 3 different image suppliers, which are Destination Management Organisations (DMOs), private companies and consumers or tourists. Both of the agents are nowadays building the image of a destination by projecting it through specific content, even if they have different purposes (Stepchenkova and Zhan, 2013).

DMOs are, amongst others, a powerful stakeholder that should be correctly positioning the destination through the image they communicate, but they should do so contemplating the positioning as a focus to what the tourists or customers say about the destination, and not on what a DMO states about itself (McKenna, 1991, in Kim and Stepchenkova, 2015). For this reason, it is also important to observe thoughtfully the behaviour of tourists as image projectors.

The image projected by tourists is the so called *User* or *Consumer Generated Content* (UGC) (Lo, McKercher, Lo, Cheung, and Law, 2011) and it is said to have word-of-mouth

promotion attributes (Crotts, Mason, and Davis, 2009). From their point of view, digital pictures and paper photographs represent a manner to transmit personal travel experiences and how they perceived an image of a destination (Schmallegger, Carson, and Jacobson, 2010, in Lo et al., 2011). Therefore, according to John Urry's theory of the hermeneutic circle, before tourists' travel, they first perceive and create their own image through photographs they receive from different channels, one of them can be other tourists. When they travel to the destination, they look for those images and capture them, as other tourists and other destination image transmitters did. Finally, those pictures are transmitted to others, when travellers aim to demonstrate they undoubtedly travelled and lived determined experiences in specific places, so they become the image communicators (Urry, 1990).

Another author who believed in this theory was Jenkins (2003). According to her, the projected image of a destination is created thanks to the press and marketers within a society with a determined purpose, inspiring people to travel to a destination. Nevertheless, those images are also perceived in an individual level by each tourist. Once they are at the destination, they will look for those projected images and will most probably visit and take pictures of the represented icons. At that point, those icons now represented on tourists' cameras will be shown to the relatives and friends of the tourists once they come back from their trips, so they can prove they were really at those places. Consequently, this fact will be considered as a way of projecting a touristic image, so the cycle of representation will start again because the images shown might influence other potential travellers. The graphic representation of it is as follows:

Figure 1. Circle of representation
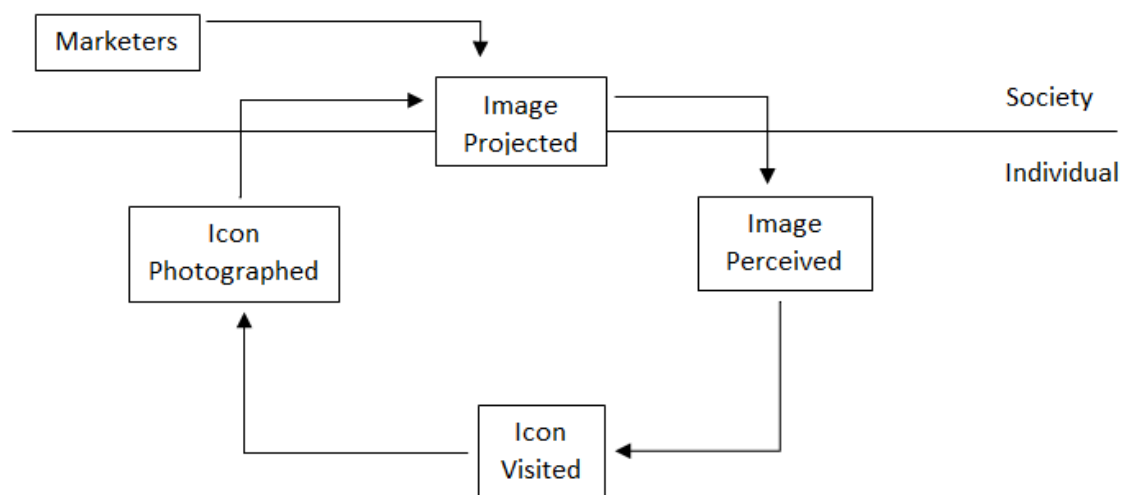
SOURCE: Jenkins (2003)

1.2 Perceived image

When tourists observe an image, they perceive reality representations and create images in their minds about the destination. Here, it will be analysed how does this happen, which components does this tourist perceived image has and finally, the types of image perceptions that can exist from a tourism point of view will be explained.

Reality representations

As stated before, John Urry's theory contemplated three moments in which tourists or potential tourists are perceiving the destination image of an area. First of all, the precognitive image tourists have before traveling to a place, which can be formed by the communicated content by television programmes, travel agencies, (Urry, 1990), mass media, DMOs or other tourists (Stepchenkova and Zhan, 2013). Secondly, the perceived image they receive once they are at the destination and that might be compared to the previous image they had in mind, and finally, the image tourists have about the destination once they already left. The last stage of the image perception tourists can have is important in the way that this will be the one that tourists will transmit through the word-of-mouth communication to other potential tourists (Chon, 1985).

In any case, in the aforementioned three situations in which tourists or potential tourists are creating images through what they perceived, those perceived images can be considered as a dynamic idea (Andreu, Bigné, and Cooper, 2000), or as groups of thoughts, values and beliefs formed in tourists' minds and that are associated with the specific knowledge, experiences and subjective and personal judgment of each tourist or potential tourist (Galí and Donaire, 2015).

Components

According to Sáez (in Puig and Baraut, 2013), the fact that tourists are conceiving a determined tourist image in their minds, is not just a matter of image perception, but also related to the ethics, moral, brain function, expression and culture of the subject. Therefore, the relation between the reality and what can be represented in tourists' minds is convoluted, a mix of myths, symbols and images that constitute reality representations and that end up building themselves and world interpretations (Puig and Baraut, 2013).

Considering the complexity of the *image* term, formed by the individual perception of different aspects, it can be said that those features may consist of a mix of affective or emotional and cognitive or perceptual elements (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Dichter, 1985).

Affective qualities of an image can be considered as those ones that arouse from the emotions a place can cause and are later demonstrated by an individual (Pan, Lee, and Tsai, 2014). When it comes to evaluating the affective qualities of an image, those ones are affected by the age, education and socio-psychological and travel motivations of

tourists, so the ones referring to feelings or attachment towards the place or object represented (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999). Four characteristics that can be analysed regarding those qualities or emotions are if the image is pleasant or unpleasant, arousing or sleepy, calming or upsetting and if it is fascinating or depressing (Kim and Stepchenkova, 2015).

Moving to the cognitive qualities a destination image can have, are those characteristics that objectively and substantially refer to a determined object, product or destination through wisdom and a group of beliefs (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Pan et al., 2014). Some of these attributes can be culture, nature and adventure, and when evaluating them, the variables that affect to those qualities are the number of information sources the subject can have, their type, the age of the subject and its education (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999).

Therefore, it is thought that even there is a clear differentiation between affective and cognitive qualities of a tourist destination, both are connected to each other in the way that cognitive qualities concern the destination's attributes knowledge, while affective, to the feelings towards it (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999).

Tourist gaze

When tourists perceive a tourist image, two image types can be identified depending on who is the subject doing so. Those are individual and collective and are interrelated in the manner that a tourist can create an own image of a destination, but this one will be determined by its familiarity, distance and personal experience, but also by sociodemographic factors, which are collective, within a group of people, like the gender, social status, age (MacKay and Fesenmaier, 1997, in Pan et al. 2014) and the time in history where this group of people has lived (Urry and Larsen, 2011). However, it is relevant to mention that Urry and Larsen (2011:21) made a special distinction on what a collective gaze can be. According to them, a tourist destination image can be associated to a media product. By this, a determined tourism icon is observed by a high number of people for its distinguished nature and receives then the name of "mediatised gaze".

The touristic gaze involves classifying images depending on the number of subjects that appear in them and where they are located within a picture. In this direction, the romantic and the collective gaze can be differentiated. On the one hand, the romantic point of view involves looking at an undisturbed, isolated and silent natural places, considered as beautiful and harmonious (Urry, 1995) and in photography, this can be represented with people or objects located far away from where the photo is taken (Pan et al., 2014). On the other hand, in the collective imaginary, people's presence is crucial, mankind is needed to create a special atmosphere that will be later on seen and perceived, and in which a sense of sociability will be represented (Urry, 1990).

1.3 Emotions in the destination's communication

As stated previously, the perception of a tourist image can be individual or collective. In both cases, colours can evoke emotions in tourists' minds when perceiving those images, individually, for its subjectivity or collectively, for their determined characteristics that now will be explained.

Colours from any type of landscape, rather architectural or natural, are crucial when creating determined attraction values of a destination, and they can even be considered as part of the cultural heritage of a place, as can represent its history and collective perception. Therefore, it can be said that a chromatic culture of a destination is related to its own cognitive and affective characteristics, but also to a wider territorial extent (Puig and Baraut, 2013).

According to Puig and Baraut (2013), exists a differentiated opinion about the meaning of colour. While Albers (in Puig and Baraut, 2013) considers that colours are perceptions that can evoke numerous interpretations, others, like Aguirre (in Puig and Baraut, 2013) think that colours are plastic and graphic elements, as something real with their own codes and signs, so go a step further on perceiving the term colour. Who does so as well is the Real Academia Española (2017), as considers colours as "specific characters of determined things" or as " the properties of transmitted, reflected or emitted light by an object" and Heller and Chamorro Mielke (2004), who believe that colours can create perspectives and arouse feelings.

Therefore, it can be said that colours can be powerful in a destination's communication thanks to the emotions they can evoke. Emotional responses can be caused in tourists or potential tourists thanks to the power of expression colours have (Puig Borràs, 2011). As using colours in any kind of visual expressions is something unavoidable, those expressions carry with them communicative meanings, whether they are promotional or artistic (Albers, 1963, in Puig and Baraut, 2013)

Depending on the typology of colours and their distribution within an image, its resulting meaning can differ. Whereas warm colours, like yellow cadmium, red or orange tonalities transmit "vitality, energy and power", cool colours, like yellow lemon, blue or green tonalities tend to communicate more "passive and relaxed" emotions. Moreover, depending on the typology of tone, the distance can differ as well. For instance, the cooler the colour is, the distant the colour will be. This is why the red colour is usually perceived at the foreground of a picture (Heller and Chamorro Mielke, 2004). On the other hand, colours organized "in harmony" tend to be more pleasant and serene to the people who observe them However, colours arranged in contrast tend to have a more shocking impact on perceivers (Puig and Baraut, 2013).

The meaning of the colours can depend as well on every determined colour. Following, a brief interpretation of colours meanings will be done, according to the studies of Puig and Baraut (2013) and Heller and Chamorro Mielke (2004).

First of all, blue is known as the favourite colour for women and men, as it does not have any negative feeling associated. It is also thought to be the coolest colour, as skin colours tend to be blue with cold weather, as well as other elements related to the cold. Ice and snow appear to have blue colour-schemes as well. As stated previously, cool colours are linked to the *distance* term, and this one has got relation with the loyalty, as with no distance, there is no manner to justify loyalty. And this is another feeling that the blue colour transmits, among others like sympathy, harmony and friendship (Heller and Chamorro Mielke, 2004). But blue also evokes immensity and trust feelings, which are strictly related to loyalty (Puig and Baraut, 2013).

Finally, it can be said that the blue colour is full of divine connotations. And it is here where the green colour is opposed, as reflects more earthly sensations. Green is the colour of nature. From nature it derives the fertility connotations, which is also linked to the symbols of life (Heller and Chamorro Mielke, 2004). But the green colour can as well be related to other concepts that derive from life or nature, like the spring or health. When it comes to how is perceived in different parts of the world, in western countries green can mean freedom, whereas for Muslims, it is its holy colour. In contrast with the blue colour, green has got as well a double meaning and is not as good accepted as blue. Green can also be related to poison, anger or disgusting things (Puig and Baraut, 2013). Consequently, green can transmit variable feelings. According to Heller and Chamorro Mielke (2004), green is neither good nor bad, it is not associated to long distances and cool tones like blue, but it is also not close and warm as red. Therefore, green is related to neutrality, tranquillity and safety.

On the other hand, a colour that is not neutral is red. Red is the easiest colour to differentiate and this is one of the reasons why red always appears in advertising (Puig and Baraut, 2013). However, a special attention needs to be put to the frequency in which bright colours are used, as an excessive use of different colours, together with red, could not be pleasant for the people viewing this picture due to the high chromatic power of this colour (Heller and Chamorro Mielke, 2004). Therefore, red is linked to powerful and strong feelings, passions and emotions. However, in contrast with other colours like green, which just has good and positive connotations, red is a colour of strong contrasts. On the one hand, red can remind of negative perceptions, like anger, annoyance (Puig and Baraut, 2013) and danger, or positive sensations, like joy, especially in Asian countries (Heller and Chamorro Mielke, 2004), energy or warmth, as it is the warmest colour of the chromatic circle (Puig and Baraut, 2013). Therefore, it can be stated that is the opposite colour of blue, which is the coolest one. This is why when having a look at pictures with red elements, those are the first ones to be seen.

Other sensations that can be extracted from the red colour are those ones related to fundamental experiences, like fire, blood or life, but perceived in another way than in green. However, the most opposed feelings transmitted through red are love and hate. Depending on the combination of colours done, the meaning will differ. If red is

combined with pink, the transmitted feeling will be love, whereas if red is combined with black, the transmitted feeling will be hate (Heller and Chamorro Mielke, 2004).

Nevertheless, this does not only happen with red. The black colour transforms any bright colour' meaning into a negative one. Black is the colour of violence (Puig and Baraut, 2013), of sins, death or power and in contrast with the warmth of red, black keeps a distance with the people perceiving it (Heller and Chamorro Mielke, 2004). But black has got as got as well a positive symbolism, as can be associated with sophistication and elegance (Puig and Baraut, 2013). Finally, something remarkable from black is its essence, as can be considered as a colour or as the absence of colours, depending if light or material colours are considered. Therefore, as in this project the analysed pictures will be digital, black will be considered as an absence of colour (Heller and Chamorro Mielke, 2004).

