Pilgrimage in a Secular Age

Religious & Consumer Landscapes of Late–Modernity

Submitted by Jose Eduardo de Andrade Chemin Filho to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology in November 2011.

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Signature: .................................................................

University of Exeter • United Kingdom
In loving memory of Gabriel Pelizzari Chemin
(1990 – 2008)
whose journey ended so soon
Contents

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................................................. iii
Preface ................................................................................................................................................................. v
List of Illustrations ............................................................................................................................................... ix
List of Charts ........................................................................................................................................................ xii
Abstract .............................................................................................................................................................. xiii

Introduction: The Return of the Pilgrim ............................................................................................................. 1
Pathways of Europe: The Camino de Santiago as a Case Study • Pilgrimage Past & Present: Defining the Problem & Problems of Definition • Religious & Consumer Landscapes: Secularization, Religion & Consumerism at Pilgrimage Sites • Heritage and the Politics of Place; Pilgrimage & Social Theory: Moving Beyond Dichotomies • The Stages of the Journeys

Part I Pilgrimage in 21st Century Europe: History, Facts & Theory

Chapter 1 The Camino de Santiago: Re–inventing Tradition ........................................................................... 22
The Making of the Pilgrimage to Compostela • The Medieval Path to God: Motivations for Pilgrimage • The Modern Pilgrimage: Re–inventing Traditions

Chapter 2 Religious Tourism in Contemporary Europe ...................................................................................... 56
The South • Western Europe • Eastern Europe • The North • Agencies & Entrepreneurs

Chapter 3 Social Theory & the Return of the Pilgrim ..................................................................................... 89
The Sacred & the Profane: Central Debates in the Field of Pilgrimage Studies • Pilgrimage, Religion & Consumer Culture in Late Modernity: Moving Beyond Dichotomies • Movement & Place: A Dialectical Approach to the Study of Religion

Part II Tales from the Field: Pilgrim Stories on the Road to Compostela

Chapter 4 A Study of British Travellers on the Road to Compostela ............................................................. 117
A Personal Introduction to the Study of Pilgrimage • Methodology: Grounded Theory & Situational Analysis • Research Design: A Project in Three Stages • Research Validity & Interpretation

Eduardo Chemin
Chapter 5 Religion & Spirituality ................................................................. 157
A Personal Introduction to the Study of Pilgrimage • Methodology: Grounded Theory & Situational Analysis • Research Design: A Project in Three Stages • Research Validity & Interpretation

Chapter 6 Mind, Body & Soul: The Social Psychology of Healing ...................... 178
A Vicarious Act: Remembrance & Healing • Closure & Fulfilment of Vows • Uncluttering • Moving Bodies, Healing Souls: The Way Within & the Way Without

Chapter 7 Pilgrimage as Metaphor .................................................................. 201
The Finiteness of it All: Time & Meaning • The Pilgrim Ethos & the Spirit of the Way • Seeking 'Time Out': Escape & Refuge • We Never Walk Alone: Encounters & 'Disencounters' on the Road to Santiago

Chapter 8 Community, Performance & Sensation Seeking ............................. 221
Something Greater than Yourself • Characters on a Journey • A Moving Community • Finding Limits

Part III Pilgrimage in a Secular Age: Religious & Consumer Landscapes of Late Modernity

Chapter 9 The Return of the Pilgrim & the Social Construction of Meaning ........... 237
Producers of Meaning: From Local to Global • 'Glocalization': Media, Politics & Consumer Culture at Pilgrimage Sites

Chapter 10 Religious & Consumer Landscapes of Late–Modernity .................... 267
'Religious Consumerism': Experiencing Religion through Consumer Culture • Something Greater than Ourselves: Chains of Memory

Conclusions: The Pilgrim Ethos & the Spirit of Modern Pilgrimage ..................... 285
The Pilgrim Ethos • Pilgrimage & the Liminal Nature of Late–Modernity • Place & Memory: Anchoring the Self • Movement as 'Heterotopia': Mirroring Society • The Road Walked & the Way Ahead

Appendix A: List of Participants According to Order of Interviews ...................... xiii
Appendix B: Consent Form for Participants .................................................... xxx
Appendix C: Letter of Explanation to Participants ............................................ xxxiv
Glossary ........................................................................................................... xxxvi
References ...................................................................................................... xliii
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To all of you, thank you for the journey and... Buen Camino!

Eduardo Chemin

Berlin, July 2012
Preface

‘When at the first I took my Pen in hand,
Thus for to write; I did not understand
That I at all should make a little Book
In such a mode: Nay, I had undertook
To make another; which, when almost done,
Before I was aware, I this begun.
And thus it was: I writing of the Way...’

(John Bunyan, The Pilgrim’s Progress)

I remember when I set off on my first trip to Compostela. In my mind that was a unique journey; one that was never to be repeated. Several years later I am still travelling, still searching, walking on paths I could have not predicted nor avoided. This has been the most difficult yet rewarding of times. Such ambiguity suits well a phenomenon that is as varied and as complex as pilgrimage. For a start, nothing is what it seems. Landscapes shift day to day, reality and dreams conflate, spirituality gains new meanings, people become strangely close to one another, yet incredibly distant, lonely, happy and vulnerable. Days merge into one long narrative of personal encounters not always easy to understand or make sense of.

Movement and inertia are levelled into what one could describe as a ‘moving paralysis’. That is, the body may move continuously, yet the inner self is embedded in no time or place. Events change, the weather changes and landscapes mutate. Like magic people multiply and disappear, ideas spring to life and shift direction – constantly. Many have written extensive volumes about it, yet few were able to capture its meanings and certainly no one, as far I am aware, has been so close to a holistic explanation as travellers themselves. This is the central issue concerning the study of pilgrimages. It is an emotional experience, one that often cannot be described but which is often simply ‘felt’. To make matters more complex, the experience of walking the Camino de Santiago cannot be fully understood without reference to the ‘other’, those realms of consciousness and emotions that make what we term humanity, human.

Eduardo Chemin
Pilgrimage continuously transcends boundaries, not only of personhood and group but of time itself. It existed at the time when history was yet to be written, when the lights were yet to be lit. Now they are as present – and perhaps as necessary – as ever. Tribes were formed and, like dunes in deserts, shifted with the wind from place to place. Pilgrimages were performed then, and are still performed now. When tribes gave way to kingdoms, when kingdoms gave way to empires and when those gave way to nations, pilgrimages were still being enacted. Today we speak of the heritage of such places whilst attempting to protect them, to re-frame them, to own them and re-appraise their value. But what are such values, one may ask? What do such places represent? What are we attempting to protect or communicate? For one thing, these are no ordinary locales; no simple coincidences made of bricks, stone or bark. These are the sacred, the secular, the ludic, the old, the new, the ‘us’ and ‘them’. These places speak of the human and the animal in the human, the animal in us and the eternal need to move beyond our own self-imposed constraints. The Camino de Santiago is not a place more than it is an experience where time is not measured but accepted as a continuous flow of stories, tales and encounters, coincidences, humour and tragedies that make up the human condition – that make up the core of our lives. There is no other way to explain what happens in such a context than by referring to that which is ineffably transient and forever transcending the boundaries of societies, cultures, civilisation, or spirituality: memory.

In the course of this study I returned to Compostela, again and again, always aiming for nothing less than the Holy Grail, the essence of the experience, blindly believing it existed and arrogantly determined to touch it, to bring it back with me: the what, where, which, who and when of such kinetic flow of stories, memories and people. But needless to say, the closer I became to such relics, the more my vision was blurred and the less I was able to see it. I was momentarily blinded by the positivistic thinking I inherited, which, like mist in the early hours of a winter’s day, prevented me from seeing clearly; it confused my instinctive, primitive awareness and sense of place. In sum, this study made me more than aware of my own limitations, not simply as a professional researcher but also as a person who grew accustomed to use and think of rationality as the only way of making sense of the world. One cannot understand such history, such overwhelming impulse and enthusiasm for these places without accepting and understanding the emotional world that constitutes what we know as human existence, the poor condition of our lives, the hopelessness that grabs each and every one of us from time to time. Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to say that every element of
life is represented in such contexts: death, laughter, comradeship, solitude, devotion, emptiness, love, peace, destruction, misfortune, hate, agony, anxiety, happiness, envy, tenderness, care, good, evil, joy, sadness, the holy and the unholy.

I learned the hard way for I have committed numerous mistakes. Travellers I met over the years showed me, my colleagues and supervisors told me, my family and close relations warned me: about the dangers of moving too slow or too fast, of rushing into conclusions, or being too complacent about reality by attempting to place it inside that scientific objective mould. Balance, it seems, is the word. We are all searching for balance, to work, to play, to function as we ought to: the balance that is missing to integrate us all into one family. One of the participants in this research referred to it as the place where ‘...God has lowered the canopy of heaven’. People I met did feel closer to heaven, not necessarily because of religion, but because they felt they could touch the stars for a second. Caminantes are those who search for that balance, who look for that path, with the beauty of the stars above in their hearts because they saw it and they touched it. They are ready and willing to share their path, their way – with or without the God above.

By studying this subject I have stood at the shores of a vast ocean and, like everyone else, I was also overwhelmed by its immense presence. I was made to feel completely insignificant before that ‘something bigger than ourselves’, as another participant put it: the great chain of people, events and circumstances that give flesh, blood and a biting heart to the stories I found along the way. I am one more, one more amongst millions of others who went out there searching, turning stones, with a clinching thirst for the unknown secrets locked away in the dusty corners of those ancient buildings and pathways. I searched and I searched, but all I was left with was the place where I started. And as the Camino often suggests, my search was in vain, for I was not looking for a destination; I was looking for a direction. The real discoveries occurred when I put one foot in front of the other and headed West.

Now, if through this journey I arrived somewhere, if what I have come all this way to say touches anyone, does something for anybody, helps or provokes someone ‘out there’ then, as T.S. Eliot once said: ‘...what might have been and what has been point to one end, which is always present’.

Yet I do not intend to turn this study into an epic. Ernest Hemingway once wrote that only bad writers make the ordinary, the quotidian, into stories of epic proportions. Their purpose is to mystify their failures through jargon and dubious language. However the pilgrimage to Eduardo Chemin
Compostela is indeed an epic journey for those who undertake it, and I do not wish to hide its overwhelming power, its characteristic effect on people, from the page. I am no Hemingway or Eliot and I can only hope you enjoy this story as much as I have enjoyed researching and writing it. For me this is not the end of the road, but the beginning of a long journey.
List of Illustrations

Figure 1 Network of routes leading to the Camino Francés ............................................. 4
Figure 2 Bridge over the river Órbigo ................................................................................. 26
Figure 3 The Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela ........................................................... 28
Figure 4 Monastério de Santo Antón .................................................................................. 32
Figure 5 Typical view of the Way of St. James ............................................................... 41
Figure 6 Pilgrim Credential .............................................................................................. 42
Figure 7 Pilgrims camping at Praia de Mar de Fora ......................................................... 43
Figure 8 Walking pilgrim with a scallop shell and the ‘Tau’ ........................................... 44
Figure 9 Yellow arrow painted on a way mark ................................................................. 45
Figure 10 Hospitalero ........................................................................................................ 47
Figure 11 Pilgrims sharing a cena comunitária (communal meal) ................................... 48
Figure 12 Pilgrim hostel in Roncesvalles ......................................................................... 49
Figure 13 Services offered on the Camino .................................................................... 50
Figure 14 Pilgrim certificate in Spanish ............................................................................ 51
Figure 15 Pilgrim certificate in Latin .................................................................................. 51
Figure 16 Pilgrim running towards the sea at Cape Finisterre ....................................... 53
Figure 17 Finisterrana ........................................................................................................ 54
Figure 18 Pangia Evangelistria at Tinos Island – Greece .............................................. 68
Figure 19 Pilgrim making her way on her knees into Pangia Evangelistria at Tinos ...... 69
Figure 20 Monastery of Meteora ...................................................................................... 70
Figure 21 Young people taking part in ceremony at Taizé .............................................. 73
Figure 22 Crowds of pilgrims in Czestochowa, Jasna Gora (Poland) ......................... 79
Figure 23 Glastonbury Pilgrim Union ............................................................................. 81
Figure 24 Visitor to St. Birinus pilgrimage in Dorchester .............................................. 82
Figure 25 Tintern Abbey .................................................................................................. 84
Figure 26 Tourist or pilgrim? A Brazilian ‘turigrino’ ..................................................... 98
Figure 27 Example of conceptual mapping hand–drafted during fieldwork .............. 139
Figure 28 Some of the properties pertaining to the concept of ‘Healing’ ..................... 140
List of Charts

Chart 1 Number of pilgrims who received the *Compostelana* between 1986 and 2010 including the Holy Years of 1993, 1999, 2004 and 2010 .................................................... 39
Chart 2 Mass attendance at Fátima (Portugal) from 1992 to 2003 ........................................ 64
Chart 3 Reasons for being in Santiago .................................................................................... 120
Chart 4 Motivation for walking the *Camino de Santiago* ..................................................... 121
Chart 5 Combined motivations by cluster of shared motives .................................................. 123
Chart 6 Religious belief: Lourdes, Fátima, Glastonbury, Stonehenge and Santiago de Compostela ................................................................................................................. 124
Chart 7: Religious beliefs by denomination: Lourdes, Fátima, Glastonbury, Stonehenge and Santiago de Compostela ........................................................................................................ 125
Chart 8 Average of most important trends found amongst travelers ........................................ 126
Chart 9 Example of a conditional/consequential matrix .......................................................... 137
Chart 10 Some properties of concept ‘not a holiday’ ............................................................... 138
Chart 11 Factors influencing the popularity of the pilgrimage to Compostela ....................... 141
Chart 12 The ways in which people come in contact with pilgrimage ..................................... 239
Chart 13 A Representation of the Convergence of Fields Intersecting at the *Camino de Santiago* .................................................................................................................. 290
Abstract

In Europe and beyond, pilgrimage centres attract millions of visitors each year. This popularity has provoked a burgeoning academic interest in pilgrimage, and this thesis builds on this expanding literature. It emerges out of a dialogue between old and new forms of movement – a conversation that demands further research on the relationship between religious traditions and late–modern consumer culture, a dialogue made explicit through the study of pilgrimage.

Although this thesis pays attention to one case study in particular, namely the Camino de Santiago de Compostela in northern Spain, it draws on multi–disciplinary research in order to set a broader context. It reveals four motivational themes, derived from interviews with pilgrims on the road to Compostela. These I explore in depth through qualitative analysis, while at the same time taking note of parallel quantitative work concerned with the Camino de Santiago as well as other pilgrimage sites in Europe. Ranging from the search for spirituality to recreation, motivations are found to be the result of a conflation of meanings; they are ambiguous narratives, which very often include spiritual as well as secular aspirations. My findings suggest a de–differentiation of poles of meaning such as sacred and profane, movement and place, religion and secularity, community and individual.

In short, this is a methodologically diverse study which argues that, contrary to perception, traditional forms of religious rituals are not necessarily incompatible with late–modern consumer culture. Through consumer culture religious traditions are being revitalized. The renewed popularity of pilgrimage today demonstrates how some religious landscapes and spaces have remained important through political and religious movements, while others have been regenerated by literature, new media, specialist tourist markets, advertising and private enterprise. Finally, this study reveals a noticeable democratization of traditional rites, and the landscapes in which they take place. A very wide variety of groups and individuals visit them.
Introduction:
The Return of the Pilgrim

‘Every pilgrimage has a local and a regional history; responds more or less sensitively to a national history; and, especially in the case of the most important pilgrimages, is shaped and coloured by international, even world history’ (Victor & Edith Turner 1978:23).

Since time immemorial, people have looked for answers at places of power: places imbued with spiritual meanings. In desperation, in thanksgiving and in all festiveness, these places have become the material testimony of our human condition. Those who visit them are often called pilgrims and their journey, a pilgrimage. Today, in our secular age, and across the globe, millions of people go on pilgrimages. In the age of mobility and fast communications, this movement seemingly contradicts the culturally prevalent modern dictums of speed, efficiency and secularity. However, in all its variety, pilgrimage is but one form of movement pertaining to a wider phenomenon, so-called ‘religious tourism’ (Rinschede 1992, Tomasi 1998, 2002, Swatos and Tomasi 2002, Swatos 2006). Hence pilgrimage is considered within the broader context of a general movement of people towards places where some form of religious heritage is central to the occasion. It is only relatively recently that the relationship between religion and tourism has gained more focused attention (Vukonic 1996 and Stausberg 2011). This has occurred despite the growing importance of tourism for local and global economies, and the centrality of religious heritage and traditions in the development of tourist markets. More importantly, the study of pilgrimage offers a unique opportunity for us to tap into issues related to religion in late–modern Europe and its relationship to consumer culture.

Taking into consideration consumer trends and the secular ethos of modern European culture and politics, as well as a growing trend towards popular ‘unchurched’ religiosity (Davie 2000, 2002) and the new ‘progressive’ forms in which it appears (Lynch 2007), we must ask the following question: today, in our secular age, why do modern Europeans go on pilgrimages? Whilst this question focuses on the return of the pilgrim in popular culture (literature and other media), it also addresses issues related to wider political, economic and
socio–cultural contexts. These contexts have an effect on people’s perceptions and life–styles, and have, in my view, contributed to the rekindled interest in pilgrimage today. In order to illustrate this I pay particular attention to one European pilgrimage site as a case–study, namely *El Camino de Santiago de Compostela* (The Way of St. James of Compostela). Today the ‘Camino’, as it has become known, is one of the most popular pilgrimage routes in the world, appealing to a variety of people: from secular visitors to a variety of religious groups, in particular Catholics. Due to this multiplicity of meanings, my contention is that through places such as this, consumer practices and religion (old and new) form an organic relationship that challenges sociological categorizations. In doing so, the route invites new questions regarding the place of religion, and spirituality, in 21st century Europe.

**Pathways of Europe: The Camino de Santiago as a Case Study**

The selection of the *Camino de Santiago* as a case–study is justified not only by the ambiguity of its status as a tourist site and a religious shrine, but also by the mysticism of its history. For many centuries now, millions have travelled from a multiplicity of sites in Europe and overseas to the tomb of Saint James the Great. The location of the Apostle’s alleged final resting place was unknown until the 9th century when it was miraculously ‘rediscovered’. According to legend, the remains of the saint were found buried where now stands the city of Santiago de Compostela, the capital of the province of Galicia in north western Spain. Whether this should be read as myth, legend or history is an issue that should not concern us, since myth and history are not necessarily opposing binaries. What is important is that the movement towards this shrine rapidly became part of an already expanding pan–European network of pilgrim routes linking most of the major Christian pilgrimage shrines of Europe, which together form a network that maps the religious landscape of the European continent (see Vázquez de Parga et al 1948/1949, Davies and Davies 1982, Nolan and Nolan 1989, Frey 1998).

After a long period of inactivity, during the 1960s Santiago de Compostela was given renewed attention by the then Spanish government, which used the image of St. James as a powerful ideological symbol in the promotion of National Socialism. Later, through the 1980s and 90s, the pilgrimage again became the focus of a range of popular and institutional discourses propagated through specialist agencies (see Westwood 1997, Webb 1999). These included, for instance, supranational governmental and non–governmental institutions such as

Eduardo Chemin
the Spanish Tourist Board, the Council of Europe, the United Nations Educational and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) and the Catholic Church itself, to mention only the most important. It was in this period that the pilgrimage to Compostela was re–branded El Camino de Santiago (Frey 1998). This simple change in semantics, from a ‘pilgrimage’ to ‘Camino’, placed an emphasis on the route and the journey element of pilgrimage, rather than on the shrine of St. James as such. It exposed the rich historical roots of the pilgrimage, thus opening it up to a wider public that, through cultural tourism, came to benefit from the architecture, history and culture of the pilgrimage route. Partly as a result of economic incentives, the number of travellers going to Santiago – including those using non–motorised means of transport – has increased exponentially in the last thirty years (see chapter 1) making it one of the most important and successful cultural, economic and political projects in the European Union.

It is important to note that the name ‘Camino de Santiago’ usually refers to one particular pilgrimage route, namely El Camino Francés (the French Way – see figure 1). In reality, there is a multiplicity of other ‘foot highways’ which link Santiago to other religious sites of importance across Europe and beyond: from Jerusalem to Rome, Canterbury, Lourdes, amongst thousands of others less famous, although equally important, shrines. In France alone there are at least four main routes connecting historical pilgrimage sites to the Spanish part of the Camino Francés: from Paris, Vézelay, Le Puy and Arles. These are connected to the French Way via two mountain passes through the Pyrenees, which link the town of St. Jean Pied–de–Port (St. John at the Foot of the Pass) in France, to Roncesvalles (Roncevaux in French, meaning ‘Valley of Thorns’), which is the first Spanish village after the Spanish/French border. The other route, known as El Camino Aragonés, links the town of Somport (France) to Puente La Reina, an important medieval town on the Spanish side of the French Way, further west from Roncesvalles. Other routes derive from England (El Camino Inglés), Portugal (El Camino Portugués), and the south of Spain (La Via de La Plata). For those travelling on foot from St. Jean Pied–de–Port, the journey lasts for four to five weeks and extends for nearly 800 km, depending on the route taken. The main route itself is well signposted throughout – but only in one direction – with yellow arrows painted on rocks, trees, buildings, traffic signs as well as plaques and signposts bearing stylised shell symbols and the council of Europe ‘Milky Way’ logo: that is, a scallop shell turned on its side and sometimes circumscribed by the European Union’s circle of stars.
Figure 1  Network of routes leading to the Camino Francés


The great majority of modern day pilgrims begin their journey either at Saint–Jean–Pied–de–Port or 27km further down the route at Roncesvalles, although they may also cover much longer distances. Some, for example, may start their pilgrimage from home, wherever home may be: a trip which could take months, even years. Most Camino pilgrims, however, will, at some point or other, join the French Way, which traverses a great variety of culturally rich regions and provinces in Spain. These span Navarra (Basque Country), the wine producing region of La Rioja, the historical region of Castilla y Léon and, finally, the verdant landscapes of (Celtic) Galicia. Due to the diversity of its regions, the Camino offers modern tourists, pilgrims or travellers (however defined) a variety of attractions: from wine and food tasting to cultural festivals, exquisite art, architecture, history, natural landscapes and a multitude of other tourist attractions and services. Accommodation and other tourist services vary widely in range: from luxurious Paradores Nacionales (a form of five star state–owned hotel) to the humble camping site, spiritual retreats or the cheap, unassuming and now abundant albergue de peregrinos (pilgrim hostels). Due to the vast area it covers, the Camino is ornamented by historical cities, stringed together by the pilgrim paths of Spain and fed by the legends of crusader knights, as in the real though almost mythological Knights Templar.
or the famous ‘El Cid Campeador’, both made famous by literature and film. Some such cities, towns or villages, have become important landmarks in their own right. Places like Pamplona, Puente la Reina, Estella, Logroño, Burgos, León, Astorga, Ponferrada, Sarria and, of course, the ‘City of the Apostle’ itself, have enough history and culture to attract a great diversity of visitors, independently of the Camino de Santiago (see Roseman 2004, Tate 2004). Many have served as a background for important historical events that are inherently linked to the development of European history and, consequently, its culture. People are often initially attracted to these places for the cultural value of the experience as much as for a sense of religious devotion.

In 1987 El Camino Francés became the first European Cultural Itinerary, due to its social and cultural diversity, natural and architectural landscapes, as well as the religious and historical importance of the route in its entirety. Furthermore, in 1993 the Camino was added to UNESCO’s World Heritage List. These were important developments that changed the fortunes of the pilgrimage by transforming it into a cultural tourist itinerary. Many who walk, cycle or ride to Compostela today do so for a variety of motives not always connected to the religious traditions that shaped the pilgrimage. The Camino is an attractive location for those seeking an alternative to the so-called ‘city break’ or for those in need of respite from urban life. Due to its location, it is particularly attractive to Western Europeans, who are enticed by low accommodation and travel costs, ease of access, the pleasant rural scenery and picturesque villages and the natural heritage of the route, the chance to meet other people, or even to lose weight.

People arrive from countries as far away as Australia, New Zealand, U.S.A., Brazil and Japan. Hence, the Camino is also part of international tourist flows, which see an increasing number of people, from a variety of backgrounds, continents and cultures, joining pilgrimage trails, shrines and other places of religious significance, as a way to experience European culture. Due to their particular history, however, pilgrimage sites, shrines and routes, like the city of Compostela and the Camino in its entirety, are also important religious hubs, or spiritual centres. As such they attract a growing number of religiously motivated visitors and others who seek ‘leisure with meaning’ (Frey 1998: 254). The importance of Santiago de Compostela as a place of religious devotion is well illustrated by the advent of Holy Years (Año Santo Jacobeo in Spanish or Ano Santo Xacobeo in Galician). These are celebrated
every time the 25th July (St. James’ day) falls on a Sunday\(^1\). During this period the Catholic Church rewards travellers with a plenary indulgence absolving believers of all sins. The famous Holy Door at Santiago’s Cathedral is opened and visitors flood in to pay their respects to St. James the Apostle. Holy Years are examples of highly organized and stylised events where a dual movement occurs: that is, a bottom–up (grass–roots) popular belief (local and otherwise) in the doctrinal quality of such festivities as well as a top–down (institutional) movement organized by the Catholic Church (see Dennett & Quaife 2004, for the history of Holy Years). There are also a variety of non–Catholic agencies and charities that help to support, organize and give incentives to this movement, such as American, Dutch, British and German Evangelical groups, to mention only a few. The Camino also attracts a number of other individuals and groups, who contribute to the growth of visitors throughout the year: from Protestant and Catholic prayer groups, tourist agencies specializing in ‘pilgrim tours’, denominational off–shoots of the church, youth groups, charities and pilgrim associations, to a variety of associations and federations of ‘friends of the Camino’. There are also several non–denominational groups that organize and mobilize visitors to Compostela by coach, car, train, sea and air.

Furthermore, Holy Years are particularly important for the Spanish people, who make up the highest percentage of pilgrims on the Camino. They are followed by Germans, French and Italian pilgrims\(^2\). At the same time, and despite many similarities to other Catholic pilgrimage sites in Europe on the Camino, there exists a marked differentiation between walkers and other travellers. The renewed emphasis on self–sufficiency – Camino pilgrims tend not to use motorized transport – creates a culture of merit that has become particular to this pilgrimage. This serves, somehow, to set it apart from other pilgrimages, such as the pilgrimages to Marian shrines, where a focus on the pilgrimage centre takes precedence over the journey (see Hermkens et al 2009, Harris 2010 and 2011). Visitors, in their totality, come to Compostela to experience the special qualities of place through movement – for instance to experience the spectacle and religious effervescence of the rites involved, to receive indulgences, to feel part of a wider community, for the aesthetics of place, devotion and to

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\(^1\) Holy Years occur every 6–5–6–11 years. For example, the most recent Holy Year was celebrated in 2010. It was preceded by the 2004 celebration and before that a holy year took place in 1998, 1993 and 1982. Therefore the next Holy Year will be celebrated in 2021.

\(^2\) Number of pilgrims according to nationality can vary depending on the year. For instance in 2010 nearly 70% of pilgrims were from Spain (usually the highest proportion of Spanish pilgrim come during Holy Years) whilst in 2009 that number was 54%.
get closer to God, in the hope of experiencing healing and a variety of other motives which I explore in depth in part II.

Pilgrimage Past & Present: Defining the Problem & Problems of Definition

The origins of the *Camino de Santiago* can be traced far back in history. Because of this, a number of modern accounts of this movement contrast the attitudes of modern travellers with that of medieval pilgrims. Implicit in these narratives is the often assumed secularity of modern travellers, as opposed to the devotional character of the medieval pilgrim and his mission. Surely the perils of walking a pilgrimage route in medieval Europe are hardly comparable to the comfortable ways in which we travel today. The frame of mind of the medieval pilgrim and the socio-cultural forces that prevailed upon him/her also differ from the forces that govern modern life (De La Peña Sola 1993). Despite such obvious differences however, some motivations stubbornly transgress ideas of space and time.

More precisely, pilgrim stories written centuries ago still find resonance with modern travellers who now incorporate ancient symbols like the scallop shell, the staff and the pilgrim passport, as an essential part of their experience. Some of the motives, such as the search for healing, also confront us with the persistence and universality of the human condition: that is, our position before nature, resistant as it is to the passing of time and notwithstanding the multitude of technological advancements occurring in medical science. Healing is not the only motivation for pilgrimage. Through inductive (ethnographic) research conducted along the *Camino Francés* (over the four years in which I studied the site), I encountered clusters of motives ranging from the need to escape a particular environment to holiday-making, the seriousness of religious devotion and the need for healing. But this multiplicity of motives and meanings is nothing new. According to a number of historians, motivation for pilgrimage in medieval Europe was, to a certain extent, as varied as today (Sumption 2003). Thus, in this investigation, I focused primarily on the new meanings given to pilgrimage, for these are inextricably intertwined with a range of contemporary issues pertinent to the consumer and religious practices that are particular to our age.

Evidently, as I move from medieval history to the present day, a constant reference will be made to terms such as ‘late–modern’, ‘modern’, ‘modernity’ and ‘modernist’ as representing

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3 Modernization actually means the sum of the processes of large–scale changes through which certain societies acquire the economic, political, social and cultural characteristics considered typical of modernity (see
distinct socio–cultural, political economic, even artistic, developments. By that however, I do not mean that the present is necessarily different from what has gone before. Rather, by ‘late–modernity’ I mean a time and place where the continuities between past and present are de–constructed and re–constructed in a variety of forms and rhythms as a constant re–interpretation and re–imagining of past epochs. As in previous periods when, according to some historians, traditions were also ‘invented’ (Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983), the reference to late–modernity describes specifically the enhanced and dominant form of consumerist tendencies which are peculiar to this day and age. Raphael Samuel (a Marxist historian) once made the compelling case that the past infuses contemporary popular culture (see Samuel 1994, 1998). I follow on this argument as a way to expose the mechanisms by which the practice of pilgrimage has simultaneously been transformed to accommodate modern tastes, a practice which was nevertheless kept within the boundaries of traditions for the benefit of a consumer culture which feeds from nostalgia and romanticism. In this sense the manifestation of history in popular culture is compelling, seductive, strange, contradictory and ethereal and pilgrimage – as a material representation of history meeting consumer culture through mass tourism – in my view, symbolises such ambiguity.

Furthermore, I also make extensive use of terms such as ‘religion’, ‘tourism’, ‘pilgrimage’, ‘heritage’, ‘secularization’ and ‘culture’. These should be read as signifiers rather than givens. That is, such terms come as shorthand for vast and complex symbolic and objective systems that are, often, too complex and varied to be described accurately every time they are used in different contexts. Although I do offer workable definitions throughout the text, these must be read against the context in which they are meant, for it is clear that definitions often imply ideological stances. For instance, I refer to the term ‘pilgrimage’ as a phenomenon that encompasses both explicit as well as implicit forms of emotions, sentiments and ideologies often framed by notions of religion, spirituality as well as consumer practices of assumed secular origins (Bailey 1998). Hence in trying to understand this phenomenon in a more

Martinelli, 2005). These characteristics acquired their meaning in the 18th Century even though its origins go back many centuries. The late term modernus derives from modo (Lat.), which means ‘now, recently’, and dates back to the end of the 5th Century. It was used in an antinomic sense compared to antiquus (Lat.), to contrast the new Christian era with the pagan antiquity. More generally, it was a way of describing and legitimazing new institutions, new legal rules, or new scholarly assumptions. Thus from its very beginning the term modern in Europe, carried a ‘normative implication as it implied a depreciation of the old and traditional’ (Martinelli, 2005: 6). The Enlightenment and the industrial revolution, powered a new way of thinking, the certainty of technological progress, which at the same time launched the concept of modernity. ‘It is exactly this concept of time and of history that is modified in modern culture in the course of the next century, by virtue of the great political and industrial transformations that altered the concept of revolution and gave concrete substance to the notion of progress. It is only then that the concept of modernity establishes itself completely’ (Martinelli, 2005: 7).
holistic manner, ‘pilgrimage’ becomes an elusive term which, admittedly, I have had to resort to metaphors in order to understand. Equally elusive, however, are definitions of tourism. For example, in John Urry’s work (2007) we find that tourism is ‘the movement of people, ideas and information from place to place, person–to–person, event to event’ (p.12). Also for Nelson Graburn (1983a) tourism is ‘...a ritual expression – individual or societal – of deeply held values about health, freedom, nature and self–improvement, a re–creation ritual which parallels pilgrimages and other rituals in more traditional, pervasively religious societies’ (p.15). In other words, tourism cannot be simply defined as an economic phenomenon since it involves a complex array of socio–cultural, political and cognitive structures and attitudes; and the same applies to pilgrimages.

To be a tourist, a pilgrim or a traveller, is to be part of the modern world; it is to enter a particular state of mind. Freedom of movement has become a taken–for–granted individual right, at least in developed wealthy nations where rights concerning allocated leisure time have been secured for several decades. This is a right that is emphasized by culturally normative discourses that re–enforce the educational and therapeutic benefits of travel, messages that are disseminated through various media channels. In turn, consumer culture itself is regarded as a system in which consumption becomes a set of behaviours dominated by consumption as an end in itself. People live to consume products, places and experiences that are often completely detached from who they are, their history or biography. It is a system in which the transmission of existing cultural values, norms and customary ways of doing things is based on the exercise of free will, thus choice and the needs of individuals become paramount. Consumer culture is bound up with ideas about capitalism, of course, but most importantly with modernity. It is assumed that in this culture people are not governed by tradition but by a multiplicity of meanings, the substance of which is dictated by media, fashion (Featherstone 2007), commercial interests and politics (Corrigan 1997, Slater 1997, Aldridge 2003). More importantly, consumer culture is comprised of spaces where the sign value of goods takes precedence over the needs of individuals and the satisfaction one may derive from the consumption of food, time, movement, places and spaces (see Baudrillard 1997). In this light, tourism, and more importantly for us, ‘religious tourism’, becomes symbolic of such culture.
Religious & Consumer Landscapes: Secularization, Religion & Consumerism at Pilgrimage Sites

At a glance, the rekindled popularity and institutional appropriation of places like Santiago de Compostela seem at odds with classic sociological theories of secularization (see Beckford 2003, Turner 2010, 2011). In such theories, secularization is the process whereby the socio-cultural and political power of religious institutions and ideas decline as a consequence of the modernist project. Secularism as an ideological construct, as opposed to secularization as a process, is represented by the advancement of instrumental rationality in the form of scientific knowledge and philosophical streams that see men, not God, at the centre of the universe (Smith 2008). This is an ideology that has challenged religious institutions for centuries, gradually eroding religious belief and practice. It is therefore impossible to speak of the traditions implied by pilgrimage without addressing these issues.

The place of religion in secular societies has been the subject of much scholarly debate and contestation. Despite the dominant view that secularization is progressive and indeed endemic to European culture, it is clear that, in the same continent, new forms of religious movement have emerged and old ones have been re-invigorated. To a certain extent, this dual movement has come to influence the renewed appeal of pilgrimage sites and routes, an issue which brings pilgrimage closer to broader debates concerned with the place of religion in late–modern consumer contexts. For instance, it is evident that political movements have absorbed religious meanings and religious movements, political ones. This is well exemplified by book covers displaying apocryphal titles such as *God is Dead* (Bruce, 2002a) and which are now displayed next to new, challenging and provocative, publications such as *God is Back* (Micklethwait & Wooldridge 2009). But this debate also extends to issues about values, hence from *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (Hitchens 2007) to *God is Great, God is Good: Why Believing in God is Reasonable and Responsible* (Craig and Mester 2009). In short, religion has [re–]gained momentum not only in public (political) arenas but also at the level of the individual.

Thus in the 21st century, religion has become more visible than Thomas Luckmann could have envisaged (Luckmann 1967). Secularism, an apparently universal (almost unchallengeable) concept is now seen as a consequence of the intricacies of history within one small geographical part of the world: Europe (Davie 2007, Berger et al 2008). Similarly, it seems reasonable to suggest that secularization is not a progressive phenomenon but a
highly complex set of cyclical movements (Hunt 2002, Joas and Wiegandt 2009, Stevenson et al 2010, Brown and Snape 2010), which is composed of various rhythms and turn–arounds. These occur even within restricted geographies such as the city, in addition to entire countries, continents or cultures. In other words, it occurs in different levels from micro to macro (Dobbelaere 1999, 2000), and it is not an irreversible process (Berger 1990, 1999, Falk 2002). In the following, I therefore move beyond such dichotomies by presenting evidence of the interdependency between old and new religious and secular beliefs and practices, which are here exemplified by the performance of pilgrimage.

Pilgrimage centres and the routes that lead there – secular or religious, modern or ancient, circular or linear, local, national or international – are becoming more popular, not less. Although I focus exclusively on Christian pilgrimage, it is important to understand this rekindled popularity as part of an increasing recognition of pilgrimage as a form of late–modern expression of values and beliefs that are in fact in tune with consumer trends. The link between institutionalized religious pilgrimage and more ‘fluid’ so–called secular places and spaces is made by the often religious heritage that is part of the tourist experience. Through the performance of rituals, secular tourism can acquire religious or spiritual significance for those who take part, whether they recognize or understand the site as an official pilgrimage site or not (see Herrero Perez 1994). In addition to the major traditional pilgrimage sites across Europe, there are hundreds, possibly thousands, of pilgrimage ‘events’ that take place under the sociological radar (Swatos 2006: viii). These places blur our definitions of sacred and profane by absorbing the varied forms that are present in the late–modern imagination. It is true that by looking at statistics showing church attendance – in a variety of countries including the Catholic south – Europe is becoming ‘unchurched’ (Davie 2000). Yet pilgrimage sites and the masses that travel there every year are markedly absent from this picture (see Hamilton 2001, Hunt 2002, Bruce 2002a, 2002b, Voas 2003, Voas and Bruce 2004, Bruce 2011 for examples of such absence).4

Pilgrimage and other heritage sites can, and often do, gain prominence as places that, in one way or another, come to embody or symbolise a particular episode in a nation’s history. Sites of man–made or natural disasters, (an erupted volcano, a tsunami), a random accident like the

4 Despite putting forwards a ‘substantive’ definition of religion I find theorists like Bruce give little room for other phenomenon outside the boundaries of church–based worship. For instance, the terms ‘church attendance’ and ‘church membership’ are abundant in Bruce’s most recent work yet I have not found the word ‘pilgrimage’ or even ‘tourism’ in the index. The same applies to many other major sociological texts dealing with the issue of religion and secularization in the modern world – whether these are critical or supportive of the classical secularization thesis.

Eduardo Chemin

11
collapsing of a football stadium, civil wars or international conflicts provide some examples. Other sites are linked to long established traditions – often, although not uniquely, religious – such as Santiago de Compostela. Still these and other thousands of such places in Europe and elsewhere speak of heritage and of something universally human to be found amongst ancient stones and verdant landscapes. Even the final resting places of popular figures today are idealised and transformed into ‘shrines’ (Reader and Walter 1997). Indeed, tourists travel to see these places in ways that resemble the seriousness of the religious visitor when looking at buildings of religious significance in any tradition. And the reverse is also true with respect to the pyrotechnics used in religious ceremonies to entice new crowds to their domains. These include music and carnivalesque performances which may involve theatre, symphony orchestras, funfairs, liturgical ceremonies, popular music concerts and visits by film actors, film premiers and book launches, to name but a few.

Hence the rekindled enthusiasm for the Camino de Santiago should not be viewed as separate from a simultaneous ‘touristification’ and ‘sacralisation’ of spaces, for the Camino is but one prominent example of a historical religious tradition which is now embedded in a consumer context. Indeed, in the following I will make the case that places of traditional religious importance should not be considered in isolation from other sites that come to acquire ‘sacred’ status or which were in some sense ‘sacralised’, even though their existence is unrelated to any particular form of belief system. Sites such as ‘Ground Zero’ in New York City (Selby 2006), the Nevada desert where ‘The Burning Man Festival’ takes place (Gilmore 2006), Princess Diana’s Memorial in London (Davie 2006a, 2006b, 2006c), and the Hillsborough memorial in Liverpool – recalling one of the worst football disasters in Europe – should suffice as examples for now. Like well-established historical pilgrimage centres, these places have become engulfed by emotional displays (contested and otherwise) often spontaneously framed by religious heritage (or discourses) and institutional rites, which envelope them in a religious, often ethical, membrane.