In contrast, exists white, the sum of all light colours and the colour with no negative meanings associated. White is thought to be the colour of perfection, honesty, in which truth is also included, tranquillity (Heller and Chamorro Mielke, 2004), innocence and spirituality (Puig and Baraut, 2013). But also white means peace and pureness in an abstract way and cleanliness physically (Heller and Chamorro Mielke, 2004).

Another colour that is also related to spirituality, but does not transmit peaceful feelings is yellow. In some cultures yellow is considered as a divine colour, as sun is perceived as yellow, even if it is not (Puig and Baraut, 2013), like in Asian cultures, where yellow means perfection. Those feelings that yellow transmit thanks to sun are positive and happy (Heller and Chamorro Mielke, 2004). For others, yellow means as well party, entertainment, optimism and cheerfulness (Puig and Baraut, 2013). All those positive connotations are related to the sun and light. For instance, as green is considered the colour of spring, yellow is the colour of summer, as well for the high number of flowers that have yellow tonalities. However, there is an enormous contradiction on the positive and negative meanings of yellow, even higher than in red. And this is why in some occasions, even if what is seen is yellow, society names it as gold, as blond hair, for example, in order to avoid judging something to be yellow (Heller and Chamorro Mielke, 2004).

Therefore, yellow can be a loved or a hated colour, and it needs to be said that has more negative than positive ideas associated, like hate, bad luck, jealousy, insecurity, craziness, envy or greed (Puig and Baraut, 2013).

In contrast, a colour which does not have many negative feelings linked is pink, as it is just considered boring and corny if it is found somewhere in excess. Kindness, charm, no-violence, softness, tenderness (Puig and Baraut, 2013), sweetness, fineness or childhood are some of the positive ideas connected to this colour. Moreover, depending on the way it is used, can bring along a feeling or another. For example, pink can be used in a non-traditional manner, causing noteworthy signs and effects, and if it is combined

with grey and silver or with black, its impression can be refined (Heller and Chamorro Mielke, 2004).

As stated previously, pink does not transmit negative feelings. The colour that does so is brown. In most situations, it transmits negative feelings, like disgust, and even it is one of the less appreciated colours, in determined aspects is also valued positively. It is thought that this is like that because is the colour with a highest number of tonalities, so the one more seen during daily life, therefore, it is the less valued. However, some of the good feelings it transmits are, for instance, when talking about the interior design of homes. Then, it is linked to warmth and retreat (Heller and Chamorro Mielke, 2004), thanks to the visual harmony and balance it has with a lot of colours. Other positive connotations make perceivers think on cosy places, beauty, old ages and hard and natural materials (Puig and Baraut, 2013). Finally, brown also evokes strong flavours, like coffee, chocolate and toasted food (Heller and Chamorro Mielke, 2004)

Another colour that gives rise to flavours is orange, known as an aromatic colour for its exoticism, it is said that exists a lot of orange food, even if at first eye, it is commonly not considered as orange, as well as happens with the yellow colour. Moreover, humans tend to expect good flavours coming from orange food (Heller and Chamorro Mielke, 2004). Orange brings to mind garish, provocative, innovative and extrovert subjects, which are always moving (Puig and Baraut, 2013). Therefore, orange is the colour of change. In Asian societies, orange is thought to be the colour of transformation, so orange reflects the opposite of conventionalism, of sociability, of fun and joy. Orange is a warm colour, which harmonizes and joins, so is the opposite of blue colour, as like stated previously, is the colour of distance. Finally, it can be said that orange has as well negative connotations attached, like inadequacy and danger (Heller and Chamorro Mielke, 2004).

Additionally, the silver colour is as well dynamic, but in a different way than orange. The dynamism of silver is more related to speed and modernity, as in comparison to gold, silver is present in other metals, like in aluminium and steel, while gold colour can only be found on one metal (Heller and Chamorro Mielke, 2004). On the other hand, elegance, like black, and beauty, like brown, are other feelings transmitted through the silver colour. Silver things are also considered to be cold (Puig and Baraut, 2013), as snow reflections can be silver (Heller and Chamorro Mielke, 2004), distant, with difficult accessibility and, in occasions, their perception is related to the moon (Puig and Baraut, 2013), for its brightness and how it is reflected during night. Other feelings transmitted by silver colours are economic power and discretion. Silver will always be an accessory and subordinated to gold, but it is considered that those images with silver have a stronger personality (Heller and Chamorro Mielke, 2004).

As stated previously, gold's symbolism has relation with metals, which in some cases can have positive connotations and in others negative. Gold can transmit loyalty, beauty,

luxury, (Heller and Chamorro Mielke, 2004), fame and privileged social status, as silver does, but also can mean having fake happiness (Puig and Baraut, 2013) and being too materialist and arrogant. Finally it needs to be said that combined with specific colours, all those negative meanings disappear. For example, if red, the colour of love, is combined with gold, they transmit happiness and the same happens with green, the colour of health (Heller and Chamorro Mielke, 2004).

Finally, a colour that is not as noteworthy as gold is grey. Grey is the colour of the discretion and simplicity (Puig and Baraut, 2013). It is important to mention that when perceiving a picture in which grey predominates, viewers tend to think on which feelings are linked to grey, and not on the colour itself. Therefore, it can be stated that grey is a colour that does not leave anyone indifferent. However, it is a conformist colour, which searches for adaptation, as it is in between the black and the white. Grey is the colour of antiquity, boredom, cruelty, sadness, oblivion bad weather, cold and, therefore, winter (Heller and Chamorro Mielke, 2004). For these reasons, among others, grey is not a common colour that can be easily found in the audiovisual industry. However, this is not the case of photography, in where is very popular using grey tonalities (Puig and Baraut, 2013). Therefore, it is expected that in this study, grey will as well have an important role when analysing the photos posted on social media.

Chapter 2. Digital photography society and tourism

After having done a description of the interpretation and meaning of the colours of pictures, it is relevant to know in which context the pictures that will be analysed are found. They are in a digitalized society, where the interaction and share of pictures between users is one of the main pillars and it is in a continuous growth.

From 5 years and on the quantity of internet users has increased more than one billion, being 2.5 on 2012, 3 on 2014, 3.4 on 2016 and 3 .7 billion users nowadays. However, those numbers take even more significance when it is perceivable that these users are active in many websites and platforms. In 2017, in every minute 4,146,600 videos were watched in Youtube, 456,000 tweets were sent, Amazon made 258,751.90 $ in sales and 46,740 photos were posted on Instagram by its users (DOMO, 2017). Therefore, the way of living is changing thanks to technologies, and photography and tourism are doing so as well.

2.1 Digital technologies and photography

Digital technologies have supposed several transformations in many aspects and one of them is the way in which, as a routine, visual resources are perceived (van Dijck, 2008). Part of these transformations have happened thanks to new digital formats from where images can be observed, most of which are through mobile devices (Puig and Baraut, 2013).

Moreover, other authors consider that some changes have happened due to multiple transformations in culture, technology and society, like van Dijck (2008), who states that the photography function has changed as it is part of a multiple transformation, in the aforementioned areas, culture, technology and society. According to him, the role and purpose of digital photography has affected the way in which people are communicating, identities are formed and images are distributed, easily and quickly thanks to the internet and through personal devices.

Therefore, having seen the extent of the situation, it can be said that those changes have had a huge repercussion on the individual and collective imagination of destinations, as they are highly conditioned by the media (Puig and Baraut, 2013). But changes and transformation by or thanks to the digital technologies have not only affected on the perception of destination imaginaries, but also on the search, selection and decision-making processes before and during their trips (Lo et al., 2011).

For instance, social networks have changed the way people look for information and advices about the places they might visit in the future (Mangan, 2015). This can be done through websites like Tripadvisor or Facebook, which information is usually more trusted by internet users than the one created by marketers, as it might come rather from other people that has lived similar experiences or from other people they might know (Roblek, Meško Štok, and Meško, 2016). Therefore, user generated content appears to be more honest and credible (Mangan, 2015) and has even been considered as a word-of-mouth source (Stepchenkova and Zhan, 2013) because it is not a commercial material trying to persuade people to consume a determined product or visit a specific destination (Lo et al., 2011).

Finally, it is important to mention that people posting pictures online is also contributing to create a destination imaginary (Lo et al., 2011). The concepts of digital technologies and photography go nowadays together, as tourists are using them before, during and after their trips (Mangan, 2015). This has happened thanks to the internet, which is now considered as an essential part of the tourism structure (Lo et al., 2011), having a lot of tourism stakeholders involved and depending on it (Deng and Li, 2018).

2.2 Web 2.0

The fact of just having a unique power administrating and controlling the web is something impossible online (Hicks and Graber, 2010). As stated previously, just in tourism exist a lot of stakeholders involved in online actions that take place in the web and a benefit of it is that everyone, rather a tourist or a company has got the same power to express their voice online.

Web 2.0 has completely changed the way in which the concept of information is understood, as this one is created by humans, computers and it is collectively shared. The fact that nowadays internet users are active consumers, because they create the information themselves and interact with each other (Hicks and Graber, 2010), has

democratized the system and different processes where tourism stakeholders are involved (Lo et al., 2011).

Overall, the revolution of web 2.0 has been letting users the power and platform to create knowledge thanks to all the information that is shared independently, so the fact that users are there is equally important to the content that is published and shared. Therefore, the 5 main characteristics of web 2.0 are "collaboration between people, creativity, conversation, community and control" (Hicks and Graber, 2010:623).

Online shared content

Digital cameras and their pictures have become means used to create and transmit information, like a personality or an experience and nowadays, the fact of exchanging and showing images online can be understood as a synonym of sharing an experience. However, even if creating an online identity can be very easy, it is important to remember that digital and online photography is linked to the edition and manipulation of the pictures and despite those pictures have a lot of power by themselves, internet does so as well (van Dijck, 2008), in rather a positive or negative way and depending on who is doing so.

The media channels through which pictures can be shared are a lot and all of them can let a private picture be in a public domain, like in a web 2.0, in instant messaging, photo albums shared online, travel blogs or in social networks, for example. Thanks to that, sharing pictures is not a matter of doing so with just relatives or friends, but with a whole community, found in a wider geographical location (Lo et al., 2011). Therefore, social networks and internet can permit an easy and quick distribution of private and unauthorised pictures or stories (Jin, 2018).

Nevertheless, it is also relevant to mention that through the course of history, the fact of sharing pictures has also had positive connotations, as photographs can play a lot of roles, especially the travel ones. Thanks to the pictures shared online, those roles are even more relevant, as they can reach a higher number of audience, and it is in those situations where social media, and concretely, social networks are very used for (Lo et al., 2011).

Social media

Social media sources, like digital technologies, mobile phones and social networks have become powerful communication channels, making fundamental changes on the way of producing and disseminating images of a destination (Puig and Baraut, 2013). The introduction of these technologies in the 21st Century has brought alongside a total revolution on social principles and on new ways of communicating (Statista, 2017d) and this has been possible because social media allows that a limitless number of users access and become members of an enormous number of online networks (Lo et al., 2011).

The magnitude of this phenomenon is so big that on June 2017, in Europe there were a total number of 822,710,362 inhabitants and 659,634,487 internet users. By this it is meant that an 80.17% of the total population from Europe was using internet and a 52% of them were Facebook users. Regarding Spain, the numbers are even more significant. There were 46,070,146 inhabitants, 40,148,353 internet users and 23,000,000 Facebook users, so a 87.14% of the total population was an internet user and a 49.9% of the total population had a Facebook account, almost half of the Spanish population (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2017).

This is one of the reasons why this study is focussed on analysing pictures posted on Facebook. This social networking service is the most popular one worldwide. It was founded by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004, but was opened to people two years later, in 2006. This website permits its users to open their own page, connect with friends and post pictures and updates that will be seen by those who the user chooses (Statista, 2017a). Even it might seem difficult, every day the number of users registered on Facebook is still growing. During the first quarter of 2017, there were 1,936 million of monthly active users worldwide, during the second quarter, the number raised to 2,006 million and during the third, there were already 2,072, so Facebook has already settled its place in the networking sites worldwide (Statista, 2017c).

However, the Facebook company was not only limited to this social network. In September 2012, this company bought the app of Instagram, which is nowadays a popular photo-sharing social network service that allows its users to take and publish pictures and videos with or without determined filters and has got as well photo-editing options. This study is focussed as well on analysing pictures posted on Instagram thanks to the pictorial material posted by users and its popularity, as in September 2017 its number of monthly active users worldwide overpassed the 800 million and it is one of the social apps with a highest level of user engagement as well (Statista, 2017b).

After having seen the uses and importance of these social network services, it is relevant to mention how they are used in tourism. According to Stepchenkova and Zhan (2013), tourists use them to share with others their travel experiences. Usually, the pictures posted go together with a title, short descriptions of it or tags (Kim and Stepchenkova, 2015) and this constitutes the metadata of the picture, so the supplementary information used to describe a picture. Moreover, a part from the own content carried by the picture itself, photos posted on social networks can be interpreted as well by their comments, as usually can demonstrate the feelings or emotions expressed by the viewers towards an image (Deng and Li, 2018).

Furthermore, users take advantage of social networks when travelling by having the opportunity to prove that they actually travelled to a place, to show others they really lived exotic or authentic experiences, to build travel memories and later on turn them into stories (Lo et al., 2011), or to inform relatives and friends about their daily life in a

destination (van Dijck, 2008), apart from other people who might see them, as mentioned previously.