**Heritage & the Politics of Place**

Despite the obvious importance of religion for the renewed enthusiasm for pilgrimage, it is imperative to highlight the wider economic and societal contexts in which this popularization takes place. For instance, since the 1980s European tourist markets have grown exponentially. This was not unique to Europe, but was part of a worldwide turn towards
tourism as a source of income – a trend that follows on from large-scale de–industrialization and global shifts in the geography of labour–based production systems. This has made tourism one of the largest industries in the world, worthy of a United Nations special branch: The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), which publishes statistics and disseminates information on global tourist patterns. Together with UNESCO, the UNWTO represents the growing emphasis on tourism and heritage as distinctively important for economic development, protection of cultural values and the preservation of history.

The importance of tourism and heritage is not only established by their contribution to local, national and supra–national economies. They are also crucial for the cultural, historical, religious and social understandings of who we are as members of a globalized society. Indeed in popular and political culture these spaces are portrayed as representing a human ‘universal’ condition. For instance UNESCO was born out of an effort to protect what it considers to be ‘World Heritage Sites’. These are places that (supposedly) embody the essence of human endeavour, locations that (presumably) possess universal qualities which transcend cultural differences – universal sources of knowledge and understanding. This focus on heritage is also enabling a ‘sacralisation’ of geography. That is, the ‘heritageisation’ of tourist ventures often frames locations that are important as spiritual and religious centres, sometimes for a variety of groups. As an example, we can take the definition of heritage established by the 2005 Council of Europe Faro Framework Convention on the ‘Value of Cultural Heritage for Society’:

Cultural heritage is a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions (Council of Europe 2005: Section I, Article 2 (a))

Supranational organizations such as UNESCO and ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) have been created to protect and study sites of heritage and cultural importance. But what exactly are we protecting that requires so much attention and care? What are the values that are involved in the perception of such sites as important to a particular culture, even to a universal (global) culture?

http://www.coe.int/lportal/web/coe–portal – accessed 20/07/10

Eduardo Chemin 13
The sacralisation of secular public spaces is an interesting theme that inevitably becomes important for the study of more traditional sites such as Santiago de Compostela, where a reverse trend is taking place: the institutional protection and political appropriation of religious heritage by secular authorities. In transforming a place, space or landscape into ‘cultural’ heritage, the local is elevated to the global. The same romantic ethos that underlies modern consumer cultures has an important role to play in this process. Today modern tourists seek places embedded in history, places denominated as ‘cultural heritage’ a term that extracts the religious or spiritual elements of place in order to make it acceptable to the secular visitor. In Roseman (2004) we find that Compostela moved from being an essentially religious centre to being a European city of culture. This is a distinction I only partly agree with, since the history and culture sought by visitors is often inseparable from the religious traditions which created these sites. Inevitably, people come to interact with such traditions, in innovative and creative ways (see also Scheer 2007). I will discuss this point at length as my argument develops.

There are of course many challenges which emerge out of this renewed interest in pilgrimage routes such as the Camino and its heritage. These ‘walking high–ways’ are rapidly transforming local economies around them, and these changes affect a great number of people. Small derelict villages in the Spanish and French countryside, places long deserted and ruined by rural exodus, are now springing back to life; other small villages and their inhabitants are being forced to increase prices, adapting to a growing tourist market over which they have no control. On the many routes that lead to Compostela, in the past two decades, pilgrim hostels have proliferated, restaurants, bars, cafes, transport links are re–opening or being created, and new residents have moved in. The Camino de Santiago has also brought much needed investment from the European Union into impoverished areas of Spain such as Galicia, in many ways transforming the lives of those living permanently in these localities.

To some extent, this movement has restored local pride in their work ethic and traditions. On the other hand, it has created conflict of interests at various levels: from local governments and the Church to local resident associations and tourists. Furthermore, and despite genuine popular belief in the doctrines represented by the pilgrimage, it is clear that the re–invigoration of such tradition and places also serve a wider (supra–national) political agenda based on ‘unity in difference’, one that is simultaneously Christian and secular. Here I am referring to the Council of Europe and its use of heritage as a point of unity in the creation of
European’ cultural cohesion. Through the European Union’s incentives, pilgrim routes (in particular those linked to Compostela) are being restored and a cultural membrane around these places is being constructed, one that (despite its Christian roots) aims at remaining neutral and secular.

To understand the network of European pilgrimage shrines and routes, and why they are again popular, one must reckon with all of these changes and incentives, as well as the actions of a great variety of groups, associations and organizations, from local to supra-national governments. These developments not only reflect a change in global economic systems but, most importantly, a change in consciousness. Postmodern ethics, it seems, are not depleted of morals and a preoccupation with social responsibility, religion or traditions for that matter. On the contrary, it is in the culmination of consumer capitalism that we see a redressing of issues postulated in the 1960s and ongoing debates about the nature and consequences of consumer culture, which find an expression in forms of ‘embedded movement’ (Nikolaïsen 2004). The meaning of leisure is changing rapidly. People now may choose to go on ‘working–holidays’, walking or cycling tours to raise money for charities, volunteering, travelling whilst exchanging skills and knowledge through community based charities and sustainability programs (Danis and Urry 2009).

In addition, pilgrimage sites, especially those that are embedded in the history of a nation, a people or transnational culture, also acquire political currency. Many popes including John Paul II and his successor Benedict XVI have made active use of Catholic pilgrimage sites in order to intensify and amplify their messages. This is the case too with Santiago de Compostela, as well as most Marian and Benedictine pilgrimage sites in Europe and beyond. In fact both John Paul II and his successor were dubbed by various media channels as ‘Pilgrim–Popes’6. This shows the importance of these places for the transmission of ideas, despite the fact that pilgrimage centres are arenas where doctrines are also challenged. The universalisms implied by such messages and places are contested by the different interest groups that come to form part of such rituals, including factions of the Catholic Church itself. On the other hand, messages transmitted through these places by political as well as ecclesiastical figures most certainly gain added value. Theologically, the attention paid by a pontiff to these remote places shows commitment from the Church to reach out to its pool of believers, otherwise scattered around the globe and away from the important spiritual centres

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of their faith. From a political (and secular) perspective, leaders and other prominent government figures may reach out to the popular concerns of the people by getting closer to the spiritual nerves of the nation. Furthermore, it is important to notice that this relationship between charismatic leaders and pilgrimage sites such as Compostela also affects the economy of such places and their surrounding geography (Lois–Gonzáles and Medina 2003).

Pilgrimage & Social Theory: Moving Beyond Dichotomies

Despite the multiplicity of meanings inherent in pilgrimage, ‘pilgrimage’ is a word that is (inevitably) closely associated with religion. In this light it becomes imperative to highlight from the start what I perceive to be one fundamental problem concerning the study of pilgrimages today. This is the idea that ‘religion’ should be juxtaposed, compared and contrasted to other supposedly non–related spheres of life. ‘Religion’, as ‘pilgrimage’, is a complex term that has somehow been simplified and extricated from the ‘experience’ of ‘being religious’ or ‘experiencing’ religious contexts. In this simplified form, one often used in the social sciences, the word ‘religion’ denotes a separation, a division, between different realms of human existence. That is, it is often contrasted to other things we do, the way we feel or act with regards to our daily routines, the places we visit and so on. One definition of religion which has been very influential, and which in my view has fed subsequent attempts to define it, is that offered by Emile Durkheim: ‘…a religion’, Durkheim states, ‘…is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and surrounded by prohibitions – beliefs and practices that unite its adherents in a single moral community called a church’ (2001:49 – italics in original). In this (social) form the word ‘religion’ becomes synonymous with a differentiation between the ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ realms. This is just one reading of Durkheim’s work, however, and one which in my view has been disproportionately applied to the study of pilgrimages. It is clear that Durkheim had much broader ideas about what constituted religion. So far, this aspect of his work rarely features in studies of pilgrimage, but, writing precisely a hundred years ago Durkheim thought that the religion of the future ‘…would consist entirely of internal and subjective states and would be freely constructed by each of us.’ (2001: 45).

More importantly still is the place Durkheim dedicated to ‘rituals’ in his analysis of religion and society. He famously attested to the effervescence of religious rituals and the symbolic

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7 The Elementary Forms of Religious Life was first published in 1912.
nature of the objects revered. He pointed to geographies that functioned as spaces for the performance of ‘piacular’, ‘mimetic’, ‘ascetic’, ‘oblation’, ‘communion’ and ‘commemorative’ rites (p. 219–300). Despite the often cited dichotomies his work supports, Durkheim also referred to such rites as specific forms of dealing with crisis, which ‘excludes neither animation nor joy’ (p. 289). In fact Durkheim dedicated a whole book (book III) of *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* to the analysis of the ‘ambiguity of the notion of the sacred’ (ibid). He saw what he termed ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ cults as drawing on different yet overlapping and interconnected forms of rituals in which ‘...as different as they can be, there is no discontinuity between them’ (2001:309).

Following this (more inclusive) reading of Durkheim’s work, my contention is that we must rethink the place of pilgrimage within the context of the sacralisation of tourist sites, as well as the ‘touristification’ of religious spaces within broader sociological contexts. Specifically we must reconfigure those often implied ‘dichotomies’ or theoretical opposites, found in the most prominent works in this field: *communitas* (Turner & Turner 1978) and the notion of ‘competing discourses’ (Eade and Sallnow 2000), movement (Frey 1998) versus roots (Cohen 1996, Basu 2004), and religious (Margry 2009) versus secular (Reader and Walter 1997). In what follows, I make more explicit this aspect of Durkheim’s work, since there is clearly a need to transcend theoretical extremes and move on to new territory. For a start we could rid ourselves of entrenched and misunderstood ideal–typical images of the tourist as necessarily secular, and the pilgrim as an obligatorily religious character. It is not in the chasing of theoretical certainties that I find a promising route. Rather, it is through the multiplicity of motivations and uncertainty of outcomes that we can come to understand the rekindled interest in, and indeed the importance of, pilgrimage today.

Pilgrimage sites – ancient and new – seem to embody a continuum with the past. Yet they also point to something thoroughly original. It is this ambiguous nature, this multiplicity of meanings found in pilgrimage sites and routes – circular, linear, and those with no particular emphasis on movement altogether – that pilgrimage must be understood. There may not be a coherent way to explain the process of pilgrimage and/or its significance either to the individual participant or to (wider) cultures, but I would like to suggest that the study of pilgrimage more broadly can provide the social scientist with a unique opportunity to study just how, in late–modernity, new and old communicative spaces are [re–]opened (Habermas 1987, 2002).
In these spaces ‘modern’ traditions may emerge and old ones be restored, offering communal meaning–making opportunities in an increasingly privatised, individual and fast–paced world. Such traditions are not opposed to, but often go hand–in–hand with capitalist [secular] values. In fact much of the ambiguous character of pilgrimages can be thought of as a fitting metaphor for late–modernity more generally. Prominent sociologists have already tapped into the symbolic value of words such as ‘tourist’ and ‘pilgrim’ as ways to conceptualize (respectively) modernity (MacCannell 1976) and post–modernity (Bauman 1993). Indeed, one striking aspect of pilgrimage is its similarity to other seemingly unrelated phenomena, like social movements. As the narratives I present later on in part II will make clear, motivations often encompass a disparity between perceived subjective needs and the objective realities of late–modern life. These narratives display parities between what John Eade and Michael Sallnow (2000) have pointed to as the intersections between ‘text’, ‘place’ and ‘biography’, expressed through personal rituals.

The often middle–class, well–educated character of modern travellers, at least those who travel to European pilgrimage shrines, seems to attest to the importance of looking at pilgrimage in order to understand other social phenomena besides religion. For example, it is the middle classes that come to represent the bulk of those involved in the organization of political rallies, charity runs, protest marches and so on (Crossley 2002, Della Porta & Diani 2005). I therefore do not see this resemblance between pilgrimage and social movements as a coincidence. Although for some such a comparison may seem inappropriate or rather difficult to imagine, motivation, context and outcomes – or ‘text’, ‘place’ and ‘biography’ – make this comparison not only possible, but actually necessary for our understanding of these forms of personalised journeys.

In his timeless description of the society of his time, The Canterbury Tales, Chaucer (2008) exposes both the religious and ludic motivations that drove hordes of people to the shrine of St. Thomas Becket in Canterbury. Throughout this work I make explicit my belief that, besides the fact that a growing number of religious and spiritual people are today taking part in pilgrimages, they should be thought of as wider movements that come to form what anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1972) has called a ‘metasocial commentary’ (p.26).
The Stages of the Journey

Part I

If this is a metaphorical journey towards understanding, it will take place as all journeys do. That is, step by step or, as on the Camino, in stages. This work is divided into three parts. In part I, I present three descriptive texts detailing the historical, empirical and theoretical context of this study. In chapter 1, I present a historical overview of the origins, development, apogee and decline of the cult of St. James and the pilgrimage culture that the figure of the mythical preacher engendered in subsequent centuries (Herwaarden 1980). In the same chapter the *Camino de Santiago* is depicted as a magnifying glass through which one can observe the medieval political, social, cultural, theological and military history of Europe – a time labelled by modern historians as ‘the golden age of pilgrimage’ (Sumption 1975; 2003). I offer this historical context at the start of the analysis as a way to contextualize the origins of the modern pilgrimage. This is important if we consider how pilgrimage sites can absorb much of the *zeitgeist* of a particular culture at a specific point in time. Hence tracing the origins and development of modern representations of such ancient rituals can be enlightening.

In chapter 2, I give continuity to the historical overview by pointing to growing interest in pilgrimage and heritage sites in Europe as part of a growing understanding of ‘religious tourism’. My aim is to give context to the in–depth ethnographic study I conducted on the Camino, which I discuss in detail in part II. However before I can explore motivations and draw explanations for the renewed interest in pilgrimage, I must describe and analyse some of the most important theoretical perspectives pertinent to the study of pilgrimages. I do this in chapter 3.

Part II

With the historical and theoretical context of the study fully disclosed, in part II I present the results of my study on the *Camino de Santiago*. I begin in chapter 4 with a description of the methodology that I used in that study. I describe how the study was conceptualized and conducted and how the data was subsequently analysed. I make full reference to every source of data whilst describing some of the more interesting situations and circumstances which occurred during field–work. I dedicate considerable space to describing and analysing the
benefits and shortcomings of inductive methodology, such as Grounded Theory and Situational Analysis, in research of this type. In adopting such a methodology I moved beyond a purely phenomenological [descriptive] account of pilgrimage, by employing what Baert and Carreira da Silva (2010) have referred to as ‘hermeneutic–inspired–pragmatism’ (p. 294). That is, whilst I combined Grounded Theory and Situational Analysis in order to tap into the inner dynamics of pilgrimage and the motivations of those who took part in it (zooming in), I also relied on this form of pragmatism in order to describe the ‘macro–scene’ and the links that I believe should be made between pilgrimage and the wider social spheres to which it connects (zooming out). The result is a middle–ground theory that uses micro–sociology to build concepts grounded in data.

In chapter 5, I discuss the motivations that implicitly or explicitly emerged in the stories of travellers who joined the Camino in search of spirituality, in confirmation of their faith or sensitivity towards the idea of the ‘spiritual journey’. I focus on motivations that were vaguely or firmly rooted in the desire to connect to traditional or other forms of spirituality through the Camino. The next chapter contains narratives which point to notions of healing – spiritual, physical, emotional and psychological. In chapter 7, I outline the metaphor of the journey and how participants became entangled in a web of personal meanings often expressed through the idea of ‘life as a journey’. The theme of ‘metaphors’ is one that stood out of such narratives with some force and as such it is one that I have carried forward in the final analysis of this work.

In the last chapter, which is concerned with the qualitative data (chapter 8), I capture the themes of community, performance and sensation seeking. Broadly understood, these referred to motivations centred on the experience of individuals who saw their journey as a ludic experience or one where the focus was on the body rather than on the ‘spiritual’ dimensions of the journey. In this chapter I also describe the motivation of those who felt connected to ‘something bigger than themselves’. That is, the feeling of being linked to a ‘chain of memory’, a tradition and the sense of community that the journey engendered. It is, however, important to highlight that all the data chapters – though they are here neatly separated by heading and sub–heading – should be read as facets of motivations which often encompass all of these themes at once. Often travellers revealed all these facets as part of their narratives which sometimes they placed in a hierarchical order, and sometimes more randomly and without emphasis on any motivation in particular. Hence this is not, by any means, an attempt to build yet another typology of pilgrimage experiences. My intention is to

Eduardo Chemin
show what I believe to be the ambiguity of motivations exemplified by the difficulty participants encountered in expressing all the sentiments involved in the making of the journey, due to the mingling of discourses found on the Camino de Santiago.

Part III

Part III begins with chapter 9, in which I describe some of the most important forces ‘pushing’ or ‘guiding’ people to places like the Camino de Santiago. I describe culturally constructed notions which help to forge discourses that give meaning to the practice of modern pilgrimage – through various media and other vehicles. I point to ‘producers of meaning’ as agents who help to create the stimuli that excite popular imagination and create notions of meaningful experiences through journeys and places ‘redolent with meaning’ (Digance, 2006). At this stage I begin to develop the concept of an ethos that seems to guide the impulse towards such places and spaces, and which shapes experience and moulds outcomes. In the last chapter (chapter 10) I bring together contemporary social theory and the findings of my qualitative research on the Camino de Santiago in an attempt to understand the renewed interest in places like Compostela. Here I show how individual motivations can be thought of as connecting to broader socio–cultural trends and theories pertinent for an investigation of the return of the pilgrim and his or her journey through the religious and consumer landscapes of late–modernity.
Part I

Pilgrimage in 21st Century Europe: History, Facts & Theory
Chapter 1

The Camino de Santiago: Re–inventing Tradition

‘All pilgrimages should be done away with... For there is no good in them, no commandment, but countless causes of sin and of contempt of God's commandments. These pilgrimages are the reason for there being so many beggars, who commit numberless villainies.’ (Martin Luther)

This is the story of a tradition: one adorned by landscapes, sculpted by men and nature, and lived by people – real and imagined. This tradition links today with yesterday, the modern and the ancient, heaven and earth. In sum, this is the story of a pilgrimage route and its heritage. Such a place is not just a point on a map; it is a symbol, a code for culture more broadly, inseparable from religion, old or new. Nonetheless, it is dependent on and enhanced by the secular rhythms of our modern world. Its roots go deep and reach back to the beginnings of Europe: politics, civilization and religion. Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Paganism and Mysticism are all part of it.

This is the long chain of memory that links modern day travellers to those who, for centuries, have travelled to Santiago de Compostela. As a Christian ritual, pilgrimage has been performed since the 1st century A.D., and its origins are inseparable from European culture. Pilgrimage originated with long journeys of [self–] imposed exile, as for example when Jesus walked through the desert or his disciples’ missions in foreign lands. In turn a pilgrimage to places of birth, mission or martyrdom became a common practice for Christian believers (Jenkins, 1950). During the 3rd and 4th centuries, two pilgrimage sites became particularly important for the development of Christianity: Jerusalem (Jesus) and Rome (St. Peter and St. Paul). However, another site gained importance with the westwards expansion of the faith. Established in the north–west corner of the Iberian Peninsula several centuries later (8th or 9th century) Santiago de Compostela8 rapidly became a centre for Christians who came to revere the (alleged) burial place of St. James the Great. Over centuries of movement they carved the

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8 The name Santiago de Compostela means literally ‘Saint James of the field of stars’ (in Latin campus meaning field and stellae meaning star) or – for an alternative hypothesis – Saint James of the burial ground (compostium in Latin meaning burial ground or place).
many routes that today form the modern *Camino de Santiago*. Santiago de Compostela, and the pilgrimage culture that it engendered, was born out of wider socio-cultural movements. Like today, in medieval Europe people moved constantly. Cultures emerged out of migratory movements, and trade and merchant routes were alive with hundreds of thousands of people travelling to and from pilgrimage sites for a variety of reasons. In sum, these were transnational and migratory flows of goods and people. Movement to places of religious significance was an important part of the cultural identity and politico-religious and economic systems that forged European culture.

In the following I journey through history in order to trace the origins of Santiago de Compostela and show the importance of institutions and popular belief in the formation of pilgrimages more broadly. Along the way, I point to some of the most significant elements that helped to shape and transform this movement into an established tradition, beginning with the origins and development of the cult of James and his increased importance over the centuries. This is followed by a description and analysis of the main motivations that drove medieval men and women to pilgrimage sites, ending with a brief overview of the modern–day phenomenon.

**The Making of the Pilgrimage to Compostela**

**The Invention/Discovery of St. James**

The chief problem when drafting the history of a pilgrimage site concerns the accuracy of facts, as in such contexts the boundary between history and myth is often blurred. For instance, there is no factual basis to the claim that the remains of James the Great, one of the twelve apostles (brother of John and son of Zebedee), was ever buried in what is now the city of Santiago de Compostela in north-west Spain. Despite this, there is little doubt that James is considered an important character in the making of Christianity. In the Acts of the Apostles we find that James and John were in the ‘inner circle’ of Jesus’ followers (Melczer, 1993:7). Indeed some historians consider James to be one of the most important of Jesus’ supporters. So despite the mystery surrounding his preaching mission in Spain, the importance of James is somewhat well documented as he shared some of the most significant moments of Christ’s earthly life. This includes miracles, the moment of Transfiguration, and Jesus’ suffering at the Garden of Gethsemane.
The part that concerns us more directly, however, is that according to legend, following the death of Jesus, James travelled westwards from Jerusalem on a mission to preach to the pagan people of other lands. On his journeying James is said to have reached the Iberian Peninsula. After little success, he returned to Jerusalem where he was then captured and martyred in 44 A.D. by Roman Emperor Herod Agrippa. James was beheaded and both his head and body were thrown outside the city walls – a passage that is also documented in the Acts of the Apostles. Although sparsely documented, James’ preaching mission in Western Europe is less difficult to imagine than what follows. According to tradition, after his martyrdom, James’ body was taken back to Galicia by his followers. They placed his remains on a boat that miraculously arrived at a place called Iria Flavia (a coastal town nowadays known as Padrón), a fishing village on the Galician Atlantic coast. With the help of a pagan woman (perhaps queen) named Lupa, they buried James’ remains approximately 80 miles inland on a hill called Libredon, a rugged valley where the city of Santiago de Compostela now stands (Kendrick, 1960; Dunn & Davidson, 1994, 1996).

It is true that documents mentioning the existence of St. James’ tomb were found in the early part of the 6th century. But if we were to consider this story as fact we would also have to explain why the location was forgotten for the previous six centuries considering its importance for Christianity as a developing faith. Nevertheless, the story tells us that in 841, a hermit (perhaps monk) named Pelayo saw lights in a forest near to Libredon, which guided him to a burial ground. The remains found in the tomb were identified as those of the apostle James by the local bishop Teodomir. He reported the finding to King Alfonso II, who in turn ordered the construction of a simple wooden church at the site (Dunn & Davidson, 1994; Webb, 1999). This occurred during a time in Europe when the ‘Moors’ had taken military control of a great part of former Roman kingdom of Hispania. The limits of the Christian world were restricted to a strip of land stretching from Galicia along the northern tip of the Iberian Peninsula, eastwards across the Pyrenees. Rather coincidentally, the discovery of St. James’ tomb came at a time when Christian elites were in real need of a unifying ideology or potent symbol to counteract the advancement of Islamic forces (Runciman, 1955; Sumption, 1975, 2003).

According to German historian Robert Plotz the cult of veneration of St. James can be traced back to the ‘sacral geography of the medieval west’ (1993: 58), encompassing a period

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9 This is how Muslims were then pejoratively called.
between the 5th and 12th centuries A.D. Partly due to the relatively stable political condition of Europe at the time, many routes emerged to places that had become, over time, an essential part of Christian beliefs and practices.

Literature telling of the existence of the cult of James emerges in the early periods of the middle ages, sometime between the 5th and 6th centuries. In the Breviarium Apostolorum of the 6th or 7th century, a Latin text derived from a Greek original written somewhere in the Byzantine realm served as the basis for much of the writing related to the veneration of the Apostle (Melczer, 1993; Plotz, 1993). This work became famous during that time and the idea that one of the twelve apostles was buried so far from the Holy Land rapidly spread. For example, De Ortu et Obitu Patrum, written in about 630, mentions that James had evangelised the west of Spain. Even in places as far away as Britain, the chronicler Aldhelm of Malmesbury (later bishop of Sherborne) wrote a poem in honour of St James in 709 (Plotz, 1993).

A Commentary on the Apocalypse by Beatus of Liébana, written in about 785, contained a list of the provinces of the world, each with its corresponding Apostle, in which Hispania was allocated to James the Great (Dennett, 2005). In Gallia Christiana a testament by bishop Desiderio written between 630 and 655 (the Merovingian period) mentions a church known as Sancti Jacobi in Cahors. There is also a document dated from the 8th century that mentions St. James and St. John as ‘special patron saints’. In 844 yet another document related to Carlos ‘the bold’ depicts St. James besides St. Stephen as the patron saint of the Cathedral in Toulouse. These examples, by no means exhaustive, show that the cult of James was becoming particularly prominent even before the (alleged) re–discovery of the Saint’s burial place. Emphasizing the ambiguity of the story, Plotz (1993) names this process ‘the invention/discovery of St. James’. He believes that in fact a transference took place in this period from the veneration of St. Martin, an already established cult in Spain and France, to that of Sant–Iago. It is important to mention, however, that Plotz’s theory is one amongst many – a variety of views is found amongst historians specializing in this particular subject.
The Development of Pilgrimage Routes

Notwithstanding such debates, it is clear that around 1000 A.D. the two most important elements in the development of the cult of Saints were already well entrenched in Western Christian tradition. These are the spiritual, exemplified by the development of St. James’ cult, and the material landscape of the pilgrimage movement that followed: churches, monasteries, bridges and other buildings that composed the rapidly developing routes across Europe. For example, as pilgrim numbers grew, hospitals were enlarged, bridges were constructed or improved (see figure 2), and more churches were built or re–built to accommodate the hundreds of thousands who travelled the *Camino Francés*, by then the most popular route to Compostela.¹⁰

Figure 2 Bridge over the river Órbigo, the longest bridge on the French Way

Source: personal archives – photograph by the author

¹⁰ The *Camino Francés* is today the most popular pilgrim route. It has been re–established based on the medieval route, although some diversions have been created due to industrialization, urbanization and commercial interests. The French way, like the many other routes that lead to Compostela are constantly being re–planned and re–drawn to match the interests of local communities and ideas about heritage and past.
It is important to note that the pilgrimage acquired a truly international status during this period rivalling even Rome and Jerusalem to a certain extent (Vázquez de Parga, et al, 1948–1949). One of the main reasons for this success lies in the increasing dangers that pilgrims faced on the way to Jerusalem. Regional conflicts and instability helped to shift the Western European religious devotional axis from the Holy Land to Compostela, rapidly turning it into a new and important sacred space for Christians (Dennett 2005). These changes gave rise to Santiago de Compostela as a city of international reputation where pilgrims from all over Europe would come to venerate the Apostle’s relics.

During the same period, the Holy See was then transferred from Iria Flavia to Santiago de Compostela by the then Pope Urban II in 1095 – the same pope who convened the first crusade. After the destruction of the modest church at Compostela by a Muslim attack in 1000 A.D., the building of a new cathedral commenced in 1078. It was the later archbishop of Compostela, Diego Gelmirez who from 1120 onwards lavishly decorated the building (see figure 3) and enthusiastically encouraged the pilgrimage to expand. In fact Gelmirez is seen as a key figure in the expansion of the pilgrimage in general. The reason he was able to do this was his well–established ties with the new pope, Calixtus II. Gelmirez, therefore, enjoyed great power and influence. It was in this period that the Liber Sancti Jacobis was compiled, marking the first great period of development of the pilgrimage. The Codex Calixtinus as it became known – since it is prefaced by a letter attributed to Calixtus II, pope from 1119 to 1124 – is of particular importance to our understanding of the development of the routes to Compostela.
The Codex Calixtinus, possibly edited by one clergyman named Aymeric Picaud ca. 1139 (Davies & Davies 1982), is a collection of five books telling the story of St. James’ mission, martyrdom and translation from Jerusalem back to Spain. It includes songs, description of artefacts and religious buildings, including a plan of Santiago’s Cathedral, a book of chants and prayers, and what became known, in modern terms, as a prototype for future travel.
guides: The Pilgrim’s Guide to Compostela\textsuperscript{11}. In this work\textsuperscript{12} the author describes the different routes across France culminating in the Camino Francés. He also described the customs of the peoples who inhabited the regions through which the pilgrim would travel, as well as useful information about the rivers that offered drinking water and those who could be harmful to both human and animals. The author also divided the pilgrimage into thirteen stages mapping the most important places on the route as well as the important places of veneration that the penitent pilgrim ought to visit in order to be redeemed.

There is, of course, no evidence to suggest that this guide was ever used by other pilgrims (Webb 2002). Yet the very idea of writing a guide invites two suggestions. First, it implies that by that time there was an already growing interest in the pilgrimage by at least portions of the population. Second, this growing popularity was in tandem with the desires of the religious elites to promote pilgrimage as a form of a politico–religious manifesto, especially considering the imminent threat of Islam. The pilgrimage became a mass phenomenon when certain policies such as the incorporation of pilgrimage as a penitential practice were later adopted. That said, due to the conflicts taking place across Europe at the time, the indiscriminate traffic of goods and people from one end of the old Roman Empire to the other was considerably reduced. But even in peaceful times, travellers faced constant threats such as bands of robbers, sickness and the overcoming of natural obstacles like rivers, snow, unusually hot summers and cold winters, wild animals and so on.

\textit{The Sanctity of the Pilgrim’s Mission: Pilgrimage as Institution}

Due to the socio–political changes in the composition of European societies, from the 12\textsuperscript{th} century onwards the number of people travelling to Compostela increased substantially. For instance some places like Roncesvalles\textsuperscript{13} received an average of 100,000 pilgrims per year (Dennett, 2005). At this stage, the movement of pilgrims took the shape of religious pilgrimage characterized by distinctive components. First, there was a noted qualitative and quantitative mutation from a pilgrimage, which was largely an imitation of the life of Jesus (\textit{via cruces}) to that of a well–structured pilgrimage. It is in this period, moreover, that the idea of a pilgrim in transit was incorporated into the ritual. Permits appear at this point,\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{11} For more details see the volume published by the Confraternity of St. James (London).
\textsuperscript{12} Although this guide is sometimes cited as one of the earliest examples of such texts there were others that preceded it. One good example would be the \textit{Itinerarium Egeriae} (Travels of Egeria) written ca. A.D. 385.
\textsuperscript{13} The first village, after the crossing over of the Pyrenees for those coming from St. Jean Pied–de–Port (France)

Eduardo Chemin
differentiating the pilgrimage from *vacandi causa* (vacation). This establishes the character of the pilgrim as someone who seeks hospitality and expects charity. With permits came institutional legitimacy and protection. Second, there was a strong cult of relics dominating the drive towards places like Compostela. In fact relics became at some stage even ‘more valuable than gold’ (Plotz, 1993:66). Indeed, as seen in the *Codex Calixtinus*, there was an abundance of relics spread across the many routes that led to Santiago and pilgrims could venerate them even before arriving at the apostle’s tomb in Galicia.

Third, the religious order of Cluny contributed greatly to the spiritual reform of Europe at the time, and as powerful patrons they greatly helped to improve the infrastructure of the pilgrimage routes by building and commissioning hospitals and bridges. Fourth, the appearance of indulgences (pardons) also caused many to go on pilgrimage. These were a form of remission of sins by the practice of pilgrimage or other acts in defence of Christianity. Inevitably this propelled the identification of the crusades with the concept of religious pilgrimage. It was a powerful ideological formula that transformed the character of the pilgrimage from a relatively local cult to a pan–European religious practice (Runciman, 1955; Sumption, 2003). There is a fifth and last stage in this development, which is in many ways a direct consequence of the former. St. James is by now the patron saint, and therefore protector, of *Hispania Cristiana*. Accordingly, he is employed as the main character in the Christian narrative that demonises the Islamic infidels, creating a unified Christian battlefront in the decisive period of the late *Reconquista*¹⁴. Taken together, these socio–political changes emphasised both the institutional protection and the privileges to be given to pilgrims (whether poor, high clergy or monarchs) along the pilgrim routes. The declared institutional protection of pilgrims had a tremendous impact on the development of the pilgrimage during the 12th and 13th centuries as it reinforced the sacredness of the pilgrims’ mission. Subsequent centuries saw the pilgrimage to Santiago developing into a true international event and the image of Santiago became increasingly associated with the pious and penitent (poor) pilgrim¹⁵.

At this stage the pilgrim incorporated symbols and practices that have survived to this day, and which became part of modern popular imagination: the pious and penitent pilgrim who

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¹⁴ This period comprehends the reign of the Catholic kings, Fernando and Isabella of Aragon. They were responsible for the building of much of the structure that is still in place today. For example the enormous *Hostal the Los Reys Católicos* in Santiago (now a luxury hotel) was built as a pilgrim hospital that cared for pilgrims both rich and poor.

¹⁵ Iconography related to such ideal only materializes, however, during the first half of the 14th century.
wears the much-depicted robe, brim hat, staff and scallop shell sewn on his garments. Such objects served various (practical) purposes. First, it was imperative that pilgrims were identified as such in order to make their journey safer and more hospitable, because of the emphasis placed (by ecclesiastical and monarchic authorities) on the sacredness of the spiritual traveller. Second, symbols like the scallop shell served as ‘proof’ that the pilgrim had indeed reached the Galician coast (where scallops were abundant) and had, therefore, fulfilled his or her mission. Even today scallop shells are still being found amongst other objects and human remains in archaeological excavations as far away as Denmark, Germany and Britain (Lack, 2003). This indicates the extent of the popularity of the cult of James, and indeed of the pilgrimage as an established and internationally recognized route (Storrs, 1994; Tate, 1990; Almazan, 2000; Sumption, 2003).

By the beginning of the 10th century, the name of Iacobus (James in Latin) was to be found in dioceses as far away as Salzburg. The date 25th July was established around this time as St. James’ day, featuring in festive calendars of places as far away as Bavaria (Plotz, 1993). The institutionalization of this pilgrimage really began, however, at the time when King Alfonso II travelled by a Roman road – now known as the Camino Primitivo (The Primitive Way) – to the site of the apostle’s tomb. Because of this, King Alfonso II is often depicted as one of the first people to have made the pilgrimage to Compostela. Later foreign pilgrims (mainly from France) started to arrive in Compostela (Dennett, 2005). The first foreign pilgrim of whom we find any record was a French man named Bretenald who arrived at Santiago at around 930. A second authentic account comes from the monastery of Albeda at La Rioja, mentioning a Gotescalc, Bishop of Le Puy, between 947 and 950 (Plotz, 1993; Dunn & Davidson, 1994, 1996; Webb, 2002). In 950–1 Aymeric Picaud (possibly a monk of Parthenay-le-Vieux in Poitou, France and credited as being the author of the first pilgrim’s guide) also made a pilgrimage to Compostela16. Interestingly, historical records show a predominance of elite pilgrims such as clergy and monarchs, at least at the early stages of the pilgrimage. The most likely reason is perhaps linked to the lack of education of lower classes, who were predominantly illiterate and as such could not leave records of their visits (Davies & Davies, 1982).

A further development of the pilgrimage to Santiago takes place during the 11th century, at a time when the European West genuinely began to develop its own homogenous spiritual and

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16 This is a contested issue amongst historians.
material culture (Plotz, 1993). At this point pilgrimage becomes a popular activity, especially during Holy Years. This increase in popularity was due, at least partially, to the conscious alliance of French ecclesiastics and Spanish monarchs in an effort to popularise the cult of St. James. This process started in the 10th century, when King Sancho ‘El Mayor’ from Navarra and the reformed Benedictine order of Cluny formed a relationship, which was honoured by his descendants. This alliance established monasteries, pilgrim hospitals (see figure 4) and places of worship along strategic points of the French route in order to establish the region as a Christian stronghold as well as to encourage more pilgrims to travel to Compostela.

Figure 4 Monastério de Santo Antón, today a make–shift pilgrim hostel, in the region of Castile

Source: personal archives – photograph by the author
The Medieval Path to God: Motivations for Pilgrimage

Alongside the institutionalization of pilgrimage and the incentives given by monarchs and clergy to boost this movement, around the 10th century a popular (grass-roots) mass movement towards Compostela begins to take shape. This indicates both a top-down approach to pilgrimage and a bottom-up current of belief in the cult of James the Apostle. It reflected a specific time in Western European societies, a period marked by a series of dark episodes characterized by ravaging wars, invasions and great social unrest. This gloomy scenario was the background in which pilgrimage grew as a popular mass phenomenon. It helped to create a tradition of penitence and redemption unleashing a creative wave of literature and institutional support that, in turn, re-enforced popular belief in the cult of St. James. However this inevitably begs the question as to what were the main popular motivations driving such popularization. In the following I describe the most prominent motives for pilgrimage, bearing in mind that this is by no means an exhaustive list. In addition we must keep consider the degree of ambiguity and overlap regarding the real beliefs of medieval travellers (Öhler, 1989).

Penance

Penance was one of the most powerful motives for someone to go on pilgrimage in medieval Europe. It should be considered alongside the growing judicial system of the middle ages, which saw pilgrimage as part of range of punishments available to the courts. Here pilgrimage became a form of punishment within which the length and duration of the penance varied according to the gravity of the sin. For example, in 1283, John Pecham, Archbishop of Canterbury, imposed a pilgrimage to Compostela as penance for a priest who transgressed his vow of chastity (Webb, 2002). Still related to penance, we also see vicarious pilgrimage taking place. That is, those who could afford it paid others to go on penitential journeys on their behalf. Similarly, friends and relatives of an infirm individual or group performed pilgrimages out of solidarity to the dying. Thus pilgrimage as penance was both imposed and self-inflicted (Davies & Davies, 1982). Indeed, the hardship that long distance journeying imposed on individuals made pilgrimage a penitential practice. However this penitential element could be aggravated by walking instead of riding or sailing, walking barefoot, constraining one’s diet to bread and water, and departing without worldly possessions.
Therefore the idea of penance was clearly related to the image of the poor pilgrim who was humbled before God and who counted on the generosity of others in order to survive.

*Healing & Devotion*

Another aspect of pilgrimage was related to seeking cures through genuine devotion. It is important to notice that pilgrimage as a form of religious ritual, performed with the aim of curing the ill was, in its majority, a practice relegated to more local shrines rather than famous international ones such as Compostela, Rome or Jerusalem (Ward, 1987). In fact it is unlikely that someone suffering from a physical disability of any kind would cope well with long distance travel. Historical evidence however is scarce, and most of what is known about local shrines comes from narratives of miracles left by a few literate pilgrims. Based on such evidence it seems that for the majority of pilgrims, the desire for healing was common due to the belief that physical suffering was brought about by spiritual sin (Sumption, 2003). Yet these desires were, in reality, rarely met by the deity. This is possibly the reason why accounts were restricted to the few who had been conceded such a special gift (Webb, 2002).

Devotion, or the desire to give expression to religious sentiments, was another reason why people went on pilgrimages, and one that was often entangled with wishes for healing; it seems that devotion as an isolated motive was less common (Vázquez de Parga, et al 1948). A pilgrimage centre such as Compostela served as a portal where the divine was ‘closer’ due to the saint’s special relationship with God. Each pilgrimage site developed its own rituals to accommodate and give context to such exchange. For instance, just before arriving in Santiago de Compostela pilgrims would bathe in a stream situated a few miles outside the city, a place known as *Lavacola*\(^\text{17}\). There pilgrims gathered in order to clean themselves and look respectable before entering the home of the Apostle James (Gitlitz & Davidson, 2000).