On the other hand, social media has been considerably incorporated in marketing communication actions, so companies and DMOs have the opportunity to be more engaged with their future, current or past clients or visitors (Jin, 2018). And thanks to the fact they are more engaged, everyday more pictures used in mass media are taken by clients or tourists, not by professionals (Deng and Li, 2018), as some tourists believe other tourists are more reliable than conventional marketers (Lo et al., 2011), as stated previously. This is also one of the reasons why this project is based on analysing UGC.

Moreover, the impacts of web 2.0 and user generated content posted online can be very powerful on destination image promotion, marketing and development, but at some point, they can be adverse against actions taken by DMOs (Lo et al., 2011), as those pictures shared by the users can even drive to a restructuring of the destination (Galí and Donaire, 2015). Independent user generated content offers travellers an alternative source of information and some tourists trust more on information shared by others than the one posted by a DMO.

Chapter 3. Student mobility

Having seen the environment where the analysed pictures will be taken from, this chapter is based on reviewing the background of the people who does so, exchange students.

The fact of travelling as a student is becoming everyday more usual and easy, as it is something that goes together with the development of modern societies (Byram and Dervin, 2008). Nevertheless, this internationalisation of education has not only caused a lot of changes within societies, but also in cultural relationships between people from worldwide (Findlay, King, Smith, Geddes, and Skeldon, 2012). Therefore, student mobility can be defined as a way of providing students the possibility to live an experience to discover other countries or areas during a short term. And it does not matter where this destination is, as students will have the possibility to do so in any part of the globe (Anyangwe, 2012).

However, the destination does matter for the student itself. According to Byram and Dervin (2008) and Verbik and Lasanowski (2007), a mobile or exchange student is a student leaving from its own place of origin for travelling to another one with the aim of studying there, seeing student mobility from two points of view, from the origin, as an outgoing tourist and from the destination, as an ingoing tourist. Moreover, Verbik and Lasanowski (2007) make a special distinction between those mobile students that travel to study abroad, which can be considered as international students. The same discernment is made by UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2018), but also adding that this

student needs to be enrolled in an educational centre that does not belong to its country of origin.

Therefore, mobile students can be exchange students, being Erasmus students the most numerous, students with bilateral agreements, students that travel to do language and culture courses or students that travel to do investigation projects, among others (Pawlowska, 2011). Most of them care about aspects that the experience of studying abroad or in another area has got attached. Some of them are having language misunderstandings, not having enough help from schools or universities, being able to receive enough grants or not and how integrated they will be to the academic system and the culture of the local community (Hernández Castañeda, 2008)

3.1 History

Even it might seem that student mobility has its origin in the recent decades, it began as a way of travelling at least on the 11th century, when universities first appeared. Then students and teachers did similar actions to peregrines, as they were both looking for places to acquire more knowledge and living new experiences, in the case of teachers and students, to discover the university cities. This changed during the 14th and 15th centuries, when European society realised it would be better to spend money on building new universities than spending money on commutations. Then, students did not need to travel that much for acquiring knowledge (Pawlowska, 2011).

One century later, thanks to the humanist movement, more students and teachers started to travel to learn from other universities, but as sending universities were having economical losses and countries wanted to control their own universities for religious and political interests, on the 16th century, some limitations were stablished and less students and teachers travelled. The situation changed again during the following century, thanks to the Grand Tour, when young people from German and English wealthy families started to travel again in order to make friends and improve their social and cultural education. Then, universities were seen as tourist attractions, so those trips became leisure trips and were no more part of the student mobility (Pawlowska, 2011).

Afterwards, student mobility decreased again (Pawlowska, 2011) and it was not until the end of the 20th century, when travelling infrastructures improved and European institutions were giving grants and organising exchange programmes to students to encourage them to travel, that numbers raised again. From then on, especially from the 90's, the numbers have not stopped to raise, but not only in Europe, but worldwide (Verbik and Lasanowski, 2007).

The total estimated number of exchange students in 2001 was of 2.7 million, almost a 61% more than 9 years before, more than a 70% of which were travelling to the United States, Australia, France, Germany and the United Kingdom. During the following years, the most popular destinations did not change much, as in 2007, every 5 exchange students across Europe, 3 of them were travelling to Germany, France or the United

Kingdom (Verbik and Lasanowski, 2007). The only one that had a severe drop was United States, as after the terrorist attacks of September 2001 and after the economic crisis of 2008, the destination started to drop on different tourism sectors, including students. However, those happenings meant as well some changes on the way of practising student mobility. For example, from then, some strict visa requirements have become necessary and the competitiveness between other destinations has increased as well (Choudaha, 2011).

Having a deeper analysis on what has happened in Europe during the last 15 years and which has been the flow of inbound international mobile students, it needs to be said that the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (GB) has always been the most popular destination in Europe, as can be seen in Graph 1 and in Table 1. It has had a continuous and differentiated growth, with a discreet decease between the 2007 and 2008, when the economic recession took place, and almost all destinations decreased, more or less, on the number of students hosted. Its last numbers recorded by the UNESCO position it from a high distance from France and Germany, with 428,724 students (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2018).

Regarding Germany, it occupied the 2nd place until 2006, as from 2004 the numbers of inbound international mobile students started to drop potentially. Then, France took its place and it was not until 2014, that Germany started to raise again. According to the last data recorded, on 2014, France received 235,123 students, whereas Germany received 210,542. Regarding the rest of the European countries, all of them have similar and not dramatic growths and drops, with the exception of Spain, as from 2003 to 2004 the numbers changed from 53,639 to 15,050 and from then on, it has potentially grown again. Finally, according to the last data recorded, behind France and Germany, the countries that host a higher number of students are Italy, followed by the Netherlands and Austria (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2018). The graph and the table below show a complete overview of the European situation.

Graph 1. Total inbound internationally mobile students between 1997 and 2016
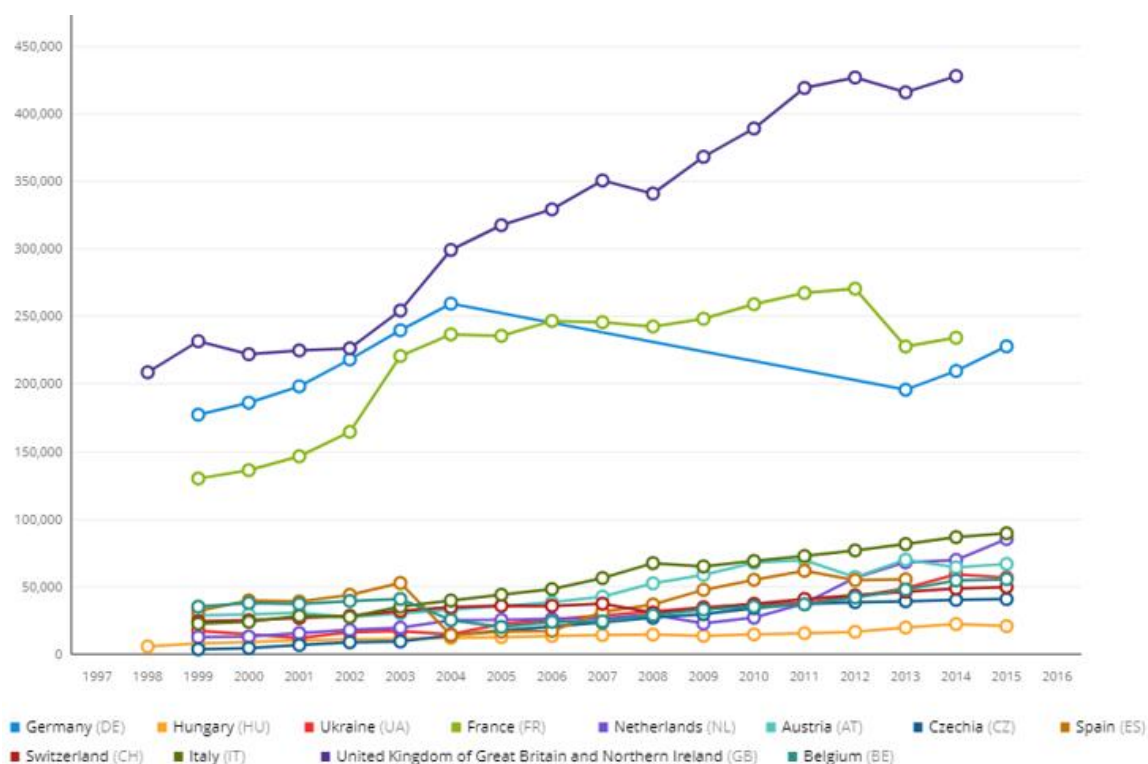
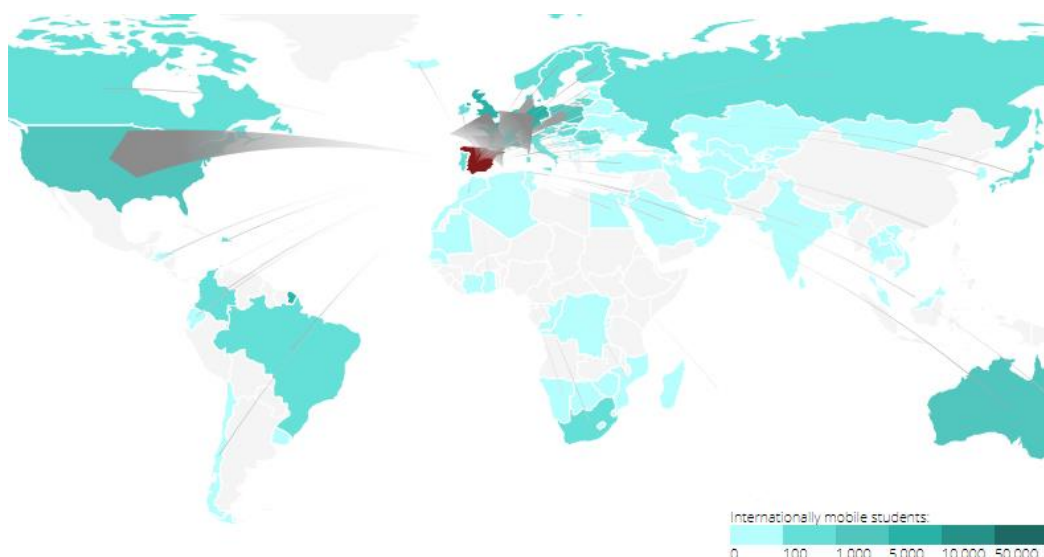SOURCE: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2018)

Table 1. Total inbound internationally mobile students between 1997 and 2016

YEAR/COUNTRY	DE	HU	UA	FR	NL	AT	CZ	ES	CH	IT	UK	BE
1998		6636	18312									
1999	178195	8869	12880	130952	13619	29819	4583	32954	25258	23496	209554	36136
2000	187033	9904	17210	137085	14012	30382	5468	40689	26003	24929	232540	38799
2001	199132	11242	18170	147402	16589	31682	7750	39944	27765	29228	222936	38150
2002	219039	11782	15622	155437	18874	28452	9753	44860	29301	28447	225722	40354
2003	240619	12226	23259	221567	20531	31101	10338	53639	32847	36137	227273	41856
2004	260314	12913	26623	237587	26154	33707	14923	15050	35705	40641	255233	26202
2005		13601	29614	236518	26387		18522	17675	36792	44921	300056	21054
2006		14491	32573	247510	27037	39329	21395	18206	36680	49090	318399	24854
2007		15110	35780	246612	27449	43572	24483	32281	38317	57271	330078	25202
2008		15459	37674	243436	30052	53396,25	27907	37726	31706	68306	351470	29844
2009		14518	38777	249143	23674	59705	30624	48517	34847	65873	341791	33951
2010		15606	43609	259935	27968	68619	34992	56018	38195	69905	368968	36126
2011		16465	49686	268212	38367	70558	38041	62636	41803	73584	389958	37866

2012	196619	17520	60037	271399	57506	58056		39455	55759	44468	77732	419946	42914
2013	210542	20694	57583	228639	68943	70852,25	40138	56361	47142	82450	427686	48748	
2014	228756	23208		235123	70692	65164,9713	41149		49536	87544	416693	55516	
2015		21707			86189	67691,3463	41715		50591	90419	428724	56453	

SOURCE: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2018)

Figure 2. Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students

SOURCE: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2015)

Particularly in the case of the Spanish students that travel abroad, the situation does not differ much from the average of European destinations. As can be seen in Figure 2, in 2015, the most visited countries were United Kingdom, Germany, United States, France and the Netherlands, within a total number of 33,225 students (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2015).

Nowadays, thanks to the globalization, universities are becoming more adapted to the necessities of international students, especially in Europe, as there is a push on the European Society to have an only identity. Thanks to that, workplaces are becoming as well adapted to international employees, so it is thought that in the future, more universities will leave behind their sense of belonging to one country or another (Byram and Dervin, 2008).

3.2 Motivations and benefits

Having seen how students have travelled during the last centuries, it is relevant to mention why they have done so and are still doing it and which benefits do they obtain by doing so.

The main motivations of travelling, in general terms, are academic and of doing research (Pawlowska, 2011). However, students could still be doing this in their countries. Then,

why do they travel to study? Financial reasons is one of the possible answers, even if not directly. For example, students pretend to have better paid jobs in the future or other improvements in their job positions thanks to the fact they studied abroad. However, students feel attracted to this activity by other reasons that affect more in a personal way and are more related to the fact of living new and different experiences by interacting with other international students and with the host community (Byram and Dervin, 2008). For example, some of these reasons can be found in the results of the study from Krzaklewska and Krupnik (in Byram and Dervin, 2008). They found out that more than the 95% of students decided to practise academic tourism to live new experiences. Other reasons were to learn other languages and about other cultures, to meet new friends, to have the opportunity to live in a different area from their home-place, to have a better education, to become independent and to enjoy themselves.