*Vows & Miracles*

According to Webb (2002), in the medieval period, voluntary pilgrimage with devotional intent often had its origins in the making of a vow. The making of a vow, however, inexorably changed the constitution of the pilgrimage from voluntary to obligatory. This transformation took place because of the strong emphasis of medieval religion on the

\(\text{\textsuperscript{17}}\) The name *Lavacola* from Spanish translates into ‘bottom washing’.

Eduardo Chemin 34
fulfilment of such vows (Anderson & Bellenger, 2007; Bartlett, 2008). Individuals often made vows at moments of extreme stress or out of devotion. Yet such vows were not always kept, as fulfilling them required a long distance pilgrimage to traditional shrines – which was not only an arduous physical journey, but also an economic burden. However the failure to perform a pilgrimage as part of a vow was a serious offence, so serious that the pope had to intervene personally in such affairs and a variety of punishments could apply.

In Sigal (1985), we find that during the early medieval period (10th and 11th centuries) miracles were performed in the vicinities of the shrines. This indicates that the miracle was linked to the immediate presence of relics and the proximity of the devotee to such objects or human remains. Between the 14th and 15th centuries, however, miracles were often performed at long range as well as at the shrine (Webb, 2002). That is, the person was far from the shrine or from contact with relics at the time when the miracle took place. Sometimes miracles would be performed during subsequent pilgrimages made due to thanksgiving for a previous intervention, or during a vicarious pilgrimage (Swanson, 1995).

This change may reflect the conscious efforts of those who compiled the lists of miracles found in some medieval shrines to communicate with wider audiences, and thus to advertise the powers of local saints and the possibility of miracles in that locality. It could also be that by the late middle–ages wider populations were more familiar with the notion of miracles, being less secluded by time and space barriers. It is difficult to say how many pilgrims came to these shrines in hope of a miracle and how many were awarded one. But what is logically concluded is that these changes benefited both the believer as well as the clergy, as they showed a well–established Christian community based on faith, the belief of daily miracles and the power of saints, in vow making and thanksgiving (Webb, 2002).

**Indulgences**

A further development in the tradition of pilgrimage, and one that is certainly still important for Catholic pilgrims today, is that of indulgences. By this is understood the full or partial remission of sins through pardoning. This was usually achieved through a religious act of faith or good works. In Catholic tradition, indulgences were believed to be a ‘reservoir of merits’ accumulated by Christ on behalf of humanity. Thus indulgences were often interpreted as spiritual ‘credits’ (Swanson, 1995). Towards the later part of the medieval period the performance of a pilgrimage was regarded as an efficient way to acquire
indulgences. With time indulgences acquired exchange value, and as such they were often treated as commodities that could be passed from one generation to the next (Swanson, 1995). However indulgences were also handed out at particular places or shrines (i.e. Rome) without any reference to pilgrimage.

As noted by Webb (2002), this aspect did not seem to diminish the importance of pilgrimages such as Santiago, Rome and Jerusalem, for these were considered places of ultimate spiritual reward. This was despite the severe criticism of figures such as Hugh Latimer, for whom the reduction of dogma to the veneration of literal images should be regarded as superstition (Sumption, 2003). Although indulgences could be obtained readily and without much difficulty, pilgrimages remained valid as efforts to solidify one’s proximity to the divine. ‘He who goes to St. James and then kills his father commits no mortal sin’ said a text attributed to a Poitevin (Sumption, 2003: 289).

Pilgrimages became accessories to the moral teaching of the Church and therefore an alternative way to engage with religion. Pilgrims would test other peoples’ solidarity (caritas) and their experience of signum charitatis or ‘signs of love’.

**The Modern Pilgrimage: Re–inventing Traditions**

*Pilgrimage through the Age of Reform: The Centrality of the Journey*

Shrines tended to attract a diversity of pilgrims for a variety of reasons and, according to Webb (2002), the pilgrimage to Santiago became characterized by the ‘devout and the voluntarily or involuntarily penitent rather than a healing shrine’ (p.55). Indulgences were therefore often secondary to other motives that could range from curiosity to escapism or even adventure. At the risk of overstating the obvious, pilgrimage meant travel. But most importantly, it provided an excuse for travel. Critics of pilgrimage like Martin Luther (quoted at the beginning of this chapter) were only too aware of the opportunity that pilgrimage offered to those willing to evade the discipline imposed by daily routines (Swanson, 1995). These were pilgrims motivated vacandi causa: by motives of recreation and idle curiosity. It is in this sense that pilgrimage is often seen by modern commentators as the precursor of tourism.
The pilgrimage to Santiago remained popular well until the end of the 15th century, but it is evident that a decline in numbers gradually took place in subsequent periods. One major cause is that the pilgrimage started to suffer from the consequences of the Protestant Reformation. This period saw much of the traffic of pilgrims from the British Isles, Germany and France, both by sea and land, dissipating. Although this did not sound the death knell of the pilgrimage, the reformist ethos found in pilgrimage an enemy practice (Dunn & Davidson, 1996). This represented a general change in attitude towards pilgrimage as poorer, non-religious, vagrant types begin to grow in numbers. At the same time, there was a qualitative change from the devout, more spiritual and penitent pilgrim, to the more secular type. It is interesting to note, however, that even in the new Protestant faiths, pilgrimage was still very much alive – at least allegorically (see Tiffany, 2006). In John Bunyan’s The Pilgrim’s Progress (1998), for instance, we come across the idea of pilgrimage essentially as an inner journey. Pilgrimage was to take place within the hearts and minds of individuals: a pilgrimage of the spirit from this world to heaven (from the city of destruction to the city of God) as opposed to a physical journey through the physical landscape.

Against this Protestant (rather static) view of pilgrimage, we find that in Catholic cultures, pilgrimage required a new set of meanings if it was to remain relevant as a religious practice. This need was translated into a change ‘from the culture of the pilgrimage to the culture of the journey’ (Tomasi, 2002: 13). This originated from a post-medieval image of the traveller as an exponent of personal freedom. Propelled by the Enlightenment ideas about learning and the position of men before nature, the Romantic Movement saw travelling as a task to be performed by the elites, for whom it now served as an educational tool. This culminated in the European Grand Tour that spanned three centuries, from the 16th to the 19th. During this period, the number of pilgrims who walked to Compostela declined substantially due to the effects of the reformation period and the fact that the relics of St. James were hidden for fears of possible invasions and looting during the 16th century. They were only ‘re–discovered’ in the mid–19th century, approximately 300 years later, hidden between the walls of the apse.

In the Holy Year of 1867 only approximately 40 pilgrims were seen taking part in the ceremonies at the Cathedral. However after the relics were found and authenticated by Pope Leo XIII, the number of pilgrims arriving in Compostela once again began to increase and numbers reached hundreds of thousands by the turn of the 20th century. Numbers declined sharply due to the Spanish Civil War (17 July 1936 to 1 April 1939). After the end of the

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18 First published in February 1678
Spanish Civil War, and partly due to Franco’s promotion of the pilgrimage, and considerable improvement in transportation, the pilgrimage once began to attract vast numbers of people. According to a German pilgrim association (St. Jakobus–Gesellschaft) approximately 500,000 people came to celebrate the Holy Year of 1948, 700,000 in 1954, 2.5 million in 1965, and 4 million in 1971 and 1976\(^\text{19}\).

Despite this, in 1971 only 491 people walked at least the last 100 km to Santiago and received the ‘pilgrim certificate’, and an even smaller number (243) received the certificate in 1976. Walking to the tomb of St. James was not a popular activity until the 1980s. During the 1980s the idea of walking to Compostela gradually gained appeal, owing to the encouragement of various agencies and individuals who worked to re-establish the old pilgrim routes by restoring bridges, clearing paths and establishing way marks. As a consequence, between 1987 and 1993 the number of people using these routes began to increase substantially. Today visitors arrive in Santiago by foot, bicycle, on horseback, on board ships and ferries, by coach, car, train, or by airplane – from all parts of Europe and indeed the world over. In 1987, the same year the Council of Europe named the Camino the first European Cultural Itinerary, the number of certificates issued to walkers, cyclists and horse riders at La Oficina de Peregrinos (The Pilgrim’s Office) was 2,491. By 1992 that number had increased to 9,764. During the 1993 Holy Year, which coincided with the inclusion of the Camino de Santiago (and the city of Santiago de Compostela) in UNESCO’s World Heritage List, the same office issued 99,439 Compostelanas.

The majority of those who received the certificate expressed their motivations as ‘religious, spiritual or personal’, since this certificate is only issued to travellers who give one of these motives as reasons for taking part on the pilgrimage. Since 1986, and omitting the years in which a special event took place (i.e. the papal visit in 1989, the Holy Years of 1993, 1999, the Jubilee year in 2000, the Holy Years of 2004 and 2010), data show that there has been an increase of 66,461 people (2.6668%) receiving the Compostelana\(^\text{20}\). At the same time, numbers of ‘Camino travellers’ have increased exponentially. Fewer than 10,000 walked to Santiago in 1992. In 2003 this number soared to almost 70,000. During the 2004 Holy Year, the number of those travelling by non–motorised modes of transport once again increased and Santiago received nearly 180,000 ‘pilgrims’. Data from 2006 to 2009 clearly illustrate this increase: from 100,377 in 2006 to 145,877 in 2009. Of these 145,877 pilgrims who received a


Eduardo Chemin
certificate as a result of completing their pilgrimage either on foot, horseback or bicycle, a total of 132,491 declared ‘religious or spiritual’ motivation. It is important to acknowledge, however, that one of the options on the information sheet is ‘religious or other’ hence we need to be cautious when considering these numbers. Data for the 2010 Holy Year reveals that the number of pilgrims receiving the pilgrim certificate that year was 270,961 (see chart 1).

**Chart 1** Number of pilgrims who received the *Compostelana* between 1986 and 2010 including the Holy Years of 1993, 1999, 2004 and 2010

![Pilgrims between 1986 and 2010](image)

Source: data based on information provided by the pilgrim office at Santiago de Compostela (www.peregrinossantiago.es – accessed 15/08/2011). Chart: designed by Anne Müller

Despite clear continuities between past and present, the reanimation of the walking pilgrimage to Compostela makes explicit the renewed emphasis on the journey element of pilgrimage (see fig. 5), rather than solely focusing on the traditional views of Christian theology as represented by place and objects of devotion (although these are still clearly important for those who visit Compostela, especially during Holy Years). However, the romantic element present in modern day narratives of the past ensures that even in academic

Eduardo Chemin
discourses, this focus on movement is frequently taken for granted as the domination of secular tourism (consumerism) over serious religious practice. The inauthentic form of travelling that the secular, demanding and individualistic modern tourist symbolises, as opposed to the authentic mission and positive attitudes that ‘pilgrims’ seem to represent, becomes visible in the discourses of those who take part in the pilgrimage, as well as a diversity of observers and commentators. Precisely due to questions of authenticity, the study of pilgrimages has become entangled in trying to resolve such dichotomies. Indeed, in these spaces different groups claim authenticity, belonging and rights. As a consequence they often come to understand place and experience differently (see Chemin, 2007). However, to polarize differences in motivation as either secular or religious is to eliminate the possibility of dialogue between these variables that these environments can offer.

*The Pilgrim's Credential*

This problem of authenticity is well illustrated by the material culture of the modern version of the pilgrimage, with its renewed emphasis on movement. As a development of the cult of James and the institutionalization that followed, in the mid–medieval period those travelling to Santiago often carried permits that allowed them to travel under the rubric of pilgrimage. This offered pilgrims not only protection but also authenticity. Pilgrims carried these permits so that the authorities of the regions the traveller journeyed through would trust them to enter their town and use its facilities. Today, there is a re–constructed equivalent of this idea. Modern Camino pilgrims carry with them a credencial del peregrino (pilgrim’s credential – see fig. 6): a blank booklet containing basic details of the bearer as well as space for stamps that must be collected as the person makes progress through the pilgrimage route.

The modern version of the permit is no longer used for reasons of security but is as a matter of authenticity and personal memento. Before the modern re–popularization of the pilgrimage, credentials were only given to those who could prove they were walking or riding to Santiago due to their religious beliefs. Hospitaleros (hosts) could make a value judgement and refrain from presenting the prospective traveller with a credential. This would prevent the person from travelling as a ‘pilgrim’: that is, as a person protected by the infrastructure of the Catholic pilgrimage (having a bed in the pilgrim hostel, free–meals, treatment at hospitals and so on). Today these rules have been relaxed, despite the on–going debate between Church and secular authorities, such as the Xunta de Galicia, regarding the meaning and
practical (logistical) management of the pilgrimage. Specifically the Catholic Church wants more control over who should possess the credentials, whereas the various municipalities through which the Camino passes find the benefits of tourism rather too attractive, and prefer to adopt a more lasses-faire approach – selling credentials cheaply and without much questioning.

Figure 5 Typical view of the Way of St. James

Is this practice detrimental to the spiritual vitality of the pilgrimage? Despite the obvious problems that increasing numbers of tourists can cause regarding the infrastructure of the Camino and the space allocated for serious religious devotion, the Church does not object to the number of people now coming to Santiago. Visitors are steadily growing in numbers and the Cathedral is the focal point of the city. The famous pilgrim mass (which is celebrated daily) is a great attraction. Pilgrimage means good business for local and national economies but also for the spiritual bank of the Church, which now sees increasing numbers of people attending ceremonies even in the years between Holy Years. Through this form of heritage tourism, many who would otherwise never step into a religious building have the opportunity to take part in religious rituals and visit places of devotion. The pilgrim credential in this sense becomes important because in many ways it comes to represent not only the personal journey of the traveller, as a way to remember the places he or she has visited. It also gives
travellers a sense of the authenticity of the journey. Like other objects forming part of the material culture of the modern pilgrimage, by possessing the credential, each individual journey becomes part of that imagined tradition.

**Figure 6 Pilgrim Credential**

Source: personal archives

Eduardo Chemin
The Scallop Shell & the Staff

The most important symbolic element of the modern pilgrimage is undoubtedly the scallop shell. Indeed, it is hard to avoid this rather joyful object on the Camino. It is found as a way mark, hanging from lamp posts, or pinned to pilgrim backpacks, sculpted on ancient stones, painted on the ground, on walls and even urban traffic signs (see fig. 7). Today travellers carry scallop shells from the beginning of their journey to the end, often bringing them back home. In the past the same object was to be found at the journey’s end: on the shores of Galicia where they were abundant. They would be brought back as proof that pilgrims had reached their destination or to re-enforce their status and mission. Scallop shells also work as a substitute for more evident religious symbols such as the cross.

**Figure 7** Pilgrims camping at *Praia de Mar de Fora* (the pilgrim’s beach)

Source: personal archives – photograph by the author

The status that it brings to the traveller is immediate. The shell, like the staff, comes to identify the pilgrim as different from other travellers (see fig. 8). It gives the person a sense of common purpose and group identification at the same time that it works as an irreplaceable memento of the journey. On their return pilgrims often display the shell at the most prominent places of the house, placing it above the mantel piece or attaching it to the fridge

Eduardo Chemin
door. Sometimes it is even stuck on the outside wall of the house as a sign that the Camino is still there with them, or it is simply left hanging in a cordon from the entrance door. The staff or walking stick also occupies an important place in pilgrimage culture. Often made of wood, many travellers will spend their free–time carving their staff with religious and personal motifs, names, dates, random yet meaningful words, names of places, faces and landscapes. Others will use it as a support for their sore knees, and still others as a psychological support or to mark the rhythm, or (at times) to keep dogs at bay.

Many pilgrims who forget their staff will walk for miles to retrieve it. When questioned about this, some say it is because of the time they had already spent looking for the ideal walking stick (the perfect size, weight and shape). Others say it is ‘an extension of their very selves’. Many went to the trouble of trying to fit them inside the confined space of the cabin on a budget airline to the annoyance of the cabin crew and other passengers. Some travellers even posted it back home – rarely is the staff simply left behind.

**Figure 8** Walking pilgrim with a scallop shell and the ‘Tau’ pinned to her backpack

![Walking pilgrim with a scallop shell and the ‘Tau’ pinned to her backpack](image)

Source: personal archives – photograph by the author

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21 The ‘Tau’ is a cruciform symbol representing the 19th letter of the Greek alphabet. In mythology it is often connected to the idea of life and/or rebirth. Amongst many other esoteric meanings, the Tau is also related to the Franciscan order for St. Francis is said to have been particularly fond of it. Pilgrims wore the Tau around their necks or pinned in their backpacks. They send them as presents to others back at home or give it to each other along the way as a sign of solidarity and compassion. The Tau seems to be a preferred symbol to other representations of the cross (especially those depicting Jesus on it) due to its other (mystical, pre-Christian) meanings.
The Yellow Arrow

With the Council of Europe denoting the *Camino de Santiago* as a ‘European Cultural Itinerary’, there was a need for a better marking of the routes so that travellers could find their way without much difficulty. This made access easy to most people, including those who are less able, including families travelling with young children, the elderly and the ill. A system of yellow arrows thus emerged, in which such signs would be painted wherever necessary: urban areas, natural paths or potentially confusing locales (see fig. 9). Today the yellow arrow has become, much like the scallop shell, synonymous with the Camino. They are to be found painted on every available surface but also as souvenirs to be sold at various outlets: t-shirts, key rings, jumpers, hats, postcards, wallets, socks, underwear and pencils all depict yellow arrows as a pilgrimage memento.

**Figure 9** Yellow arrow painted on a way mark. Note the stones placed on top of the column

Besides its primary function as a way marker always orienting travellers westwards, the yellow arrow also functions as a psychological and metaphorical re-enforcement of the goal of the journey, and a remainder of the flow of people who travelled the same path in the past.

Eduardo Chemin
The arrow points to Santiago, to that irreducible, simple, firm, assertion that if the traveller follows the ‘right path’ he or she will inevitably arrive at the destination: physically as well as spiritually. Hence the arrows are often taken as a sign of direction, but this is not limited to an individual’s positioning within a real and physical geography. The arrows are also a symbol indicating a constant certainty or flow. These metaphors are understood as such and are taken seriously, and souvenirs act as a reminder of their commitment to a personal journey. The simple act of wearing a t-shirt depicting a yellow arrow in Santiago, as many do, reminds the individual of the journey and the possibility of continuation after the physical journey comes to an end.

**Hostels & Hospitality**

Other elements found in the modern (walking) pilgrimage were also appropriated from the past in the re–imagining of the medieval pilgrimage. Hostels and the hospitality offered in them have become crucial in the re–popularization of the Camino and in the re–imagining of old traditions. It is through the so–called *refúgios* that travellers first come into contact with the ethos of the pilgrimage (see Kowalski, 2006). Those who own these places and those who volunteer there are often experienced (seasoned) travellers who are able to give advice of all kinds to a multitude of people, who see them as sources of support: psychological, practical and spiritual (see fig. 10). But hostels also function as discursive spaces: that is, the spaces in which people are able to bond. There travellers share evening meals and give each other mutual support. Many ‘mini–rituals’ are in fact performed in *refúgios*: dance, music, mystic/esoteric performances of cultic traditions, prayers, blessings of meals and masses are given by travellers themselves, by their hosts, or (as it is often the case) by both.

Today there are a multitude of pilgrim hostels. Here I separate them into different categories depending on the services they provide. First is those opened and maintained by a religious order such as the Catholic Church or an Evangelical group. A second type of hostel is those built, renovated or administered by confraternities and/or associations or federations of ‘friends of the Camino’. The latter are usually charities run by volunteers who remain functional with the help of donations and the annual fees paid by their members. One example is the Confraternity of St. James, based in London, which now administers two *refúgios* located in Rabanal del Camino (Province of León) and in the coastal town of Miraz (Galicia). Another example is the *Federación Española de los Amigos del Camino de Santiago***.
Santiago (Spanish Federation of the Friends of the Way), a charity responsible for many pilgrim hostels along the Camino. In both formats hostels often operate on a *donativo* (donation) basis. Donations vary from place to place but commonly suggested donations are only symbolic and barely cover the costs of running the hostel, which often offer an evening meal and breakfast for free.

**Figure 10** Hospitalero (volunteer): helping tired pilgrims to recover

The decision to charge travellers or not is often a contentious one. Many administrators feel that by charging the ethos of the pilgrimage is lost. Others see no harm in charging a small fee for the better running of the facilities provided. Whatever the arrangement, however, these places are often very welcoming and in many ways differ considerably from hotels or even ordinary bed and breakfasts. Hence at the heart of the ethos underlying the pilgrimage is the concept of hospitality (see fig. 11 and 12).