And even it has been found that students are motivated by these reasons and to obtain determined benefits, the real benefits they can gain from living an experience like that can coincide or not with what they expected, but they are more related to growing personally, linguistically and culturally than in an academic way (Byram and Dervin, 2008).

Some of those gains that can coincide with the motivations of students can be learning other languages, learning about other cultures and ways of living in them, making new friends (Pawlowska, 2011) or having better salaries in their future careers. Others, which might be completely unknown by students once they are planning to study abroad can be having better academic marks in their home-places once they are back (Byram and Dervin, 2008), having the possibility to be integrated in a completely different society, discovering new horizons and academically learn about aspects they would not thought about before or being more open minded and having the possibility to see things from new points of view (Pawlowska, 2011).

3.3 Youthful tourism characteristics

As stated previously, mobile students can be considered as tourists once they are studying in another place for less than one year, but more concretely, the students that will be analysed will be part of the tourism known as youthful, which is linked to mobile students as well. At this point, to avoid misunderstandings, it is necessary to explain what youthful tourism is and which the characteristics of its tourists are.

Student mobility is part of youth tourism, which is nowadays one of the most important types of tourism worldwide, having generated around 200 billion dollars in 2013. Moreover, its growth during the last decade has been considerably high and it is not expected to decrease, as the UNWTO, in Organisation Internationale du Tourisme Social (2014), has forecasted that by 2020 around 300 million international youth trips will be done every year. Youthful tourists are those ones that are usually hosted in specific places like shared flats, student housings or hostels, who are travelling to live new

experiences, in other cultures and to learn and are usually benefiting from discounts in some tourism products, as their economic average level is not very high. Part of them can be researchers, others travelling to learn a language or studying within the frame of a studying programme, whether from elementary schools, secondary schools or universities (Pawlowska, 2011).

However, not all authors coincide of considering youth tourists those from elementary and secondary schools and universities. According to Carr (1998), different researchers have settled different ages on delimiting youth tourists and all in all, they can vary from 15 to 38 years old. Moreover, youth tourists appear to be more conscientious about sustainability and overnighting more than other tourists do. Moreover, they are stricter on the tourism products they consume, by requesting more quality and responsible tourism products. Therefore, it is expected that in the future, the market will be more adapted to their needs (Pawlowska, 2011).

All in all, "If youth is a time of socializing and learning, tourism should be framing to achieve this objective" Alzua (in Pawlowska, 2011:15).

3.4 Exchange agreements

At this point of the research, after having deepened into the type of tourism exchange students do, it is time to explain within which exchange agreements do most of the exchange students who travel to Girona have, which are Erasmus, SICUE and Prometheus. However, this project has just analysed students within the Erasmus and Prometheus programmes, being Erasmus the most popular one.

Erasmus +

Erasmus + is a programme created to empower youth, education, sports and academic training in and for the European Union. During its 30 years of history, it has economically help European citizens thanks to a budget of more than 14,500 million euros. This programme exists from 1987 and during the last year, 2017, a total number of 9 million people benefited from the advantages of being part of this programme in more than 33 countries (European Commission, 2017).

The duration of this programme ranges from 3 months to 1 year and the amount of the grants given to the students depend on the country of origin, destination and the university of origin, as it is expected to compensate the difference on expenses from one place to the other (Pawlowska, 2011).

The purpose of this programme is to make people connect and help, not only those who can afford travelling, but everyone and it seems that they are reaching their objectives. According to the (European Commission, 2017), an 83% of those people who participated on an Erasmus programme feels to be more European, an 85% agreed on saying that after participating in this programme believed more on the common European values and a 94% of them have changed their minds, while being more

tolerant. Therefore, the aims of Erasmus + go beyond educational purposes, helping to develop more global knowledge and broaden the limits of its participants' minds (Anyangwe, 2012).

RESULTS

At this point of the project and after having conceptualized and seen what different authors have written about the type of touristic image that is being analysed, how to interpret the meanings of some elements that create pictures, the online environment where the analysed pictures are found and relevant and concerning information about who is posting them, the analysis of the pictures has been done as stated in the methodology.

Thanks to the aforementioned analysis, an answer can be given to the different research questions set out at the methodology of this project. Following, different chapters will cover different topics which will overall show which is the image that exchange students who go to Girona transmit through the pictures they post in social networks.

Chapter 1. A metonymic perspective

As acknowledged in the literature review, pictures are composed by manifest and latent content and can be seen from a metonymic or a metaphorical perspective. From the analysed pictures, both features have been taken into consideration and following, an overview of the signs that carry a meaning by themselves will be explained. Those are the physical elements that appear in the pictures and that can be understood at a face value. However, when combining them and beholding them as a whole, it can be said that they contribute to create a tourist image of a destination. Therefore, the elements that prevail in the pictures posted by the students vary depending on the location from where the pictures were taken. In this chapter, the elements from the most popular destinations chosen by the exchange students are presented.

However, in this study not only the number of times the elements appeared has been calculated, but also the percentage of coverage they have appeared within the pictures, as this means students can be giving more importance to certain elements by representing them bigger than others in their pictures. A classification of these elements has been done considering the type of element that was being codified. A first draft of the possible elements appearing in pictures was done and as pictures were being codified, some others were added and others erased so to make sure that all elements appearing in pictures were contemplated. The blueprint of the codified elements is as following:

- Architectural
  - o Bridge
  - o Buildings
  - o Canal
  - o Fountain
  - o Lake
  - o Port
  - o Square
  - o Staircase
  - o Street
  - o Triumph arch
  - o Viewpoint

- - o Wall
- Cultural
  - o Amsterdam landscape
  - o Bridge
  - o Building
  - o Cadaqués landscape
  - o Cinematographic
  - o Florence landscape
  - o Landscape of Onyar houses
  - o Lisbon landscape
  - o Museum
  - o Old quarter landscape
  - o Painting
  - o Park
  - o Sculpture
  - o Square
  - o Theatre
  - o Vatican City landscape
- Gastronomic
  - o Alcohol
- Home
- Natural
  - o Beach
  - o Countryside
  - o Fauna and flora
    - ▪ Animals
    - ▪ Plants
      - • Flowers
      - • Trees
  - o Lake
  - o Mountain
  - o River
  - o Sea
- People
- Political
  - o Building
  - o Flag
  - o Monument
  - o News
  - o Painting
- Religious
  - o Building
  - o Other
  - o Painting
  - o Sculpture
- Sport
- Student
- Tourism Product
- Traditional
- Transport

The most popular elements appearing in pictures are *architectural elements*, which include buildings, bridges, lakes, streets, squares, walls, ports, staircases, canals, viewpoints, architectural monuments such as Triumph arches and fountains. On the other hand, *natural elements* include beaches, countryside landscapes, mountains, the sea, rivers, natural lakes and any demonstration of fauna and flora, rather plants, like trees and flowers or animals. Finally, the top 3 includes as well *cultural elements*. This one refers to those elements that are relevant for the heritage and history of a place by what they are representing. This is why this code includes cultural landscapes of some cities, museums, pieces of art or pieces of architecture. *Student elements* is meant by those features that can be related to a student environment, such pictures of a university, of student materials or classrooms, among others, by *sport elements* are understood all those elements related to the sport world, such as sport equipment or facilities. *Tourism products* refer exclusively to those products that are designed to be consumed and that are consumed by tourists, such as cruises, restaurants, bars,

museums, beach hammocks, among others, but that include somebody paying for consuming them. *Traditional elements* refer to those ones related to the traditional heritage of a determined area, like representative elements of their festivities or of their local routines. *Gastronomic elements* make reference to any representation of food or beverage, as well as gastronomic facilities such as bars or restaurants, by *home elements* it is meant all those features that can be found in a home and that are used in a daily life, *political elements* refer to those ones with political connotations like flags or political buildings, *religious elements* allude to features with religious connotations, not only religious buildings, but also religious pieces of art like paintings or sculptures and *transport elements* refer to means of transport and their facilities. Finally, *people* includes any person appearing in pictures, rather if it is posing for it or not.

Once seen which codes were created and to what do they refer, it is time to have a look at which frequencies and curiosities do the results show. The selected locations are Girona city, Costa Brava and Barcelona, not only because they were the most popular, but also because are destinations with different characteristics. Therefore, some differences may be seen.

To start with, the case of the pictures taken in Girona and posted on social networks show that the elements that appear more times in pictures are *people*, by appearing in 173 out of a total of 274 pictures, *architectural elements*, appearing in 155 pictures and *natural elements*, appearing in 124 pictures.

However, the percentage of the coverage range of the elements in most cases does not match with the number of pictures where certain elements appear. For instance, a remarkable information from the pictures taken in Girona is that even the elements that appear more in pictures are the aforementioned; the ones that occupy a higher area on the posted pictures are *student, architectural* and *cultural elements*, being student elements highly above the other two with a median of 93.4% of coverage compared to the 72.1% and 53.1%. This statement is presented after calculating the average and the median of coverage of all pictures. Therefore, even in the pictures taken in Girona include a high number of *people* and *architectural* and *natural elements*, the *architectural* ones are the only ones that apart from being numerous are as well given a high importance in pictures. In contrast, students tend to portrait in higher dimensions *student* and *cultural elements* than rather *people* or *natural elements*.

Finally, another remarkable piece of information about the features that appear in Girona's pictures is that apart from *student elements*, there are other types of items that have a high percentage of coverage every time they appear, even if they are not present in many pictures. Those ones are *sport elements*, *tourism products* and *traditional elements*. They just appear a few times, but when they do so, students want to give them a high importance, by portraying them in big dimensions.

Graph 2. Relation of number of times in pictures and coverage (Girona elements)
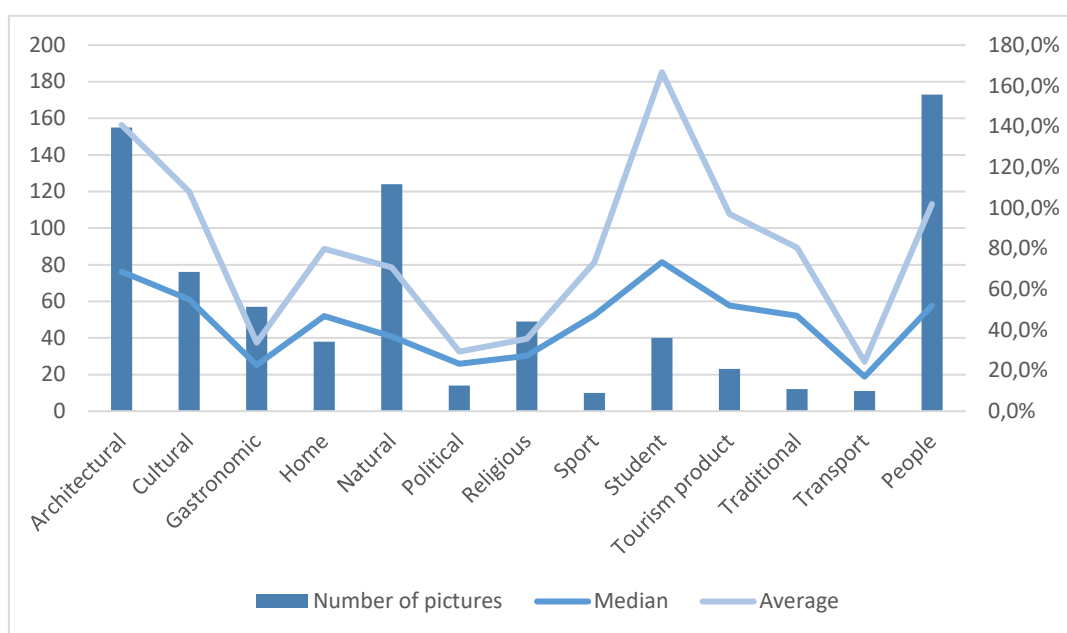
Moving to the elements that appear in Costa Brava pictures, they are considerably different from the ones appearing in Girona. While in the case of Girona, there were some predominant types of elements, all the other types, like *gastronomic, home, political, religious, sport, tourism products, transport* and *traditional elements* appeared in a relatively similar number of pictures, in the case of the elements appearing in Costa Brava pictures, apart from the 3 most predominant types of elements, all the others were almost non-existent.

The 3 most predominant types of elements appearing in Costa Brava pictures were *natural elements, people* and *architectural elements*, by being *natural* the most predominant with a total of 85 pictures and having the highest percentage of area coverage considering both types of calculations, the median and the average. Therefore, from the pictures posted on Costa Brava, the 65.7% of their area on average is covered with *natural elements* and a 69.1% if the median is considered. In the case of *people* and *architectural elements*, even if *people* appear in more pictures, 58 in contrast of the 39 pictures where *architectural elements* were appearing, the coverage area is relatively similar, as the median and average are alike in both cases. This data shows that students tended to give more importance to the nature of Costa Brava, such as the beaches, the sea or their flora and afterwards, to the architecture and people equally and ignoring other types of elements that exist in this area.

It can be possible that they were portraying what they had previously seen in other pictures from Costa Brava before travelling there, so behaving like a regular tourist, and not like a student tourist that is being in an area for a longer time. Contrary, this result was different in the pictures taken in Girona, where there was more diversity on the

types of elements appearing on the pictures and apart from *architecture* and *people*, they wanted to give importance to *student elements* in their pictures.