A third type of hostel is represented by privately owned establishments. Like the two types already mentioned, this form can also embrace the full ethos of the pilgrimage by adhering to the same principle of hospitality commonly seen on the route to Compostela. Hospitality
again is so important in this pilgrimage that even five star hotels may give ‘pilgrim meals’ at a reduced rate for those travellers that can present a stamped credential and thus prove they have been on a walking pilgrimage to Santiago. Within this category of ‘private’, hosts may choose to seek more or less involvement with the hospitality principle of the pilgrimage\textsuperscript{22}. There are others, however, who simply run their hostels like a business by charging for everything consumed inside the hostel and not really engaging with guests in a more meaningful way.

\textbf{Figure 11} Pilgrims sharing a \textit{cena comunitária} (communal meal)

Source: Personal Archive – photograph by the author.

\textsuperscript{22} see chapter 9 for some examples of hosts
A fourth type of hostel is represented by those administered by local authorities. These usually charge less than those privately owned hostels and offer more modern facilities; they are staffed by civil servants paid to perform the role of house–keeper (see fig. 13).

Despite an abundance of hostels as well as hospitals, restaurants and hotels along the route, the idea of an alternative (more personal) form of hospitality is very vivid on the Camino. The demand for hosts is great and many pilgrim associations and federations aim to train new enthusiasts for the role. During training, volunteers are told about the ethos of the journey and the importance of the pilgrim as a modern spiritual seeker. This does not simply consist in
giving instrumental (practical) advice to travellers. It demands a considerable amount of emotional labour. It is a supportive role that can deeply affect both travellers and hosts. Hence the concept of hospitality on this route not only entails the basic provision of food and shelter; it also forms an extensive network of psychological and moral support.

**Figure 13 Services offered on the Camino**

Source: personal archives. Promotional material printed by Albergue San Pelayo. These three images show an entrance ticket for a pilgrim hostel in Galicia. The photograph (centre) is of a purpose-built pilgrim hostel in La Rioja with capacity for 60 people; both are run by local authorities. The last image (bottom) shows a third sector emerging, a privately owned hybrid hostel. A cross between a bed and breakfast and a youth hostel – note scallop shell motives.
The Compostelana

At the end of their journey travellers are often presented with a Compostelana (see fig. 14). This is a certificate written in Latin and given to those who declare a religious, personal or spiritual motivation and who walked, cycled or rode on horseback for at least the last 100 kilometres (for walkers) or 200 kilometres (for cyclists and those on horseback) via one of the established pilgrimage routes. The figure on the right (fig. 15) is the certificate given to travellers who do not declare a religious, spiritual or personal motive for joining the Camino. This is written in plain Spanish and is less elaborate. Both certificates are issued by La Oficina de Peregrinos (The Pilgrim’s office) at Santiago de Compostela. Pilgrims have to queue, sometimes for an hour or more, to acquire one of these certificates. Some frame and display it (sometimes at the most prominent places of their homes). It is, like the Scallop shell and the pilgrim credential, a cherished memento. These documents have no connection to the pilgrimage as a medieval tradition, however, as they were introduced in the 1990s.

Figure 14 Pilgrim certificate in Spanish

Figure 15 Pilgrim certificate in Latin

Source: personal archives
Finisterre: The Beginning is at the End.

On the Camino, objects and places are very often related to Christianity. However there is a range of experiences that are more tied to ancient, esoteric and mystic symbols and ideas that appeal to modern [secular] travellers. Finisterre is perhaps, where this process can be most easily observed23 (Herrero Perez, 2008). In order to reach Finisterre, travellers often take advantage of a regular coach service from Santiago de Compostela, an approximate three hour journey or an extra four days hiking. For these travellers, the object through which contact with the ‘authentic’ is made is similar to that held by those who come to the pilgrimage guided by their interest in traditional religion.

For some travellers, however, Finisterre represents an attractive location. It is a dramatic end (both geographically and metaphorically) to the [spiritual] personal and physical journey; a distant place (the ancient end of the world) replete with natural elements that function as a refuge from a technology– and a bureaucracy–dominated world. This is particularly attractive to (mostly young) travellers who live in urban cosmopolitan societies where ‘people get caught in a time crunch feeling stressed and burned out’ (Timothy & Conover, 2006:139). What it is also interesting about Finisterre is the performance of rituals that emphasize a link between the modern traveller and ancient esoteric/mystic practices that are believed to have taken place along that route (and to pre–date Christianity), such as the neo–pagan Celtic and Roman traditions of sun worshipping. As the sun ‘dies’ at the end of the physical path, so does the old self. And when the sun is [re–]born, like a phoenix from the ashes, so is the new self (see fig. 16).

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23 Finisterre (meaning literally ‘the end of the world’) is a small fishing village on the Atlantic edge of western Spain approximately 90km west of Santiago in a region known as Galicia. This area is famous for its Roman and Celtic heritage as well as legends and stories of mystics who came to this remote part of Europe in search of purification and understanding of the codes of nature and universe.
Often seen as a form of transition from the old to the new, many pilgrims burn their worn-out clothes and leave their ragged boots behind on the many secluded beaches that form part of Cape Finisterre. Finisterre serves as an example of an intersection or convergence of two fields showing signs of commonality and difference between two distinct sub–systems: the neo–pagan beliefs in animist nature and the more orthodox belief in the embodiment of the sacred in the form of saints and their relics. The route to Finisterre is not (officially) recognized by the Catholic Church as part of the formal pilgrimage. However a certificate issued by the local authorities suggests a growing integration between the Finisterra route and the Camino with its end point at Compostela (see figure 17). Hence it would be a mistake to see this renewed interest in Finisterre as something separate from the more ‘main–stream’ pilgrimage culture for gradually even this leg of the journey is also becoming ‘institutionalized’.
Figure 17 Finisterrana a certificate given to those who complete the 90km to Finisterre from Santiago de Compostela

Source: personal archives
In the above I have presented an overview of the historical development of the cult of St. James as well as the pilgrimage tradition that followed, from its origins in the 8th century to the present time. Through the example of Santiago de Compostela it is clear that the religious movement towards pilgrimage sites has helped to forge what we recognize today as European culture. This is a characteristic of pilgrimage that, as I will argue in the next chapters, also holds true in modern contexts. Through a description of the basic elements of medieval religious life I presented an epoch in which religion and society were fully integrated: a time when belief undoubtedly permeated all aspects of daily life. I also drew parallels between past and present religious practices in an attempt to reveal the material culture of pilgrimage. Such commonalities are not only important because they show some historical continuity, but also because they challenge our views about past and present. Above all they locate the practice of pilgrimage within a continuum or historical development of wider socio-cultural and political contexts.

In the past, reasons for going on pilgrimage were as varied as they are today, and the act of pilgrimage (as religious practice more broadly) was, as it is now, inherently ambiguous. These are eclectic, elastic or porous rituals that incorporate a multitude of meanings and motivations. That is, they entail a series of discourses and practices that often contradict the core elements of the dominant faith. They are therefore contested spaces. Today the practice of pilgrimage has been incorporated into wider tourist markets that focus on culture, heritage and the religious traditions that shaped them, but this need not diminish the importance of these sites for our understanding of contemporary religion and consumer practices.
Chapter 2

Religious Tourism in Contemporary Europe

‘Pilgrimage involving penitence, the search for miracles, indulgences and the need for spiritual aid was an obvious purpose, but was blended with curiosity (the desire to explore strange worlds); trade (dealing in art, artefacts and relics); ecclesiastical business (the need for papal sanction, training and education for the administration of the Church) and culture (the desire to absorb art, literature, theology and learning) (Judith Champ, The English Pilgrimage to Rome, p.1).

The 21st century is undoubtedly the age of mobility. Although people have always travelled, the ease of movement we enjoy today would be hard to imagine even a century ago. As migration has become increasingly important for global economy and politics, so has tourism. But it is not only economies that benefit from this movement. Religion, it seems, is also being revitalized by the constant flow of people, ideas and goods we refer to as ‘globalization’ (Schirato and Webb 2003, Scholte 2005, Urry 2007) or ‘transnationalism’ (Vertovec 2009). We travel for a variety of reasons, mostly for leisure and work. But it seems that a growing number of us combine these motives with the expression of religious beliefs, or to satisfy a curiosity or need to experience sacred places, for healing, cultural interest or to celebrate or mark a particular episode in our lives. In Europe this movement often takes the shape of pilgrimages or tourist trips that, at their very least, focus on the appreciation of religious spaces, their heritage and history. ‘Religious tourism’ is a term that has come to define a movement towards places understood as religious heritage, a cultural construct framed by space and by time, an idea, an image, a building or landscape, a route: in sum, objects of memory and devotion24.

Following the description of the roots and material culture of the Camino de Santiago, I now focus on the contemporary movement of people towards a variety of sites in Europe as a way to contextualize the apparent growth in interest in organized pilgrimage more specifically. I depict the wider interest in religious heritage, and then later focus on the more specialist

24This is a contentious term, one often rebuked by academics and religious authorities alike. Here I use it simply as a way to describe the industry that has grown around the movement towards religious or spiritually important places.
interest in pilgrimage which such interest has engendered. I consider the *Camino de Santiago* within this wider context by acknowledging it as one form of religious tourism; thus pilgrimage in the strict Christian sense of the word, although very important, is not a unique representation of this movement but only part of the overall composition. Pilgrimages to traditional Christian shrines then become part of a broader movement towards ‘places of power’, places that may not be necessarily connected to religious traditions. Such places vary widely in their characteristics and history, from established traditional pilgrimage shrines to lesser known places and festivities which are not always associated with the practice of pilgrimage in the strict Christian devotional sense.

Until now, the first and only serious study attempting to survey Christian pilgrimage sites in Western Europe was written by Sydney and Mary Lee Nolan. In their co-authored volume titled *Christian Pilgrimage in Modern Western Europe* (1989), they studied 6,150 pilgrimage sites (850 of these were visited in person by the researchers). At the time, they estimated that there were approximately 6,000 Christian pilgrimage centres in Western Europe. These varied from local chapels and holy wells to internationally recognizable centres such as Fátima, Lourdes, Rome and Santiago de Compostela. Their admittedly conservative estimative was that between 70 and 100 million religiously motivated visits to these sites were performed every year. They further estimated that 72 shrines of great importance attracted ‘...large numbers of pilgrims...’ yearly (p.29), and that at least 830 European shrines attracted an average of 10,000 people or more every year. Since then there have been various developments in tourist infrastructure and political changes which have affected the vitality of some of these sites: some positively, some negatively. However, as this chapter makes clear, if we were to replicate this study today, partly due to the fall of Communism, the positive impact of European integration and improvements on transportation, the likelihood is that we would find an even greater number of shrines and an even more substantial number of people visiting them.

Religious tourism is a growing industry that has captured the will of political, economic, religious and cultural institutions, which increasingly see the value and importance of this type of activity as a fruitful, even necessary alternative or complement to other forms of tourism and religious practice. Although reliable, scientifically produced, data regarding this issue is particularly difficult to access (when it exists at all), some sources reveal an increasing (dual) movement feeding the popularity of such sites and the industries that surround it. Today, more than 300 million people travel annually specifically for religious

Eduardo Chemin

57
reasons, and an unknown number of people travel to places imbued with religious and spiritual meanings where they engage with religious traditions and doctrines, people and ideas. With revenues exceeding $18 billion a year, religious tourism is emerging with a force, especially in Europe where the tourist infrastructure is well laid out, well maintained and widely advertised. Even in the emerging economies of Eastern Europe, this movement is being followed by the incentives of institutions eager to capitalise on their cultural heritage and thus profit from the tourism generated by their numerous religious sites (Stamenković et al 2010).

The data presented here describes only a fraction of places of religious importance in Europe, and as such these can be considered simple ‘case studies’ that ‘illustrate’ the importance of these places for economy, religion and national identity. I discuss them in a sequence that follows a south to north axis: from the Catholic Mediterranean countries through to western and eastern parts of the continent, and ending in the Protestant north. Here I use the United Nations Statistics Division to group countries into ‘regions’ 25. It is, however, important to note that the assignment of countries or areas to specific groupings is for statistical convenience only and it does not imply or reflect any assumptions or particular views regarding political or other affiliation of countries or territories by me or the United Nations. I have personally visited a number of the sites I discuss in this chapter, including places in Italy, Germany, Malta, U.K., Spain, France, Portugal and Scandinavia, but I have also relied on secondary resources such as the internet as well as relevant academic studies for the overall compilation of data regarding factors such as numbers of visitors and motives.

The important academic debates regarding motivations of travellers and the similarities and differences between tourism and pilgrimage will be addressed in full in chapter 3 (see also chapter 4 for quantitative studies of motivations). For now, whenever possible I will use more value–free terms such as ‘visitors’, ‘travellers’ or ‘people’ to indicate human presence, even if the source of data classify visitors as ‘pilgrims’.

25http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm#europe – accessed 25/07/11. There are of course many issues that arise with the utilization of this method. For example, in this collection, countries like Poland and Czech Republic were classified as ‘Eastern Europe’ despite them often being referred to as ‘Central Europe’ by the inhabitants of these localities, media and other interlocutors. Another case in point is the United Kingdom. Despite being considered a ‘Western nation’, here the U.K. is grouped together with Scandinavian countries and labelled as ‘The North’.

Eduardo Chemin 58
The South

Malta

Notwithstanding cautionary notes regarding the interpretation of this data, as found in the Mintel Report (2005)\textsuperscript{26} in places like Malta, a country with a rich Catholic heritage, the number of visitors to its churches and places of worship seems to be increasing. Tourists to Malta are attracted by a variety of motives often combining interest in the religious, cultural and historical aspects of those places with the Easter Holy Week rituals, which have become increasingly important for Malta’s revenue. Although few tourists visit Malta solely for religious purposes, one commentator from the Maltese Tourist Office observed that

...church visits are one of the most frequent activities tourists engage in during their holiday in Malta. In 2004, 72\% of UK tourists visited churches during their stay in Malta. However, the appeal of our churches is not restricted to tourists of a religious turn of mind; our churches are also attractive to those seeking art, architecture, history, culture, Maltese religiosity and way of life (Mintel Group Report 2005: 37).

This trend regarding church visitation is reflected in the high percentage of people from other European countries to Malta who also visit churches even though they stated that the visit was not strictly ‘religious’. For example, 86\% of French, 73\% of Germans, 68\% of Dutch and 65\% of Italians who go to Malta also visit one or more of its churches during their stay on the island. A British tour operator offers packages to Malta as a pilgrimage island: ‘A pilgrimage to Malta in the footsteps of St. Paul’\textsuperscript{27}. According to their website, travellers will have ‘An opportunity to visit some of the most amazing shrines at a wonderful time of the year’\textsuperscript{28}. In their itinerary, tourists will visit Mellieha, one of Malta’s most prominent sites, and go on a boat trip to St. Paul’s Islands to visit the site of the saint’s alleged shipwreck. They will also visit the chapel of San Pawl Milqi where St. Paul was received by the Roman emperor, the village of Mgarr where travellers will taste Malta’s Mediterranean cuisine and visit St. John’s Cathedral amongst other important monuments. Travellers have private Mass arranged in advance and access to relics including the viewing of the wrist bone of St. Paul and a piece of the column on which he was beheaded. Thus Malta serves as a good illustration of the

\textsuperscript{26}The Mintel report uses a great variety of sources ranging from websites to the tourist offices of these locations. Some of these are shared with my own independent research.


multitude of services offered by tour operators across Europe to those who wish to visit sites that are linked to their faith.

Spa

In Spain, churches, monasteries and other sites – some of which are important pilgrimage places – are popular destinations for a multitude of visitors. Spain is saturated with buildings imbued with religious (and touristic) importance. Thus, as in other European countries, the heritage found in Spain is enveloped by sacred as well as secular meanings. The Spanish ‘heritage–scape’ (Di Giovine 2009) is one of the richest and most seductive in the world due to its high aesthetic value. With monuments dating back to early Christian periods, Spain is an open–air museum displaying real architectural treasures. Millions of visitors flock to Spain every year, for a great variety of reasons. Here I will only focus on the number of visitors to some of the most prominent Spanish religious sites. However, one should bear in mind the thousands of other events and festivals that currently attract large numbers of people each year. The Holy Week in Seville and the feast of San Fermín in Pamplona (with the famous running of the bulls), suffice as examples. Both of these are attractive ‘cultural’ festivals but they also offer an opportunity for the religious to come to these places and visit their religious buildings.

More broadly, by looking at the total of U.K. visitors to Spain for instance, we find that there was an increase from 14,011,200 million visitors in 2001 to 16,032,400 million in 2003. In 2001, 49,100 declared their reasons for visiting the country as ‘religious’, compared to 100,800 in 2003. That is, an increase of 105% took place in 24 months (Movimientos Turísticos En Fronteras [Frontur, IET] Spanish Tourist Office [U.K], c.f. The Mintel Report 2005: 32). Perhaps even more interestingly, in the same report we also find that in 2002 48,818,900 million people from a great variety of nationalities visited Spain, 912,300 of whom declared their visit as ‘religious’. This number actually represents a decrease in the numbers of visitors in 2003 when an estimated 49,040,900 people visited Spain (763,700 came for specific ‘religious’ reasons). It is clear that this decreasing number of religious visitors does not indicate a decline in interest in religious sites, but a general decline in visitors, caused by a multitude of factors including Spain’s lack of appropriate investment in tourist infrastructure and wider economic downturns. It is hence difficult to establish motivations on the basis of statistical increase or decrease.

Eduardo Chemin
One need only think of sites such as *La Sagrada Familia* (Barcelona) to see the complexity of the relationship between religion and tourism and how there are many nuances between sacred and secular motivations and sites. Credited to the genius of architect Antonio Gaudí (and entirely financed via donations), this magnificent building currently attracts 5,000 international visitors per day during the winter months and 10,000 people per day during the summer months, totalling on average 2 million visitors every year\(^{29}\). If for a moment we consider that all of these visitors are motivated only by secular curiosity, there would be other facets to this movement which would also have to be taken into account. For instance there is a strong relationship between architecture, a cult figure and religion here. This is well exemplified by the man who built the Cathedral, Antonio Gaudí, a cult figure who is often referred to as ‘God’s architect.’ *La Sagrada Familia*, his masterpiece basilica, was added to UNESCO’s World Heritage List in 1984, but it was consecrated by Pope Benedict XVI only in 2011. This has validated the building as a place of religious importance for Catholics, but only after it was already established as an architectural wonder visited by millions of tourists each year. Another interesting facet of this is that the consecration of the basilica has coincided with a campaign for Gaudí’s beatification after an alleged miracle involving his intervention\(^{30}\).

This is an interesting case because it symbolises the dynamics of the ‘sacralisation of place’ and, with it, the conviviality of secular and religious interests in the construction of ‘sacred sites’. It makes apparent how people and places are venerated and how they become part of a national identity. In Catalunya (Cataluña), Gaudí and his buildings are admired – not to say ‘worshipped’ – as symbols standing for the sophistication, creativity, innovation and passion of the people of Cataluña. As I mentioned, *La Sagrada Familia* is now officially a Catholic religious building and that adds yet another layer of sacredness onto the coat of meanings of such a place, transforming it into a cauldron of narratives and discourses and attracting a diverse array of people.

This added importance given to places of high aesthetic value by secular institutions is an important aspect of the development of religious tourism. The relationship between religious emotion or devotion, architecture, cult figures and secular powers is exemplified by agencies like the Council of Europe and UNESCO who add to the construction of meanings given to these places. For instance many places of religious importance in Spain have been included in

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\(^{29}\) www.sagradafamilia.cat – accessed 01/08/11

UNESCO’s World Heritage List and some are also part of incentives given to conservation works by the European Union. These include places like the Benedictine monastery complex at Montserrat (also in Cataluña) which currently attracts between 2.2 and 2.7 million visitors annually\(^3\), the Cathedral of the ‘world heritage city’ of Salamanca, the cathedrals of Cordoba\(^3\), Seville\(^3\) and Burgos\(^3\) all three part of UNESCO’s World Heritage Sites – all of which attract an average 2 to 3 million visitors yearly. These places are coated with cultural, religious and political discourses. They serve various purposes and have survived due to the relationship between secular and religious institutions which protect and publicise them, not only as tourist attractions but also as places of religious, cultural and political importance. More importantly, sometimes the veneration of these places takes shape as an end point to personal, often religious, ‘pilgrimages’.