Graph 3. Relation of number of times in pictures and coverage (Costa Brava elements)
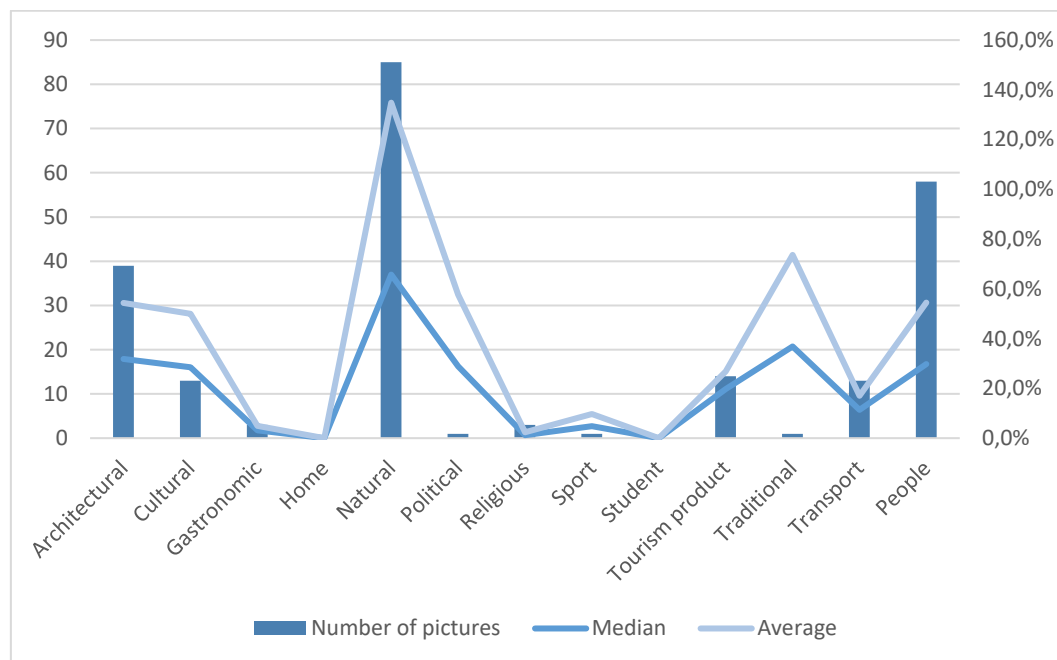
SOURCE: Own elaboration

Finally, moving to the pictures that were taken in Barcelona, vary on the types of elements more photographed from Costa Brava in the way that Barcelona is a different type of tourist destination compared to Costa Brava. As well as in the case of Girona, all types of elements are present and *people, architectural* and *natural elements* are the ones appearing in more pictures, 34, 42 and 32 respectively in comparison of a total of 50 pictures. However, a relevant fact is that even Barcelona is a more crowded city, there are more pictures containing architecture than people. On the other hand, in the case of Girona is the other way round. It might be possible that this happens because in Girona pictures, students appear in the photos with their friends while in the case of Barcelona, they are showing the city as a tourist destination, so they publish more pictures of landscapes and objects.

Graph 4. Relation of number of times in pictures and coverage (Barcelona elements)

Relation number of times in pictures - cobertura
(Barcelona elements)
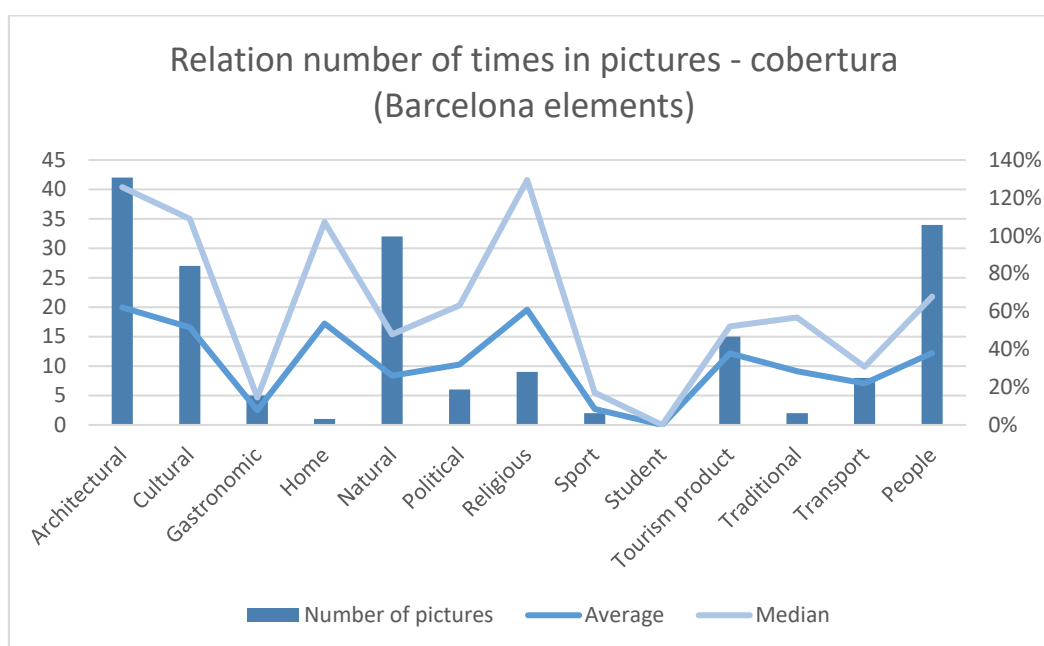
SOURCE: Own elaboration

Therefore, students decided to show a romantic gaze in Barcelona and Costa Brava pictures, while in Girona, a collective imaginary is shown. In the case of the Costa Brava pictures, it could be considered as something understandable, as *natural elements* are the most numerous, so according to the theory, the romantic gaze usually represents isolated, silent and natural places. However, there are some points that contradict the theory and will be explained below.

On the one hand, it is contradictory because the reality from Costa Brava in summer is usually not as shown in pictures, as it is not isolated neither silent even the nature is still there. Moreover, most of the pictures from Costa Brava were taken in summer and in the destinations of Cadaqués and Lloret de Mar, two cities that become full of tourists during this season.

On the other hand, in the case of Barcelona, the median of the percentage of coverage of people is in the sixth position compared to other types of elements, so people's presence is not crucial in the published pictures. Otherwise, students tend to show a romantic point of view of Barcelona, as in most pictures people are not located close to the shooting point.

These facts also go along with the type of people appearing in the pictures. In all destinations, the student who posted the picture was the one appearing in most pictures. However, when it comes to the rest of the people appearing in the photos, in the case of Girona, friends of the student and locals where the next ones who appeared more. In contrast, a few number of tourists appeared in the pictures. This could mean that exchange students did not perceive Girona as a tourist destination, but as a place

of residence and as a place to share experiences with friends. This was not the case of the pictures taken in other destinations, where locals barely appeared in pictures. For instance, in the case of the photos from Costa Brava, after the student itself, the most people appearing in pictures are friends, then tourists and locals. This could mean that exchange students show the Costa Brava as a place to socialize and have fun with friends. The same situation is given in the inland from Girona province, in destinations like Banyoles or Besalú.

In contrast, in destinations like Barcelona or other European cities, tourists appear in more pictures than friends or locals, with the exception of pictures taken in other Spanish destinations, where the number of friends appearing in pictures is relatively high above the pictures where locals and tourists appear. This might happen because pictures of Barcelona and other European cities are taken in areas with high flows of tourists.

These facts could also go along with the type of areas photographed in different cases. For example, while in Girona the most common places were the university and the place of residence of the student, in other destinations, the most photographed areas were in touristic places. In order to see if the type of people appearing in the pictures had any relation with the area where the pictures were taken, it has been studied which where the places where most tourists appeared from Girona city and where most locals. The results are positive, the relation exists, as most tourists were appearing in pictures taken in the cathedral, in Onyar and along the Old Quarter streets, three of them touristic areas, while locals mostly appeared in the university, Girona squares and lastly in Old Quarter streets.

Furthermore, it is relevant to mention that there are people appearing in a big number of pictures of Barcelona, but as in the same case of Girona, students do not tend to give a lot of importance to *people*, as the percentage of coverage of *people* in the pictures is not very high. In contrast, *architectural elements* appear in a lot of pictures and the median of the percentage of coverage of those elements is one of the highest, 63.6%. Surprisingly, the type of elements that is given a higher importance and percentage of coverage in students' pictures are *religious elements*, with a median of 68.6%. This is because in the pictures where the Sagrada Família or the Barcelona's Cathedral appear, the students portrayed them in big dimensions.

In the case of the *natural elements*, the difference is easily perceivable in between the 3 tourist destinations. In the case of Costa Brava, *natural elements* appear in a high number of pictures with a high percentage of coverage. Contrary, in the case of Girona and Barcelona, *natural elements* appear as well in a high number of pictures, put students do not pretend to give them a lot of importance, as the average and the median of the percentage of coverage are not very high compared to other types of elements.

Finally, the third type of elements with a higher percentage of coverage in pictures, a 57,4% of median, are cultural elements. Having a look at the data, it can be seen that from Barcelona, students wanted to show that is a cosmopolitan city. Therefore, architectural and cultural elements appear in a high number of pictures, but are also given a lot of importance in the pictures, as the percentage of coverage of both is relatively high.

To conclude, it can be stated that students tended to photography more some types of objects, but giving more importance to others in most cases. For example, *people* appear in a high number of pictures from the three aforementioned destinations, but in none of them *people* supposed the centre of attention of the students gaze. Contrarily, architecture constitutes a pillar of exchange students' pictures, by appearing in a high number of pictures and in big dimensions, no mattering the type of destination, urban or natural. However, the main focus in Costa Brava was put to nature, while in Girona and Barcelona, even students tended to show more architecture, the variety of elements appearing was wider than in Costa Brava, where students mostly focussed on the natural part of it and ignoring other elements that also exist in that area.

Moreover, exists a clear differentiation regarding elements appearing in pictures depending on the perspective given by the students, if they see the destination as a place where they live or as a place they are visiting. For instance, in the case of Girona, students were giving a lot of importance to *student elements*, while in Barcelona, *religious elements* were the ones given a higher importance, so landmarks of the city such as the Sagrada Família or the Barcelona's Cathedral. This differentiation was also seen on the type of people appearing in the pictures. All in all, thanks to the elements appearing in pictures, students were showing to an online community their point of view of the destinations they visited.

Chapter 2. Beyond appearances

Once we have seen what appears in pictures, it is appropriate to present which is the latent content pictures carry, so how do other signs present in pictures affect to the global image of destinations shown in the published photos. This involves showing in which locations, contexts, and situations are the previously mentioned elements found. Other information that has helped to answer the problem statement and that is presented in this chapter as well is the temporal analysis of the pictures, so to know if there is any existing pattern concerning the period of the exchange where students posted their pictures. Finally, analysing the latent content means as well to know which metaphoric connotations do pictures show. This has been done thanks to analysing the colours that prevail in pictures, so which feelings do they transmit.

All this information has helped to have the complete overview of how is the image transmitted through social networks by exchange students that choose Girona as a studying destination.

2.1 Living a travelling experience

As stated in the literature review, exchange students and the fact of travelling for studying reasons constitute a specific type of tourism, involving tourists with certain characteristics. Some of those features have been detected during the analysis of the pictures. According to Anyangwe (2012), thanks to student mobility, students have the chance to experience new adventures while discovering other countries or areas. In the analysed pictures, this statement is confirmed, as apart from travelling to a wide range of places, exchange students showed that they discovered Girona from a special point of view, considering the city as their *settlement*.

It is relevant to note that students seem to show they are living a complete experience at the destination in many different ways, not just studying at university and learning about the city of Girona and its culture, but also meeting new friends and visiting other places. Therefore, one of the other results that derives from investigating how has their exchange experience been is which places have they visited.

In this case, the analysis has been made by recording if the pictures were taken in Girona city, where exactly from the city of Girona, if they were taken within the rest of the Girona province, differentiating as well if it was in a destination from the Costa Brava or from the inland of the Girona province and later determining the municipality where the photos were shoot. In the case of the rest of the pictures, they have been codified if they were taken in the rest of the Catalan territory, in the rest of Spain or in other European countries. For each case, some subcategories were created specifying as well the destinations, being the most common Barcelona and Montserrat in the case of Catalonia, Valencia and Seville in the case of Spain and Andorra and Lisbon in the case of Europe.

After having said that, it can be stated that the city of Girona was definitely the most portrayed location and this was one way from exchange students to show online they were doing their exchange in Girona city. The fact of incorporating Girona as their *settlement* might be evident, but it is just a little part of what being a student tourist in Girona means. Even if other locations appeared as well in a big number of pictures, the city of Girona pretends to be its *settlement*, it could be named as their main destination. This is why in more than 250 pictures, out of the 604 that were analysed, were shot in Girona, especially in the old quarter and in their place of residence. The fact that the old quarter was the most photographed area from Girona represents, in some way, the relation that attaches students to their tourist condition.

On the one hand, the old quarter is photographed from a more tourist perspective in some pictures, while in others is portrait from a local outlook. This statement could led

to understand that exchange students are tourists pretending to be locals at some point, but as well showing they are tourists and are living a travelling experience. This has been demonstrated thanks to analysing other features from the pictures, like the elements appearing or the types of situations shown in pictures, which will be explained in the following section from this chapter.

It is stated that they are living a travelling experience as even studying in Girona, there is a total of 301 which were not taken in Girona, so more than half of the total pictures, as just 274 were shot in Girona city. From these other destinations, the most popular one is Girona province. Surprisingly, in the case of the rest of European and Spanish destinations, a remarkable fact is that more students were showing travelling to other European cities rather than to national territory.

Considering concrete destinations between Catalan and Spanish destinations, eluding the Costa Brava, the most portrayed areas were Barcelona, Montserrat and Seville. At this point, some statements can be made. On the one hand, Barcelona could be in the very top for its popularity and for being on the top 5 of the most visited European cities on the last past years, so it is a centre of attraction as well for exchange students, for its short distance from Girona and from its popular nightlife, an appealing attraction for some exchange students. In the case of Montserrat, this is the second most shot destination. However, a reason why this destination appears to be that popular among exchange students might be an excursion organized by the Erasmus Student Network. As stated in the literature review, one of the student tourists features is that they are tourists with not a lot of budget, usually participating in or being part of young organisations and benefiting from entities discounts. Therefore, this could confirm the theory.

Moving to the European destinations, they appeared in 74 pictures. It is relevant to mention that the number of European cities visited by the analysed exchange students was relatively high, in 24 different locations. However, just a few of them outstand from the rest. The more portrayed cities were Andorra, Lisbon, Paris and Oporto. This affirmation shows as well that exchange students live a travelling experience. It can be already perceived that studying abroad does not just include studying and visiting a destination, but also being involucrate in a society while visiting places that may not have been visited if the student did not took the decision to travel to Girona.

Finally, a similar situation to the case of the European cities is given when having a look at the municipalities from the Girona province. The number of destinations appearing in the analysed pictures is considerably high but just some of them are outstanding. Between those, Lloret de Mar, Cadaqués and Banyoles are the most portrayed cities, being Lloret de Mar the most popular. Moreover, an interesting fact to stress is that from the total pictures of the Girona province, excluding the capital, 83 were taken in the Costa Brava, while just 30 in destinations from the inland of the province. From these

results it can be understood that while there are students who aim to discover alternative areas, as the number of towns portrayed is quite high, the majority of them goes for towns or an area with a popular touristic reputation, such as Lloret de Mar or the Costa Brava. This shows that even though students pretend to somehow become locals, the next step would be to broaden their horizons beyond Girona city and explore and be familiarized with other areas from the Girona province area or Catalan territory.

2.2 Experiences through situations

Having seen the locations where the pictures where taken, the project is also focussed in other data that can contribute to the creation of a specific type of tourist image by exchange students. Therefore, not only is being analysed which elements do appear in pictures, as stated in Chapter 1 from the results, but as well investigating in which contexts where those elements appearing. By examining so, it can be said which type of experiences are exchange students showing to the digital world.

To carry out with this investigation, 5 different types of situations appearing in pictures have been created to codify them. The first one, *day to day situations* refer to those situations that happen daily in students' lives, no matter if they are doing an exchange or if they are at their place of origin. Some of the subcategories from this code are, for example, *friends' meetings, gastronomic situations* that involve somebody eating or drinking, *student situations*, such as being at university or doing sport. The second category is Tourist situations, and involves those situations where students appear to be visiting a place. Moreover, a more specific differentiation has been done determining which kind of tourism was shown in pictures, such as *cultural, natural, cosmopolitan tourism, sun and sand* or *active*, among others. Another classification has been *event*, and under this code all the pictures where the situation was any kind of event were codified, like *cultural events, protests, leisure events, sport events*, among others. Additionally, t*radition situations* were as well codified, referring to those pictures showing local traditions from an area. Finally, some pictures were codified with *transport situations*, referring to those ones where they or somebody else was travelling.

It has been relevant to investigate the situations shown because it constitutes the essence of the pictures, what pictures show about what their protagonists are doing abroad. The results show that *tourist situations* are the most predominant type, by being 403 pictures out of a total of 604 *tourist situations*. The results are understandable, as all in all, what students are living is a travelling experience, so pictures show *tourist situations*. However, the fact of being student tourists makes some differences not in general number, but yes if some other data is combined with this information. For instance, almost 150 pictures show *day to day* situations, characteristics that probably would not be found in pictures from vacation tourists. Having a deeper look, considering the time of the day where the pictures were taken, however, there is a clear

differentiation that can be done. Tourist situation pictures where most taken during day light, by having more than 250 pictures of difference with the next situation more shown during day light, *day to day* situations. However, when having a look at pictures taken during night, *tourist situations* dramatically decrease by being replaced by *day to day* and *Events* situations. This result let the investigation to discover which exact situations do exchange students show to be doing during night. The results, confirm again the characteristics of youth tourism stated in the literature review, as the more shown situations during night were *friends' meetings, leisure events, gastronomic situations* and *cultural events*.

Graph 5. Relation between type of situation and location
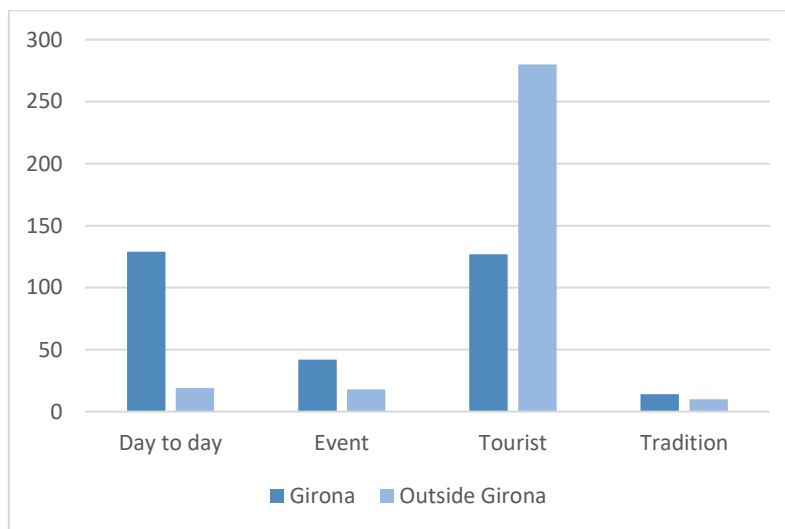
SOURCE: Own elaboration

Graph 6. Night situations
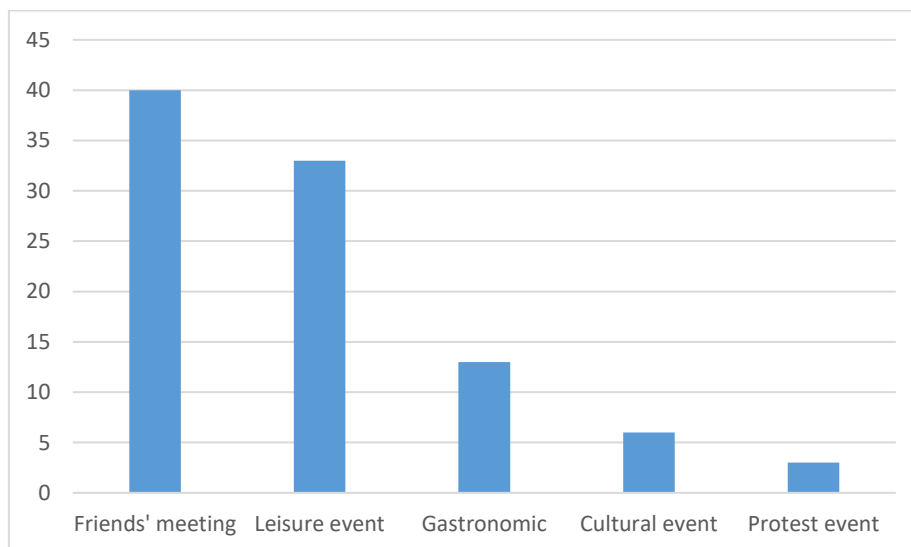
SOURCE: Own elaboration

As previously shown, *tourist* and *day to day* situations were the ones appearing more in students' pictures. Therefore, it has been considered appropriate to have a deeper look into these types of situations to know better which kind of tourism exchange students show to be doing while their studying abroad time and as well which are the daily activities that they do and decide to show online. The results show that most of the *tourist situations* are given in cities, so they promote cosmopolitan tourism, followed by natural tourism and cultural. *Sun and sand*, *active* and *snow tourism* were barely shown in pictures. Regarding the daily situations, *friends' meetings* stands out from the other type of situation. This could mean that students tend to show that doing an exchange involves meeting a lot of people and having time with new friends, they show it is not an experience not to live alone but to share with other people. The next category is *gastronomic situations*, which most times are also shared with more people, and later followed by s*tudent* and *sport situations*. Considering that one of their main reasons to do student tourism, according to the literature review, it is to study in another country, it is understandable that *student situations* are in the top 3 of *day to day situations*.

Finally, a clarification has been made considering the location where the pictures were taken, rather in Girona city, the *settlement* of the students, or outside Girona. Surprisingly, the data shows that *day to day* and *tourist situations* were almost in same numbers in Girona city and when comparing the information with the number of pictures taken and published outside Girona there is a clear difference. While within pictures taken outside Girona, there are more *tourist situations,* there are more *day to day, events* and *tradition situations* inside Girona than outside. This confirms that exchange students showed they felt Girona as their home and as a place to participate in what locals do, bringing the local lenses, while outside Girona they were more focussed on discovering things from a more touristy point of view.

2.3 Behaving as vacation tourists

As it has been seen, some of the situations shown in pictures were *tourist situations*. However, when taking pictures, do exchange students behave as other vacation tourists? This study has also analysed if the pictures taken were pictures taken of the traditional objects or areas and from the typical perspectives that other tourists would.

Going back to the hermeneutic circle theory, when tourists travel to a destination, they look for the images they previously created in their minds before going there and then they capture them with their cameras and show them to the world to justify they have been or lived some experiences (Urry, 1990). Therefore, do exchange students change the hermeneutic circle by showing other points of view of the destination or do they just exactly reproduce the same pictures they previously saw? The results show that exchange students do reproduce the same type of images published in travel brochures or that most represent a destination from a tourist point of view, what in the study refers to *typical tourist image*. However, pictures taken in Barcelona and other destinations

from outside Girona do tend to reproduce this type of pictures. On the other hand, pictures taken in Girona city tend more to be done from alternative perspectives and the fact that there are more locals appearing in Girona pictures affect as well to the image transmission of the destination.

Other information found in the collected data shows that in most of the *typical tourist images* or nobody or just few people were appearing on them, representing that this type of pictures was projected from a romantic point of view. When referring to the type of landscape appearing in them, in more than half of the *typical tourist images* the landscape was urban, probably because in most of the pictures showing *tourist situations*, those situations were representing a cosmopolitan type of tourism.

Graph 7. Number of people appearing in typical tourist images
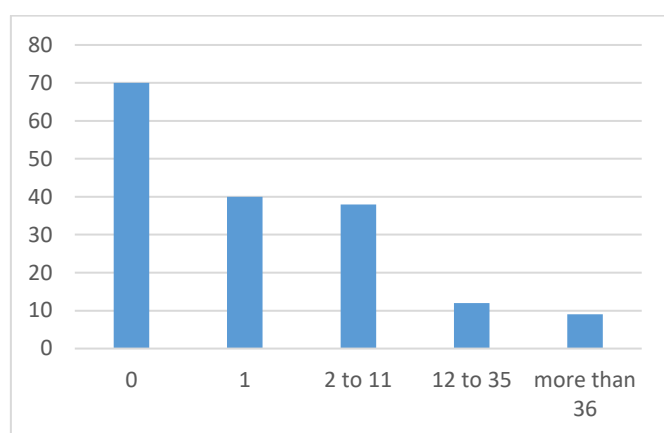
SOURCE: Own elaboration

Finally, the types of experiences shown in those *typical tourist images* do not match with the previously shown results about how are the experiences of exchange students during their time abroad. Therefore, a difference has been seen between the *typical* and *non-typical tourist images*. On the one hand, in the *non-typical tourist images*, exchange students show the experience of student mobility as a manner of meeting new people and sharing moments with new friends. However, in most of the *typical tourist images*, just the student itself or other tourists appear. Out of the 139 pictures that are *typical tourist images*, in 74 of them appears the student itself, in 40 other tourists and just in 18 their friends.

Table 2. Type of people appearing in typical tourist images

Student	74
Tourist	40
Friends	18
Locals	7

SOURCE: Own elaboration

2.4 The clock never stops

After analysing if exchange students behave or not like vacation tourists when taking pictures, another question arises. Do exchange students that go to Girona behave the same during their whole trip while taking pictures? This section aims to give an answer to this enigma as it affects as well to the transmitted image of the destination, as it may vary from one month to another.

In order to be able to give trustful results, these ones have been treated in relative numbers, considering if the pictures were taken at the beginning, during the middle course or at the end of their exchange and later dividing this numbers among the amount of pictures shot in every period of time. This will be presented in that way so to show the weight of each variable from the total amount of pictures from each period. The *beginning* pictures include those ones shot in August and September, the m*iddle course* pictures include those ones shot during the months of October, November and December and the *end* pictures include those ones shot during the month of January and beginning of February.

In the previous section, who was appearing in *typical tourist images* or which situations were shown in them has been explained. As some people could imagine, during the first months of the exchange it should be when *typical tourist images* should have more weight as students are discovering the destination for first time. However, during the whole exchange time, *Non-typical tourist* images overcome the typical ones, and the time when *typical tourist images* have a higher percentage in contrast with the non-typical is during the *end* of their exchange.

The previously done statement has an explanation that has been discovered through examining another variable from this study, which is the location where the pictures were taken. While during the *beginning* months of the exchange more than an 80% of the pictures were taken in Girona city and Girona province, during the *middle course*, the percentage decreased to 60% and to a 52% by the *end* of their exchange in contrast with the other destinations photographed in every period. This could mean that during the *end*, they were travelling to other locations that were not Girona. Therefore, they were portraying them in the same way other types of tourists would have done.