This is certainly the case of the Iglesia de Nuestra Señora del Rocío (Andalucía), one of the most important pilgrimage sites in Spain. It currently attracts masses of visitors every year that may come due to religious devotion or simply to witness the lively festivities which take place at Pentecost. The population of El Rocío is of 700 people only, but during the festivities of the weekend before Pentecost Monday – that is June 1\(^{st}\) and May 24\(^{th}\) – as many as 1 million people from all over the world take part in the famous Romería (procession)\(^3\). It would be impossible to separate the success of El Rocío from the cultural identity of Andalucía, the efforts of the Spanish Ministerio del Tourismo (Ministry of Tourism), the Catholic Church and other (local) entrepreneurs, associations, federations and a variety of other charities and interest groups. Indeed, Spain is one of the most visited countries in Europe and its religious heritage plays a fundamental role in attracting visitors all year round. The most famous religious site in Spain is, undoubtedly, Santiago de Compostela (the focus of this study – for data concerning this site see chapter 1), but there are also thousands of other pilgrimage sites in Spain which currently attract unestimated numbers of people but which show the importance of religious tourism for the country.

This great variety of places includes León (a well-known stop for travellers on the Camino de Santiago), which attracts people for its own important buildings, like Gaudi’s Casa de los Botines, its great Cathedral and the famous Basílica de San Isidoro. Like many religious

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\(^3\) www.abadiamontserrat.net – accessed 01/08/2011
\(^3\) www.catedraldecordoba.es – accessed 25/07/11
\(^3\) www.catedraldeburgos.es – accessed 26/07/11
\(^3\) www.visithuelva.com – accessed 01/08/11
buildings in Europe, the latter two are a hybrid of museum and religious shrine which attract a great number of people who come with a general ‘cultural and religious’ interest. Also, 32 km. north of the city of Andújar (Jaén) we find the church of the ‘Virgin of the Head’ (La Basílica y Real Santuario de la Santísima Virgen de la Cabeza), a well–known Marian shrine and pilgrimage destination for a variety of Christians and non–Christians alike. On the same scale, in Getafe (Province of Salamanca) we find El Santuario de La Peña de Francia (‘Our Lady of Sorrow of France’). Getafe is a city in the southern zone of the metropolitan area of Madrid and is one of the most populated and industrialized cities in the region. It is also the place of many religious festivals and processions especially those related to Holy Week. In Getafe religious celebration occurs forty days after Easter Sunday. Celebrations usually begin some days prior to the days of the Ascension – according to tradition, this is the day the Angels descended from the Cerro de los Ángeles (marked by ‘The Monument to the Angels’), to carry the virgin up to heaven. Other famous and well–attended religious ‘hubs’ include the Jesuit sanctuary of St. Ignatius Loyola in Azpeitia (Basque Country) and ‘Our Lady of Guadalupe’ – one of the most important Marian shrines in Europe. The latter is particularly important as an example of a religious site which incorporates many ludic and cultural elements. It is revered in the monastery of Santa María de Guadalupe (today’s Cáceres), where the famous ‘Bolibongkingking Festival’ takes place. During this event Lobocanons (the local people) celebrate the feast with loud music and fireworks, starting nine days prior to May 24th with a ballad of praises to the Virgin Mary which are sung (in various languages) before the start of novena masses. These festivities are attended by a variety of people from around the world. Guadalupe is one of the most revered places in Europe as it keeps one of the only three ‘Black Madonnas’ of Spain.

Portugal

In Portugal, Fátima (in the north–western region of the country) is the most prominent example of a pilgrimage tradition to emerge in a rapidly modernising period. Fátima is Portugal’s national shrine and its origins lay in the reporting of five apparitions of the Virgin Mary on the 13th of each month, from May to October 1917 to a general crowd. The numbers of those visiting the shrine of Our Lady is continually increasing. Here we find that numbers of visitors to the church services increased from 1.8 million in 1992 to 3.5 million in 2003, representing a leap of 1.7 million people or 92% in over a decade. The Mintel report, on which part of this data is based upon, further combines other data from the same shrine in an
effort to make a better judgement of the real increase in numbers of people visiting the shrine. Mintel researchers included the number of celebrants, attendees at mass, and the number of people participating in other celebrations at the Sanctuary. They state that ‘In 1993 the number was 2,350,708 compared to 6,975,835 in 2003, representing a difference of 4,6256,127 or an increase of almost 200% in the number of visitors over ten years’ (see chart 2 – Mintel Report 2005:29).

**Chart 2** Mass attendance at Fátima (Portugal) from 1992 to 2003

![Fátima Mass Attendance](source)


**Italy**

Italy also attracts a vast number of visitors annually to its thousands of heritage, religious and pilgrimage sites. The Pope’s Easter and Christmas speeches at The Vatican attract multitudes that come not only to hear his Holiness, but also to wander amongst a mind-bending number of heritage sites, monuments and places of great artistic value that make Rome, and indeed the whole of Italy, one of the most visited places in the world. In 2004 an estimated 190,000 people gathered in St. Peter’s Square to see and hear the Pope giving his *Urbi et Orbi* Easter address. The Vatican believes, however, that approximately 2 million people came to Rome
to see the then Pope (John Paul II) in the same occasion but could not make it into the square. It is estimated that 20 million visitors come to the Vatican every year: people from different faiths and cultural backgrounds that visit the ‘eternal city’ for a great variety of reasons, with leisure and tourism, broadly conceived, topping the list. Also during 2009, approximately 7.5 million people visited San Giovanni Rotondo in the southern Italian province of Foggia (in Puglia), the burial place of Padre Pio: a beloved figure for millions of Italians who flock annually to the final resting place of this Benedictine monk canonized by Pope John Paul II on June 16th 2002.

Italy has a multitude of pilgrimage sites of international renown: too many to be list here. These would include Assisi, the home of St. Francis (1182–1260), which, according to the Mintel report, attracts from 3 to 5 million visitors a year. St. Francis himself was an avid pilgrim who visited sites including St.Peter’s tomb in Rome and Santiago de Compostela in Spain, so the tradition of making a pilgrimage to Assisi is also tied to the Saint’s own lifestyle. St. Francis’ wanderings around Europe are relatively well documented due to his celebrity status and many churches on the French Way in Spain are dedicated to him, some linked to the time when he was himself walked on the pilgrimage route to Compostela in the 13th century.

The Population of Assisi is estimated at 6,000 people yet the constant influx of visitors makes it one of the busiest pilgrimage sites in the world. Similarly, in Turin in north–west Italy, one of the most important – and controversial – relics in Christendom is permanently displayed making it an important site for Christian visitors. Turin houses what is believed to be the Holy Shroud, the piece of cloth that allegedly covered Jesus’ body after the crucifixion. Turin’s tourist board acknowledges that approximately 1.5 million visitors come to the city every year. However the day the Shroud was put on display authorities recorded 2 million visitors entering the city in less than sixty days: the equivalent of 30,000 people a day. Italian authorities believe that approximately 40 million people visit the country each year and for these visitors ‘...religion may be a part...’ of their motivations (Mintel Report, 2005: 31). According to one tourist board representative:

People visit Italy for multiple reasons, which include experiencing Italian culture, visiting the country’s cities and spending time at the beach. With such good transport links, for example you can travel by rail between Naples and Rome in two hours, people may well visit religious sites and buildings as part of their holiday (ibid).
Like in Spain there are numerous sites in Italy which attract a variety of people from Europe and abroad who, due to their interest in the culture and the religious heritage of places of devotion every year visit Italy’s towns and cities. Places like Loretto (the Holy House of Loreto – associated with a Marian apparition), Bari (Basilica of St. Nicholas), Pompeii (the shrine of the Madonna del Rosario), Materdomini (the shrine of St. Gerard Majella), Paola (the Sanctuary of St. Francis of Paola), Palazzola (a spiritual retreat owned by the English College of Rome) are high on the list of tourist agencies across Europe. But other places like Montenero (the shrine of ‘Our Lady of Grace’), Cascia (Basilica of St. Rita of Cascia), Nettuno (the shrine of St. Maria Goretti), Pietralba (Pietralba Monastery – one of the most famous pilgrimage places in South Tirol) and Trieste (an interesting ‘hybrid’ place where Catholic and Orthodox Christianity are part of the identity of the place – as for example the Catholic Cathedral dedicated to St. Justus and the Serbian Orthodox church of St. Spyridon) are also important places for both pilgrimage and cultural heritage tourism in Italy.

*The Balkans: Examples from Serbia & Montenegro*

In Serbia, a country described as a place where, due to post-communist ‘desecularization’ a ‘(hyper) production of Holy places’ is taking place (see Radulović 2010: 143), we find three sanctuaries of particular importance. Two of these are of Orthodox origins, namely the Most Holy Madonna Land Cover in Dunis and St. Petka in Kalemegdan, while the other is the Catholic shrine of the Madonna, or ‘Our Lady’, of Tekia in Petrovaradin. Although Christian in origin, these sites are attended by people belonging to a multiplicity of religions including Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants, Pagans and Gypsy Muslims (see Radisavljević–Ćiparizović 2010). In these sites ‘dozens of thousands of people, mostly from Serbia and Republika Srpska...’ use the site for religious purposes (ibid: 157). Due to its eclecticism and popularity the site of the Most Holy Madonna Land Cover in Dunis is also known as the ‘little Serbian Lourdes’. Anecdotal evidence from a nun, Mother Evgenija, ‘the oldest nun in the monastery’, tells us that in some years ‘this holy place was visited by 100,000 people’ which would flood the place in less than 24 hours (ibid).

This movement is, however, not new to Serbia. Whilst the churches in the capital city of Belgrade were empty throughout the 1970s and 1980s, in the same period, at the burial place of St. Petka (Kalemegdan), people queued to pay their respects to the saint. Of particular importance is October 27th, when water is sanctified. This ceremony is attended by both
Christians and Muslims alike. Tourists visiting Belgrade and Kalemegdan fortress often also visit the Church of Ružica and St. Petka's chapel. On August 5th celebrations take place in the Madonna of Tekije sanctuary, an event which became known as ‘Snow Madonna Day’. This name related to the battle between Christians and Turks which took place on that day in 1716. Also a well–attended shrine, Tekije attracts a mixture of pilgrims (mainly Christian and Muslims), who whilst practising their own rituals also come with their entire families as part of their holiday vacation.

In Serbia, as well as in Croatia, Slovenia and indeed the whole of the Balkans, there is evidence to suggest that people use ‘cult places’ belonging to ancient sites of Christianity as well as pagan origins as places of pilgrimage. These are used by people belonging to a variety of religions and cultural backgrounds. Such places are usually centred on devotional (cultic) objects, waters or wells, stones, crossroads or burial places. Qualitative research has shown that the belief in the power of such places is not only alive, but manifests itself in a variety of ways and meanings are constructed by a variety of actors and visitors who may be Muslims, Catholics or Protestants (see Petrović et al 2010). In regions such as ‘middle Timok’, for instance, places of worship and pilgrimage are so numerous that researchers had to develop typologies in order to interpret and classify some of the differences between them (Krstić 2010).

Another important pilgrimage site in the Balkans is Saint Fruska Gora Mountain in the northern Serbian province of Vojvodina, a place dominated by over 200 sacral buildings pertaining to a variety of religious traditions, including 16 Orthodox monasteries. The latter form part of a complex of monasteries spread across Serbia, with approximately 100 edifices of religious and spiritual significance to a variety of faiths. According to Serbian researchers, these represent ‘the unique potential for development of faith–based tourism in the Balkan region’ (Stamenković et al 2010: 88).

Furthermore, in Montenegro, the most popular pilgrimage place is the Ostrog Monastery near Nikšić (North Centre of Montenegro). It belongs to the Serbian Orthodox order and is dedicated to Saint Basil of Ostrog whose relics are kept there. With regards to the numbers of visitors, as an Orthodox pilgrimage site, the monastery is second only to Jerusalem and the Holy Hill. The monastery is famous for healing miracles, and the multitudes who visit the place often come seeking cures. Despite its Orthodox roots, the monastery is also visited by Muslims and believers from other Christian faiths. The most important visitation days are
marked by St. Ilija Day, St. Patr Day, All Saints, the Feast of the Assumption and May 12th when St. Basil’s day is celebrated (see Božović 2010).

_Greece_

So far I have only scratched the surface, for there are a great number of sites which adorn the Mediterranean and which have become important places of worship and a marker of national identity for a variety of groups. To cite one example, I point to Pangia Evangelistria Church in Tinos in Greece (see figure 18), which attracts thousands of visitors every day (see also Jubisch 1995). Although accurate numbers are difficult to establish one thing is obvious: Pangia Evangelistria is as important for Orthodox devotees as Fátima or Lourdes are for Catholics. A large percentage of the Greek tourists that go to Tinos are self-styled ‘pilgrims’ and it is not uncommon for people to make their way into the church on their knees (see figure 19) – although knee pads have now become acceptable as a way to alleviate the pains of penitence. In Tinos alone there are about one thousand other churches, some of which are also pilgrimage sites. Hence it would be hard to estimate the precise number of sites in mainland Greece and the Islands.

_Figure 18_ Pangia Evangelistria at Tinos Island – Greece

Figure 19 Pilgrim making her way on her knees into Pangia Evangelistria at Tinos (Greece)

Source: photograph courtesy of www.greece-island.info/tinos.htm – accessed 01/04/11

To give a better idea of the scale of religious tourism in Greece, out of the seventeen Greek sites which have entered the UNESCO World Heritage List, at least three quarters are places of religious importance. Locations such as Mount Athos and the six surviving Greek Orthodox monasteries that form the complex of Meteora (Thessaly – see figure 20) are at the top of this list for their cultural, historical and religious importance. Meteora currently attracts an approximate 600,000 visitors annually. According to UNESCO, the monasteries of Meteora ‘represent a unique artistic achievement and are one of the most powerful examples of the architectural transformation of a site into a place of retreat, meditation and prayer’.

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36 www.visitgreece.gr – accessed 01/04/11
37 http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/455 – accessed 06/06/11
In a power display of human ingenuity the monasteries fuse architecture and nature, which merge into breathtakingly organic forms. These buildings are difficult to access (since narrow and slippery steps lead to the top), but the surrounding landscape and high aesthetic value of place overrides these difficulties. The site is widely publicized and as such is used as a background for a variety of marketing campaigns such as for tourist holiday packages as well as credit card brands and other products.

**Western Europe**

*France*

In the western part of Europe, France is the most prominent example of a secular society where religious tourism is responsible for a good proportion of the tourist revenue. Currently over 50 million tourists visit France every year and religious tourism has an approximate 44% share of this market. 52% of the cultural heritage of France can be classified as places of pilgrimage, or at least sites of spiritual and religious importance. France has approximately
5,000 pilgrimage sites of which 185 are officially recognized by the Catholic Church (Stamenković et al, 2010). From the north of the country to the south, the most prominent sites are Amiens, Lisieux (Normandy), Paris (the miraculous medal at Rue de Bac, Sacré-Cœur, Notre Dame), Le Mont Saint Michel, Chartres, Pontmain, Sainte–Anne – d’Auray, Nevers, Paray–le–Monial, Taizé (a monastic community situated at Saône–et–Loire in Bourgogne), Le Puy–en–Velay, Rocamadour, the sanctuary of La Salette, Ars and finally Lourdes: the second largest pilgrimage destination for Roman Catholics in the world. Many places of pilgrimage in France, apart from being centres or end destinations in their own right, also form part of the network of routes that link some of these places to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. These reference points form a pan–European network of pathways linked by places of high spiritual power and aesthetic value, places often framed around a building, artefact or some (sometimes mythical) event.

Rocamadour, for example, is used as a pilgrimage site associated with The Black Madonna, a statue that is said to have performed miracles since medieval times. However, that same site is also geographically close to the Camino Francés, and as such is visited by pilgrims on the way to Compostela. Rocamadour is also part of the many routes pertaining to the European cultural itineraries of Europe and so is used by secular hikers as well as religiously motivated visitors. Le Puy–en–Velay, a famous pilgrimage destination in its own right, is yet another good starting point for travellers coming from the north and central parts of France, as well as for those who come from the British Isles and Scandinavia. Le Puy is a town that has a history of relic veneration traceable back to the middle–ages. Like Rocamadour, it houses an image of a Black Madonna (Virgin Mary) that attracts devotees all year round. This is not to mention Amiens Cathedral, where sculpture and sand carvings – including a statue of the patron saint of travellers (Saint Christopher) – are displayed along with the famous monochrome labyrinth guiding visitors to the centre of their spirituality.

As in Malta, Spain, Italy and Greece, many French pilgrimage sites have also been denominated ‘world heritage’ by UNESCO. This is the case for instance for Mont–St–Michel’s Benedictine complex, and Chartres and Amiens cathedrals. The latter two were both important (medieval) pilgrimage sites which now attract people from all over the world for their religious importance as well as their architectural treasures, including their famous labyrinths. This ‘heritageisation’ of sacred spaces is a trend that has the power to revive long forgotten locations or traditions by making them accessible to a wider public. The inclusion of these buildings and landscapes on the UNESCO list adds to the seductive power of these

Eduardo Chemin
locations. Approximately 6 million people visit Lourdes, followed by 3.1 million visitors to Mont–St–Michel, 1.5 million to Rocamadour, 1 million to Lisieux and 0.7 million to Le Puy–en–Velay (Mintel International Report, 2005). It is important to highlight, however, that visitors are not always motivated by religious beliefs, and that such numbers only represent the total number of visitors to these places without differentiating between motives. That said, the current enthusiasm for pilgrimages in Europe seems to challenge even the most Catholic cultures found elsewhere.

To consider examples from larger countries outside of Europe, the shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida do Norte in Brazil currently attracts an annual average of 7 million visitors, and a record number of people were observed in 2009 when 9,554,485 million people visited Brazil’s premier national shrine. The Church of Aparecida is the largest building in honour of Mary in the world. In terms of its importance, this site could be compared to Lourdes, which attracted 6,379,534 million visitors in 2009. However France’s population is of approximately 66 million people compared to Brazil’s nearly 200 million. A visit made by Pope John Paul II to Lourdes in 2004 attracted approximately 300,000 visitors in one single day – August 15th, the day of the Assumption and the busiest day for Marian shrines. To make another comparison, in Mexico the shrine to Our Lady of Guadalupe, the most visited Marian pilgrimage shrine in Latin America, attracts an average of 15 million visitors each year, whereas Notre Dame de Paris receives approximately 12 million, many of whom will attend mass during the first Friday of every month when the Crown of Thorns is displayed to the crowds. Mexico’s population, however, is approximately 112 million people, or almost double of that of France.

Since 1858 a gradual but steady increase in numbers of visitors going to Lourdes has been observed. Two episodes show a sudden increase in numbers, one in 1958 and the other in 2008. These were special occasions that marked the respective 100th and 150th anniversaries of the Miracle of Lourdes. In 1958, the number of people visiting Lourdes reached 5 million for the first time. In 2002 this figure rose to 6 million and in 2008 it surpassed 9 million. On average, tourists visiting Lourdes spend an approximate €400 to €500 million annually, making this movement a massive contribution to the economy of the region. With less than 3% of all visitors coming from non–European countries, sites like Lourdes are clearly part of a particularly European pilgrimage culture that remain vigorous despite the official secular status of the European Union as established in the Lisbon Treaty.
Furthermore, there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of local pilgrimage sites in France that do not benefit from the same international profile such as Lourdes or Chartres but which, nevertheless, attract a substantial number of people (at least around 10,000 visitors a year). It is important to mention other places like the Taizé community, in eastern France, which hosts an astonishing number of meetings, processions, and activities for the hundreds of thousands of people (especially young adults) who come for the benefits of the ‘Taizé experience’ throughout the year (see fig. 21). It is difficult to estimate with precision the number of people who attend ceremonies, and their motivations are largely hidden from the sociological gaze. However:

‘...the fact that religious shrines across France (and the world) are attracting millions of international visitors each year shows that religious heritage has an important place within national tourist industries’ (Mintel Report, 2005:26).