Other interesting facts have been discovered through analysing this variable. One of them is that at the *beginning* of the exchange time, the percentage of the pictures taken in Girona city were more than a 50% while during the *middle course* and at the *end*, Girona pictures did not reach the 50% in contrast with other destinations. This shows as well the evolution of how students show their exchange experience, as at the *beginning* they show they are discovering their main destination, while during the *middle course* and at the *end* they tend to show more they are living a multi-destination travel experience, by showing they are visiting other places as well. Therefore, the percentages show that through the passing of the months, the percentages of pictures taken in

Girona city and province decrease. However, the percentages of pictures taken in the rest of Catalonia Spain and Europe increase progressively, with the exception of the case of Catalonia, that decreases again during the last months of exchange, as it can be seen in the following graphic.

Graph 8. Evolution of the pictures' locations
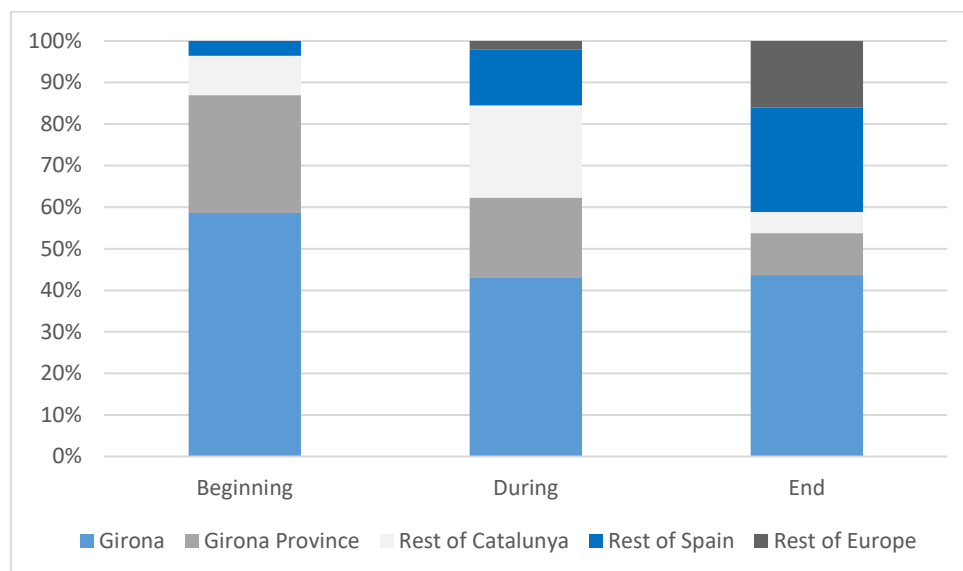
SOURCE: Own elaboration

Moreover, concretely in the case of Girona, an interesting fact is that the percentage of pictures taken in the place of residence of the student increases from the *beginning* to the *end* of their exchange time. Therefore, it goes from a 3% of the pictures taken at the *beginning* of the period, to a 9% during the *middle course* and a 22% at the *end,* being in the last two the location from inside Girona where more pictures were taken. This could mean an evolution of the pertinence feeling students had towards their new home in Girona along their stay and considering that most of the pictures taken in the place of residence of the students show friends meetings, this statement could demonstrate as well that students show that their friends' relationships become tighter as time passes.

The previously mentioned results can be confirmed as well when having a look at the percentages of the number of people appearing in pictures from every period, taking into account that in most of the pictures where *2 to 11* people appear, they are groups of friends. In the case of pictures with no people appearing, the percentage decreases as time passes, while the percentage of *2 to 11* people appearing in pictures increases and has got higher percentages at the *end* of the exchange pictures.

Contrarily, in the case of the situations shown in pictures and appearing elements, they do not follow any differentiation along the time. In all periods, *tourist situations* predominate and are followed by *day to day* situations and *natural* and *architectural elements* have higher percentages than other elements as well in the three time frames.

To conclude, it can be said that some results found in this section follow the pattern of results shown in other sections regarding the experience of being a student tourist. Therefore, after doing the analysis of the evolution of the pictures posted, it can be said that exists an evolution of the pictures regarding some features, like the location where the pictures were taken, the number of people appearing in them or the type of pictures posted, if they were rather *typical tourist* images or not. To that end, the fact of showing to be living a travel experience and meeting new people suffer an evolution during time, while other aspects like the situations shown or the elements appearing in pictures do not.

Table 3. Evolution of typical tourist images

	Typical tourist image	Non typical tourist image
Beginning	27%	73%
During	26%	74%
End	33%	67%

SOURCE: Own elaboration

2.5 Colouring social networks

Having seen what do pictures show beyond appearances, this section aims to go deeper in what do pictures transmit from a more subjective point of view, but considering a theoretical background from other studies, like in *El patrimoni cromàtic de la costa brava* , that have worked with these specific matters as well, colours and feelings. First of all the results will show which are the feelings the main characters from the pictures appear to be undergoing and later on which feelings can the analysed pictures transmit thanks to the colours they have.

In order to know which feelings do students show in pictures thanks to the people appearing in them it is relevant to know which kind of pictures were posted. From the extracted results, it can be stated that most of the pictures posted were rather a panoramic view and a portrait, a picture of an object and a portrait, a portrait itself or a selfie, so types of pictures where people were appearing. However, in most of the pictures from this study there was no people showing emotions, being most of them panoramic views plus portraits.

The emotion that was most showed in pictures was happiness, which was shown in more than a 35% of the total number of the analysed pictures. This statement, together with the previous one, could be considered controversial when having a look at the results shown in the previous sections. As stated, being a student tourist means living a complete experience and experiencing new situations while discovering one or more destinations and meeting people. Therefore, one could think that the feelings shown in pictures would involve more excitement, like fun, admiration or curiosity. However, in

most of the analysed pictures people are not showing emotions or showing just happiness, maybe because they filtered and selected carefully which pictures they wanted to post online, so it can be possible that there are differences between what they want to demonstrate and how their experience actually is.

However, students can not control every aspect of their pictures and in occasions they even do not realise what they are transmitting. One of these situations could be when observing at the colours they have. As stated in the literature review, colours can be very powerful when defining the identity of a destination. For this reason, the following results are focussed on showing which are those colours for the main destinations visited by the students during their exchange time.

It has been observed that the main colours representing each destination visited by the exchange students in most situations has got a direct relation with the type of elements that are more common from every location. To start with, in Chapter 1 it was seen that the elements with a higher percentage of coverage in the city of Girona were *student, architectural* and *cultural elements*. Consequently, the colours appearing the most in Girona are warm colours like orange, brown or pink and beige, some of the most representative colours from *architectural, cultural* and *student elements*. However, when having a look at another Catalan city, Barcelona, the data changes considerably. Even if *architectural* and *cultural elements* coincide as well on being the most present types of elements in pictures together with *religious*, the chromatic heritage from Barcelona extends to a wider level and goes beyond warm and beige colours like in the case of Girona within the analysed pictures.

In the city of Barcelona, the only colour that outstands from the others is warm yellow. Following, there are different colours with lower percentages like white, red, cool yellow, green or black, a wide range of colours with no associations between them. Therefore, it can be stated that a specific rule does not exist when considering associations between colours and types of elements, because even if it coincides in the case of Girona, it does not happen the same in the case of Barcelona.

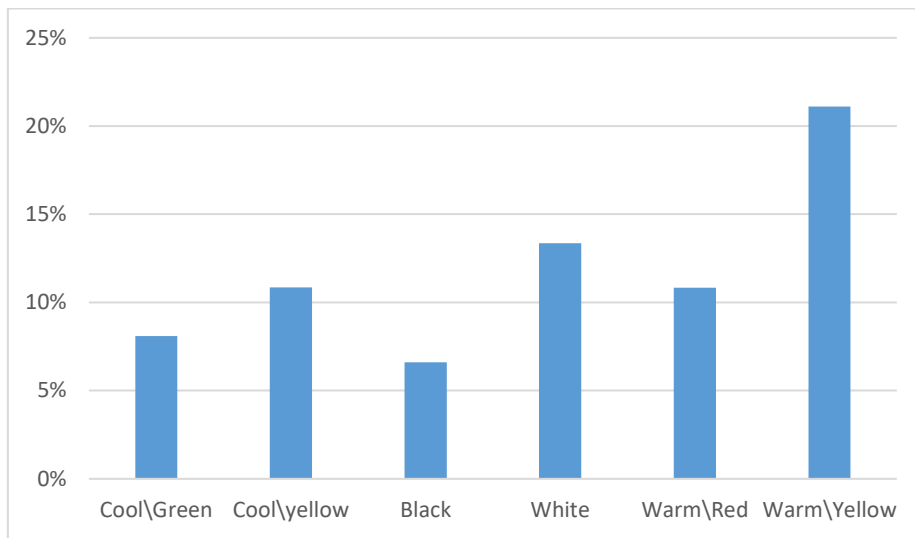Graph 9. Most predominant colours in Barcelona pictures
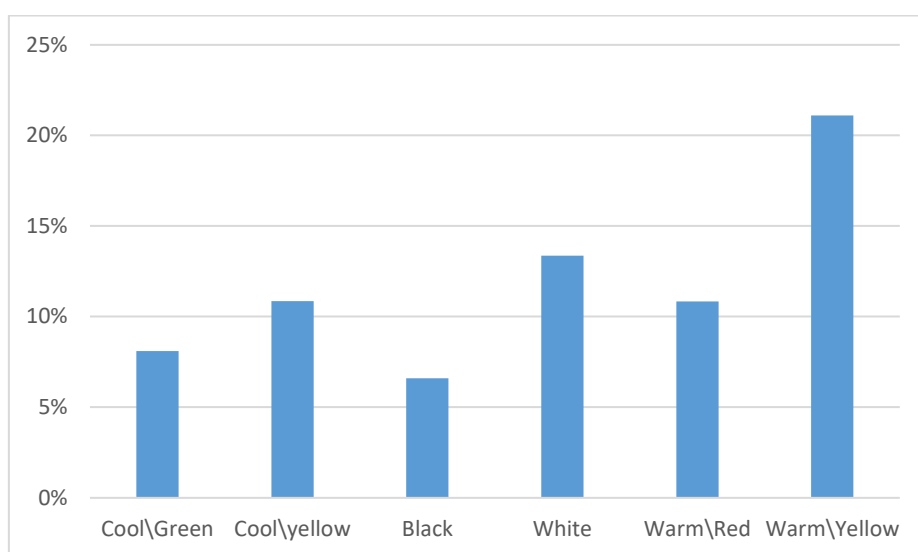
SOURCE: Own elaboration

When moving to Costa Brava, the chromatic heritage from the analysed pictures is very different from the ones previously expounded. In Costa Brava, more than a 50% of the colours prevailing are cool colours and the most shown are cool grey, with a 26% and blue, with a 21%. The rest of the most common colours from Costa Brava are silver, white, beige and brown, so none of them is a warm colour. As stated in Chapter 1, the most predominant elements from Costa Brava are *natural* and in this case, a relation exists as well. Some of the colours coincide between the most common in *natural* elements and the most common from Cost Brava, which are silver and cool grey from the pictures posted by the exchange students.

At this point of the study, it can already be seen that there is a difference between the chromatic heritage of different cities and of different areas, like in the case of Costa Brava. However, it has been studied as well if there are differences between specific locations from Costa Brava. The comparison is done between two of the most cities portrayed by the analysed exchange students, Cadaqués and Lloret de Mar. Even if it might seem that the colours from their pictures are very similar, the case is that in Cadaqués, the colours that appear the most in pictures are warm yellow, white, cool yellow, red and green, while in Lloret de Mar, the most predominant colour was blue, followed by beige, silver and grey. From this finding, it can be deducted that not all Costa Brava destinations have got a similar chromatic heritage and that Cadaqués has got its own, independent of being a coastal town. However, these results are understandable when considering the main attraction point from Cadaqués, apart from the sea, which is its landscape with white houses. Contrarily, the colours that appear more in Lloret de Mar pictures match more with the chromatic heritage of Costa Brava, due to the importance of blue, grey and silver.

Graph 10. Most predominant colours in Cadaqués pictures

SOURCE: Own elaboration

Graph 11. Most predominant colours in Lloret de Mar pictures
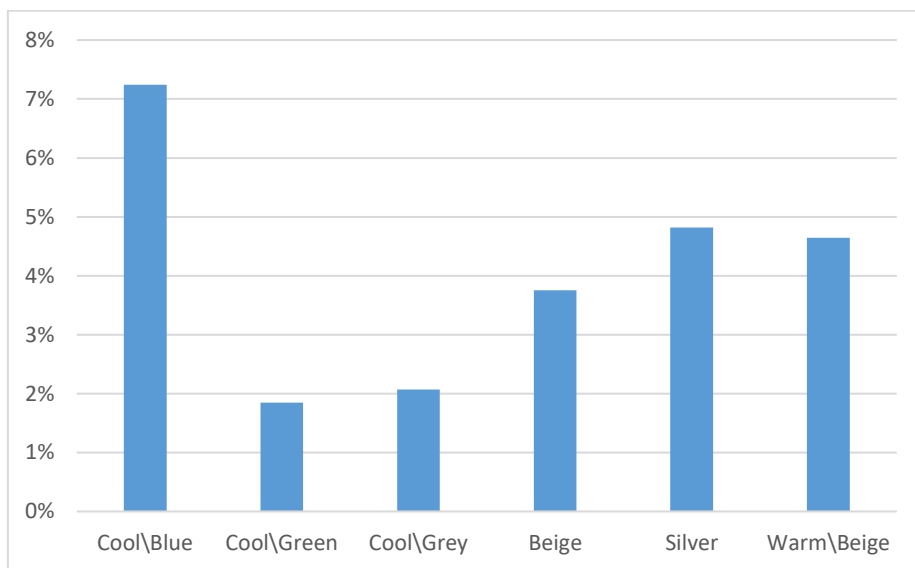
SOURCE: Own elaboration

Finally, another comparison has been found interesting to do, which is between two destinations very portrayed by exchange students and famous for their natural heritage, even if each of them has got different characteristics, Costa Brava and Andorra. As it has been seen, grey, silver and blue are three of the main colours appearing in Costa Brava pictures. It could be evident that Andorra's colour heritage may vary from Costa Brava due to its different location. However, the most common colour from its pictures were silver, followed by white and grey, which coincide with Costa Brava most common colours. In lower proportions, other colours that appear most in Andorra pictures are black, blue and green. It has been found surprising that even in Andorra and Costa Brava *natural elements* prevail, in none of them the green colour was one of the colours

appearing the most, as from the *natural elements* identified in pictures, more than half of them were green.

Having seen the chromatic heritage of the most visited areas by the analysed exchange students, it is also relevant to understand other aspects from the posted pictures considering the types of colours they have. On the one hand, it has been found that depending on the time of the day pictures were taken, the proportions of the types of colours and their temperature changed. In that case, during mornings and afternoons, there were more bright and cool colours appearing than subdued and warm colours. However, in pictures taken during the sunset and night, more warm and subdued colours appeared. This statement confirms the theory expounded in the literature review, about the clear contrasts between warm and cool colours. On the one hand, it has been found that warm colours are more related to sunset and night, together with subdued colours, while cool colours are more present during times when there is daylight and consequently bright colours.

On the other hand, it has been analysed which colours do prevail depending on the layout in which they are found in pictures. According to Puig and Baraut (2013), a picture will appear to be more serene and pleasant if colours are distributed on harmony within a picture while otherwise, a picture will be more impressive for perceivers if colours are distributed in contrast. The analysis of the sample of pictures has led to assert that the colours that will cause impression when appearing in pictures will be mainly warm colours, like red, yellow or pink, while colours that will transmit serenity and calmness will be more neutral colours like silver, beige or grey.

Table 4. Layout of colours

Colour	Contrast	Colour	Harmony
Warm\Red	084%	Silver	081%
Warm\Yellow	080%	Beige	081%
Warm\Pink	074%	Cool\Grey	078%
Cool\Yellow	069%	Cool\Green	063%
Warm\Orange	053%	Grey	062%

SOURCE: Own elaboration

Finally, a last differentiation can be made regarding the types of colours appearing in pictures considering the type of landscape in which they appear. While in natural landscapes it is very clear that silver and cool colours are the most predominant, in urban areas there is no clear pattern about specific colours. This could be due to the plurality of elements appearing in pictures, as stated in Chapter 1 of the results, while in natural landscapes mostly prevail *natural elements*.

Once it has been seen which colours and types of colours prevail in pictures, how they are related to the destinations and elements, as well to the situations from the pictures

in which they appear, it is relevant to do a throwback to the literature review of this study and to the theory of Puig and Baraut (2013). Colours can be feelings transmitters. Therefore, even if students are not aware about this fact when publishing pictures online, they are as well transmitting feelings about the destinations they are visiting and about the experience they are living thanks to the tones of their pictures. Therefore, in those cases in which blue was one of the most predominant colours, like in Costa Brava or Lloret de Mar, students were transmitting feelings of positivism, loyalty, distance or immensity. Silver was as well a very popular colour, not just in coastal destinations, but also in Andorra. In those cases, students are showing dynamism, in this case, the dynamism of water, as in a lot of pictures water from lakes, rivers or from the sea was portrayed in silver. Moreover, this colour shows speed, modernity and elegance, together with a strong personality. These adjectives could now be said to be linked to the image of the aforementioned destinations, as colours are as well part of the destination.

In contrast, in the case of cities like Girona or Barcelona, the emotions attached to their predominant colours are far different. In the case of Girona, warm colours like orange, brown or pink are related to power, vitality and innovation in the case of orange. This one contrasts with the feelings of old ages of brown, and even brown could be considered as a not very valued colour in many occasions, in the case of the city of Girona it could be showing as well warmth and representing a cosy place. Finally, pink is considered as well a charming colour and it does not have negative feelings associated. A colour that does so is yellow. Yellow has been found to be the most predominant colour in the city of Barcelona. This fact has been considered surprising in the way that he colour yellow can be rather loved or hated. Therefore, in terms of promotion of the image of Barcelona, the fact that exchange students are commonly showing this colour can affect to the image of the city very positively or negatively. On the one hand, yellow can mean positivism, enjoyment, fun or entertainment, while in other situations can mean hate, jealousy or bad luck. In this case, it has been supposed that the analysed exchange students decided to portray this colour because of the first group of adjectives, considering as well the type of experience they are living. However, in some way it could be controversial if the people observing them from their computers understand the images differently.

To conclude, it can be stated that depending on the destination portrayed, some patterns have or have not been found. In the case of Girona, its chromatic culture is basically related to its architecture with warm colours. Costa Brava main colours, blue and grey, are related to natural elements from the area and exists a main difference between the colours prevailing in other destinations like Girona and Barcelona, even if Barcelona is as well a Mediterranean city. However, in this one the yellow colour is the main character, there is an inexistence of patterns in relation to the prevailing elements of the city and there is a big variety of colours appearing in Barcelona pictures. This might

be because of the diversity of the city in all aspects. Regarding the specific destinations from Costa Brava, their chromatic heritage goes along with the highlights of the place, like in the case of Cadaqués. Finally, it has been found surprising that even the green colour was the one representing more *natural elements*, destinations where nature was the main character, like in Costa Brava or Andorra, the green colour was not one of the most representative tones.

CONCLUSIONS

This project was aiming to discover which is the destination image that exchange students that go to Girona transmit through the pictures they post on social networks. Thanks to the investigations done from a selected sample of students and pictures, it can be concluded that exchange students that go to Girona not only transmit an image of Girona to online communities. They do so as well of other destinations, but what they most portray in pictures is their lifestyle and experience lived, enhanced by the fact of being student tourists.

Nevertheless, it has been discovered that not all the information shared is chosen by the students. There is a difference between what they want to transmit and what they are transmitting without being conscious of. For example, when taking pictures, students decide which elements to include in them, how many people they want to portray, which situations to show or which locations to share. However, it can be possible that the feelings they are actually sharing are unknown by the photo shooter if she or he is not considering that the appearing colours do make a difference when perceiving a picture.

Thanks to the elements appearing in pictures, it has been discerned that students were giving a lot of importance to architecture in all the destinations they were visiting. They did so by not only including *architectural elements* in a big number of pictures, but also by portraying them in big dimensions, something that did not happen with *people*, as they appeared in a big number of pictures but in smaller dimensions. However, other elements apart from the aforementioned contributed as well to constitute an online destination image, such as *natural elements* for Costa Brava and *student elements* for Girona city, which were given a lot of importance in pictures.

Therefore, it can be stated that a difference has been found on students' behaviour when taking pictures depending on the location in which they were shot. In the ones taken in Girona, students were behaving like student tourists, focussing in *student elements*, *people* and portraying a wider range of types of elements compared to the ones portrayed in other locations, where they were behaving more as vacation tourists. However, during the beginning of their stay, students were behaving more as vacation tourists in the city of Girona than during the rest of their stay. A clear example can be observed when looking at the number of pictures taken in their places of residence, which increased as time passed. Furthermore it has been seen that in the posted pictures students were showing Girona as their *settlement*, for the types of elements portrayed or the situations shown in their pictures. Girona was the only location where most *day to day, events* and *tradition situations* were shown. Contrarily, *tourist situations* prevailed more outside the city. Moreover, the perspective from most pictures taken in Girona was not what in this project is called a *typical tourist* point of view, and there were more locals than tourists appearing in the pictures taken.

All in all, it has been discovered that even being tourists, students showed to have a settlement, but visiting a lot of other places apart from their studying destination, Girona. Therefore, they were showing to have lived a studying experience, but also a travelling experience, by visiting other places, which in occasions was in Girona province, but was also in farther locations, outside Catalonia and even outside Spain. However, in those locations students tended to behave more as vacation tourists than student tourists, by portraying more *typical tourist* images than in the city of Girona, which was more portrayed from an alternative point of view, they were posing alone in them and showing more tourist situations than in Girona city.

As it has been seen until this point, the word experience has been commonly used. It can be stated that exchange students are showing a whole experience online. They are not only showing how they live a travelling experience, but a complete experience that involves travelling to multiple destinations, studying, knowing about a city like a local would, learning about its culture and being immersed in it, until the point that it appears to be their *settlement*. This experience involves as well meeting new people and having good moments with them, as shown in pictures.

Nevertheless, a differentiation needs to be done, as this experience is not the same during the six months stay. An evolution exists on some aspects of the published pictures, which means that the experience could be considered as a story, which begins in a manner and finishes in a different way. The travelling experience is demonstrated to suffer an evolution during time, as there is an evolution on the locations appearing in pictures. From the beginning to the end, the number of pictures taken in Girona mean lower percentages, while the percentages of the pictures taken outside Girona increase. This statement goes along with the types of pictures, less *typical* at the beginning than at the end, when more pictures outside Girona were taken.

This evolution could also be explained through were exactly from the city of Girona the pictures were taken. The number of pictures taken in the place of residence of students increases as time passes, demonstrating that the pertinence of feeling Girona as their *settlement* increases. Moreover, pictures taken in the place of residence of students mostly show *friends' meetings*, meaning that this complete experience of meeting new people and creating new bonds with other students suffers an evolution as well, maybe having tighter friend relationships at the end of their exchange time. This statement is not only demonstrated by where the pictures were taken, but also how many people was appearing in them. As time passes, the number of pictures with nobody appearing in them decreases, while the number of pictures with *2 to 11* people increases, so if considering that in most situations where *2 to 11* people appears, these people are friends, the previously done observation is reconfirmed.

Moreover, this study has demonstrated as well that there are aspects from pictures posted online that can be slipped by unseen when publishing them, but that can actually

affect the image of destinations, such as the colours prevailing in them. Colours can constitute a chromatic heritage for a destination, varying significantly for two destinations from a very similar area. This has been seen in the case of Cadaqués and Lloret de Mar, which are two municipalities from the Costa Brava but they showed to have differences in their chromatic culture, being most predominant white and yellow in the case of Cadaqués and blue and silver in the case of Lloret de Mar. The colours as well were representing the most predominant elements from a destination, like warm colours for a destination with a lot of architecture, like in the case of Girona city or cool colours for a destination where nature prevails, like in Costa Brava or Andorra. Moreover, at the same time, colours can transmit feelings about a destination and in this case, they have done so as well about an experience. For instance, even in the city of Barcelona the number of colours appearing was very varied and there was not a chromatic pattern, the yellow colour was outstanding from the rest, a surprising result when considering that the yellow colour can transmit rather optimism and happiness or hate.

All in all, it can be stated that the city of Girona was shown to be a city that outstands for its architecture and for being cosmopolitan, due to there was a high number of pictures where people was appearing. This architecture is the pillar of its image, because of its importance in number of pictures, in percentage of coverage and to the chromatic heritage of the city, which is constituted by those warm colours representing its architecture. However, for exchange students there were other elements that were relevant as well from the city of Girona such as *student* or *cultural elements*. They showed that the city is a place to visit, but also a place to live in, due to all the *day to day* situations they portrayed, which were mainly *friends' meetings* and moments to share while eating or drinking. Moreover, they showed Girona as a welcoming city, by portraying in a high percentage of pictures locals and their friends.

To conclude, this project has demonstrated that the fact of being an exchange student involves not only being a student tourist, but also a vacation tourist. Thanks to the pictures they published online, exchange students were showing to live a complete experience. This experience involved learning and knowing in depth about a city, Girona, and being immersed in it, even sometimes showing how to behave like locals. When being in the city, students were showing to practise student tourism. However, during the beginning of their stay and when visiting other destinations, they were behaving more as vacation tourists, living this experience by discovering new places and cultures. However, what will probably stay forever with them is the last component of this complete experience, which involves, no matter if it was in Girona city or in other destinations, the fact of meeting new friends and creating bonds with new people.

While developing this project, some questions have arisen and could be the beginning of future studies to be conducted. Due to logistics and technical matters, this project could not cover all of them, even if it has been though to treat them.

From a methodological perspective, it has been though that the following step for this project would be not only to analyse which is the image exchange students that go to Girona are transmitting online, but also which is the real impact that these pictures cause online. This could be done by analysing the reactions they generate or which kind of reception they have by the online users, by reading the comments or likes of pictures.

Furthermore, it could be investigated which were the purposes of the people posting the pictures or other affairs more related to what the student really wanted to show with them, as this project has only focussed on a visual part. It has analysed which is the global picture that is transmitted, which is the final online image that stays after such a travelling experience.

Besides, a differentiation could be made by having a significant sample from students from different countries, so to be able to investigate if the image exchange students are transmitting goes along with their country of origin. Due to the fact that the pictures studied were taken by 15 different students from 3 different courses, it has been considered that the sample was not numerous enough to do this distinction, even if it worked for all the other aspects that were analysed in this study.

On the other hand, from a conceptual point of view it could be interesting to do future research about other aspects related to the results found in this study. On the one hand, to investigate why did exchange students decided to visit certain destinations beside Girona, and not others. Was it due to accessibility, means of transport available, distances or excursions organized by the Erasmus Student Network? On the other hand, it could be advantageous to investigate if the tourist offer from the city of Girona is adapted to student tourists such as exchange students, considering the results found in this project and the fact that Girona is named a *University City*.

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