**Figure 21** Young people taking part in ceremony at Taizé

![Young people taking part in ceremony at Taizé](http://www.taize.fr)


Even if we entertain the possibility that the number of ‘real pilgrims’ visiting these destinations is small, this is still significant, as it seems that this movement has been noticed
not only by academics, but also by the private sector, which is commissioning reports in order to respond to growing demand for these services.

**Belgium & The Netherlands**

In Belgium two Catholic sites are prominent: the sanctuary of Our Lady of Bearings (also known as ‘Our Lady of the Golden Heart’), and Our Lady of Banneux (also known as the shrine of ‘Our Lady of the Poor’). As the name indicates, both are associated with Marian apparitions, and both attract hundreds of thousands of people every year. In the website dedicated to Banneux, we find a calling to the religious and the non-religious alike. Millions have visited the site since 1932, the year the apparitions took place, and this movement still continuous to this day.

You, who come through Beauraing, stop for a few minutes regardless of your religious or moral convictions. Something is happening here. A message of serenity, peace and joy. At the Sanctuaries, during retreats, contemplate the preserved surroundings of the region, you are invited to replenish yourself, to retrace the unfinished border between the essential and the accessory, between tolerance and rejection...

In Banneux, the site where from January 15th to March 2nd 1933 the Virgin Mary allegedly appeared eight times to Mariette Béco, a young girl aged 11 years, we find that

…Each year, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims, come, alone or in groups, notably during the Triduum of the sick, to confide to Our Lady their poverties, their sufferings, their pains, their wants.

Furthermore, in the most comprehensive study of pilgrimage sites of a single European country to date, The Meertens Instituut (Amsterdam) found more than 662 active pilgrimage sites in The Netherlands alone, a good proportion of which were of Catholic origin. The Netherlands is one of the most liberal and secular societies in the west of Europe, where only a small percentage of people actually attend church services on any given Sunday. However

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38 www.beauraing.catho.be – accessed 26/07/11
39 www.banneux.nd.be – accessed 25/07/11
40 www.meertens.knaw.nl/bedevaart for a comprehensive and detailed list of each individual site – available in Dutch only

Eduardo Chemin
the Meertens Instituut research has uncovered the vitality of pilgrimage sites in that country, showing the remarkable resilience of this form of movement. The number of people visiting these sites is difficult to estimate (precisely because of difficulties in establishing motives for visitation) but to give an idea of these places I briefly describe three of the most popular pilgrimage sites in the Netherlands. The first is the apparitional Marian cult of ‘Our Lady of All Nations’ in Amsterdam. The name is linked to the visionary Ida Peerdeman, who until 1959 received messages from the Virgin Mary. She introduced herself as ‘the Mother of All Nations’, who wants to bring peace and unity among all nations and religions. In 2002 the bishop of Haarlem, Mgr. J. M. Punt, officially recognized the apparitions and since then the chapel dedicated to the Lady became an important site for pilgrims, who now come from all over Europe to pay their respects. One of the curious aspects of this particular shrine is the number of women who attend ceremonies and special prayer days. The second shrine is the town of Heiloo where Saint Willibrord was said to have performed a miracle around 690 A.D. It has a chapel from the 12th century known as the Onze Lieve Vrouwe ter Nood visited annually by approximately 15,000 people, according to a Meertens Instituut researcher. The third site is associated with Amsterdam’s ‘Silent Procession’, a tradition associated with a miracle which took place in the medieval period. Every year, what is now a festival week begins on the Wednesday after March 12th. From then on throughout Saturday, holy masses of devotion are celebrated in the Beguinage (the oldest and most famous of the many courtyards in the city created in 1346 to house Beguines, pious catholic women who lived and dressed like nuns, without taking formal vows). Annually the procession gathers approximately 6,000 to 7,000 people.

Germany

In Germany we also find an active religious tourist market where pilgrimage sites, religious festivals and other related events also attract a considerable number of people. In Wittenberg and Cologne there are important pilgrimage sites which would certainly demand a more thorough investigation, but which are visibly important for local and indeed national identity. Unsurprisingly Wittenberg (Martin Luther’s Memorial house) and Cologne’s Cathedral have also been designated World Heritage Sites. Cologne is firmly on the European pilgrimage map, especially after it successfully hosted the 2005 ‘World Youth Day’ – a Catholic movement specifically focused on young people. This event attracted millions to the site that same year, with Cologne’s cathedral as the focal point. The Cathedral is a pilgrimage site

Eduardo Chemin
which attracts a variety of people from all backgrounds and cultures, who come to admire the neo–gothic architecture, and the ceremonies and history of this impressive building. Explaining the inclusion of the building in their World Heritage List, UNESCO reported that:

The Committee decided to inscribe the nominated property on the basis of cultural criteria (i), (ii) and (iv) considering that the monument is of outstanding universal value being an exceptional work of human creative genius, constructed over more than six centuries and a powerful testimony to *the strength and persistence of Christian belief in medieval and modern Europe.*

There are many other sites in Germany which incite similar interest. Kevelaer (North Rhine–Westphalia) is one of the best known examples of a well–visited Catholic shrine in Germany. A reported 1 million visitors, mostly from Germany and the Netherlands, visit Kevelaer every year to honour the Virgin Mary. The Sanctuary of Mary Queen of Peace at Neviges, the domain of a Franciscan order, also attracts 150,000 to 200,000 thousand visitors each year. This town, now part of the suburban area of Velbert (North Rhine–Westphalia) is the site of one of the earliest reported Marian apparition (1681) north of the Alps. It is also the site of an architectural wonder: the Pilgrimage Church ‘Maria – Queen of Peace’, built by the famous architect Gottfried Boehm. In Kam–Bornhofen in the middle–Rhine region (district of Rhein–Lahn) we find a vibrant pilgrimage site dating back to the 13th century. The building houses exquisite and historic works of art and it includes the miraculous image of the Virgin Mary, the 18th century high altar made of marble, the pulpit and many other features of interest that are visited and admired by a large number of visitors each year.

In Bavaria we find major Catholic shrines which have attracted a considerable number of visitors throughout the ages, and which to this day are very popular. These include Oberammergau’s Passion plays, which currently attract hundreds of thousands when the plays take place. The last occasion (2010) gathered an estimated 500,000 visitors during the period from May to October, in which more than 2,000 villagers acted the scenes of Jesus Christ’s journey through preaching, crucifixion, death and resurrection. Speaking to some tour agencies in Britain, I found that a single tour operator can take as many as 10,000 pilgrims each time the plays are enacted. A diverse array of visitors from around the world

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41 www.whc.unesco.org/en/list/292 – accessed 06/06/11 – italics added
42 www.kevelaer.de – accessed 01/08/2011
43 www.mariendom.de – accessed 01/08/2011

Eduardo Chemin 76
come to see the plays, many from places as far away as Japan and Australia. In Walldürn, a town in the Neckar–Odenwald district (Baden–Württemberg), we find yet another important pilgrimage site associated with an image of Christ. Today, more than 150,000 people visit the over 670 year–old pilgrimage shrine. The peak time for pilgrimage in Walldürn lasts for four weeks beginning on the Sunday after Pentecost (the feast of the Holy Trinity). During this period, another 100,000 people join the pilgrimage as Fußwallfahrtsgruppen (foot pilgrim groups), resembling those walking to Santiago de Compostela. But there are other (special) groups and days of pilgrimage in Walldürn. For instance motorcyclists will join the processions (on Saturday before Pentecost), families with children will cycle on the second Saturday of September (the so–called Jugendwallfahrstag), and a pilgrimage day for First Communion is also performed. The diversity of groups and motivations make these occasions vibrant and colourful.

In Trier we find the oldest church in Germany, built on the site of Emperor Constantine’s own church (326 A.D) and representing another pilgrimage site of international reputation and recognition. Many relics related to Christ are housed in Trier Cathedral (Dom St. Peter) including the Holy Robe (believed to be the piece of textile Christ wore during the Crucifixion) and a nail also linked to that event. Today Trier Cathedral still attracts a great number of people for, of course, a variety of reasons – from religious devotion to simple curiosity. However perhaps one of the most important pilgrimage sites in Germany is that of Altötting, a small town located in upper Bavaria which is famous for the Gnadenkapelle (Chapel of the Miraculous Image). This is an octagonal building which keeps a venerated statue of the Virgin Mary associated with the story of a 3–year–old boy who had drowned in the river and was revived when his grieving mother placed him in front of a wooden statue of Mary at the high altar in 1489. News of the miracle quickly spread, and the chapel was immediately extended. Today an average of 1 million people visit Altötting annually – for religious and other cultural reasons. Moreover, this place is now even closer to the heart of Catholicism, for in the nearby town of Marktl, Pope Benedict XVI was born. Together with Oberammergau, Altötting is not only one of Germany’s most important shrines, but also one of Europe’s Catholic ‘spiritual hearts’.

44 http://www.wallduern.de – accessed 01/08/2011
45 www.altoetting.de – accessed 01/08/2011
Eastern Europe

Poland & Czech Republic

In Eastern Europe two different locations currently attract high number of visitors. The first is the main pilgrimage site in Poland centred on the veneration of the painting of ‘Our Lady of Czestochowa’. The second is Apparition Hill in Medjugorje (Bosnia and Herzegovina). Both are active Catholic pilgrimage sites attracting millions of visitors annually. With somewhere between 11,000 and 13,700 visitors a day, Czestochowa has attracted between 3 and 4 million visitors a year for the past ten years (Mintel Group Report 2005:36). Czestochowa is, however, the negative case in this data. Figures for Poland show that between 1994 and 2002 the number of visitors that came to the country on a self–reportedly visit for religious reasons fell from 1.4 million to 507,000 – a decline of 71%. However looking at other sectors of the Polish tourist industry it is clear that this fall was linked to a broader and complex economic context rather than decline of interest in this particular location alone. Between 1998 and 2002 the number of overall foreign arrivals fell by 43%: from 89.1 million in 1999 to 50.7 million in 2002. Many factors contributed to this decline, in particular the events which took place in New York on September 11th 2001 and the immediate world–wide economic and security crisis that followed. These affected tourist industries around the world as well as Poland’s own internal economic frailty at the time. Adding to this Poland was still commercially isolated from the European Union and, as such, it was ‘outside’ Europe’s main pilgrimage itineraries for those living in Western Europe.

However much has changed since the publication of the Mintel report (2005). Prior to 2004, no low–budget airlines provided services to Poland from other parts of the E.U. Today budget airlines such as Easyjet and Ryanair together fly to a total of ten destinations in Poland including Warsaw, Krakow, Gdansk, Katowice, Bydgoszcz, Lodz, Poznan, Rzeszow, Wroclaw, and Szczecin. Since Poland has also joined the European Union, its tourist infrastructure has benefited enormously from the renewed influx of foreign visitors. In addition, its own domestic tourist industry gained notable strength, a fact that is well illustrated by the renewed vitality of its pilgrimage sites. Recent statistics show that Jasna Gora, the site where the pilgrimage takes place, is steadily recovering from the bad days of economic and political instability. Visitors to Jasna Gora often arrive in large groups formed of hundreds of people who crowd the streets in and around the squares and broad avenues that lead to the sanctuary (see fig. 22). Although the majority of pilgrims are of Polish

Eduardo Chemin
nationality, Jasna Gora also attracts a great variety of people from many countries. In 2005 4.5 million visitors came to the site, followed by 4.5 million in 2006, 4.5 million in 2007, 3.5 million in 2008 and a similar number in 2009.

Figure 22 Crowds of pilgrims in Czestochowa, Jasna Gora (Poland)


Data for Medjugorje shows that in 1983, 1.37 million of the people who visited the site attended mass. This was followed by a low point in 1992 when that number decreased to 1.14 million (83%). Since 1997, with the violence caused by conflicts in the area, numbers continued to decline, but recently, numbers have increased significantly with 1.18 million Holy Commumions being given in 2003, just 0.19 million less (14%) than the ‘golden period’ of 1990. In 2009 that number remained the same.

As with other sites where the safety of visitors is jeopardized by socio-political unrest, for example Israel and Kashmir, this pilgrimage site has suffered from the brutality of armed disputes in the region.

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Eduardo Chemin
In the east we also find a number of other sites that attract a considerable number of visitors annually. To cite only the most famous, I point to Rama Czeck Mariazell in Jejnice and the Sedlec Ossuary in Kutna Hora – both in the Czech Republic. Although I have not been able to access statistics for these sites, these are located in the main tourist and backpacking routes of Europe and are well grounded in the pilgrimage culture of the country. Anecdotal evidence suggests these are also well visited places.

The North

The United Kingdom & Ireland

In England, a country with a strong Protestant culture, places of pilgrimage are (still, or yet again) attracting visitors. Canterbury, for example, attracts an average of 3 million visitors annually, who come to visit the famous Canterbury Cathedral, the burial place of St. Thomas Becket, who was martyred in 1170. Glastonbury in Somerset, a small town of 9,000 inhabitants which has gained a reputation among both Christians and Pagan faiths, is also attracting a growing number of people to its multiple sites. Besides the various attractions Glastonbury has to offer in its eclectic range of services – from Buddhists and Hindus to Taoists – it also hosts an annual Christian pilgrimage celebrated since 1924, the year that marked the Bristol Anglo Catholic Glastonbury Pilgrimage and the Church Union in Salisbury. According to the Glastonbury pilgrimage official website:

From the '60s to the '80s, average numbers attending the pilgrimage have increased from 5,000 to 8,000 and the coaches from 60/70 to 110/120. Where there were 2,000/3,000 communicants in the sixties and 3,000/4,000 in the seventies, there are 5,000 today. This has required more communion stations, the purchase of our own vessels and the need for more priests...

In addition to the Christian pilgrimage, people come to Glastonbury from all around Europe and beyond, attracted by Arthurian myths and Pagan festivals and rituals. Glastonbury is home to a wealth of services and products that cater for those interested in New Age spirituality as well as others: from people concerned with environmental issues to Christian devotion (see figure 23). With the Tor and Glastonbury Abbey firmly grounded in the tourist

routes of England, this is an eclectic space where a variety of groups come together in one way or another (Bowman 2008, 2011). Indeed, Glastonbury is home to a variety of groups who are politically engaged in the construction of Glastonbury as a spiritual (pilgrimage) centre.

In Walsingham, a small locality in Norfolk, a Chapel dedicated to ‘Our Lady of Walsingham’ (where the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared to a woman in 1061) is also a popular pilgrimage site. In total these pilgrimage sites, according to the Mintel report, attract an average of 6 million people every year.

**Figure 23** Glastonbury Pilgrim Union at Glastonbury advocating ‘green fuel’


This is not to mention the unknown number of people going on ‘pilgrimages’ to Pagan and Christian sites all over the British Isles besides Glastonbury. Stonehenge in Wiltshire, for Eduardo Chemin 81
instance, receives at least 20,000 strong crowds every year, who come to witness the summer Solstice – usually staying the whole night (see Blain and Wallis, 2006a, 2006b). In addition to the importance of particular places, there are also numerous walking routes that have recently acquired religious or spiritual significance in Britain. For instance the Saint Birinus’ pilgrimage in Oxfordshire (see fig. 24) is becoming a popular pilgrimage, appealing to day trippers and backpackers alike. During the dissolution of the monasteries in 1530, the original shrine was destroyed along with many other Catholic buildings. However a new shrine in honour of St. Birinus was built on the same site. Interestingly the new building incorporates some of the stones from the original in an effort to give continuity to the spirituality of place. The new pilgrimage centre is located at the south aisle of the old abbey church at Dorchester, revealing the important role heritage plays in the re–inventing (or reviving) of traditions. Today hundreds of people take part in the annual pilgrimage from Churn Knob at Blewbury to Dorchester every July (this is based anecdotal evidence as the official numbers of attendees were not available at the time of writing). As on the Camino de Santiago, day–trippers carry a ‘pilgrim passport’ that must be stamped at certain stages. They also receive a certificate at the end if they provide the passport fully stamped.

Figure 24 Visitor to St. Birinus pilgrimage in Dorchester holding a stamped ‘pilgrim passport’

Despite the clear difficulty in accessing and analysing this type of data, there seems to be a growing interest in these sites.

In Ireland, a country with a strong Catholic tradition, Croagh Patrick and Knock (the former linked to St. Patrick and the latter to the Virgin Mary) are both important not only for believers but for a general sense of national identity (Egan, forthcoming). Lough Derg (Donegal) is another example of a site which people visited for over a 1,000 years. Also known as St. Patrick’s Purgatory, it attracts a substantial number of visitors – especially during the summer months. In combination these three sites attract an estimated 2 million visitors annually.

The Celtic regions in general hold a wide range of other sites of spiritual importance in the British Isles which attract an increasing number of visitors. This include the Isle of Iona, Inner Hebrides and the Findhorn Foundation in Moray Firth (Scotland), and the Cistercian Way in Wales (which passes Tintern Abbey – see fig. 25), and Lindisfarne (which receives an average of 650,000 visitors yearly) including:

...bird–watchers, walkers, fishing–parties, artists, writers, photographers and film–makers, historians and scientists, journalists, industrialists, politicians, actors, theologians, wildfowlers, yachters, golfers (resting overnight in the excellent nearby Northumberland golf courses) as well as thousands of Christian and non–Christian pilgrims.

These are all examples of sacred spaces that have been incorporated by tourist markets and vice–versa. They are places of tourist interest that are increasingly becoming sacralised.

49 www.lindisfarne.org.uk – accessed on 01/04/2011
50 www.lindisfarne.org.uk – accessed on 05/07/2011
Besides more prominent Christian and other sites of religious and spiritual importance, in Britain – as elsewhere in Europe – there is a wealth of other places that are acquiring important status for local communities. Examples of such places are now to be found even in inner city spaces, where a number of migrant groups and communities have adopted urban landscapes as places of worship. For instance Hindus (first, second and third generation) have incorporated parts of the River Thames into their celebrations, and Muslims in inner city London, Bradford and Birmingham, have transformed public buildings and spaces into places of worship and prayer (see Eade forthcoming). For some time now ethnic minorities have viewed urban landscapes as meaningful spaces for worship and religious practice. This phenomenon, although not new, requires further study.

**Norway & Latvia**

In recent years there has also been an increase in numbers of pilgrims to Nordic shrines. One of the most prominent cases is the pilgrimage to Trondheim in Norway. The resting place of St. Olav has become popular amongst people of all ages and is quickly becoming ‘reintegrated’ into the main–stream of pilgrimage sites and routes. Nidaros Cathedral in
Trondheim was certainly one of the great pilgrimage centres in medieval Europe. After a long period of decline it is again attracting visitors, thanks to the efforts of the Norwegian tourist board and Trondheim’s enthusiastic council. Walking to Trondheim is quickly becoming a popular activity, especially for young Scandinavians who enjoy summer holidays whilst walking on the footsteps of medieval pilgrims\(^51\). As is the case with the *Camino de Santiago*, pilgrims who walk are awarded certificates, must carry a ‘pilgrim passport’ and use much similar regalia. The main route to Trondheim is approximately 640 km long, beginning in Oslo, in the ruins of the Old City moving north. It then follows the lake Mjøsa, up the valley Gudbrandsdal, over Dovrefjell and down the valley Oppdal before ending in Trondheim. There is a Pilgrim’s Office in Oslo which gives advice to pilgrims and is also responsible for awarding pilgrims their certificates.

In Latvia, the Jāņi Festival is an important public event attracting the attention of a variety of groups including New Agers from beyond Latvia, since it is believed to have pagan (and ethnic) origins. The festival also marks the summer solstice and the worshipping of the Sun God as well as a divide in nature: that is, the longest day of the year and the shortest night. It also serves as a marker for the work of farmers as it represents a break in the agricultural calendar\(^52\). These are popular tourist destinations that need more attention from sociologists of religion as they embody a growing movement towards festivals and sites imbued with a mixing of old and new forms of belief bounded by consumer activity.

### Agencies & Entrepreneurs

Despite the predominance of Catholic visitors at the pilgrimage sites mentioned above, it is important to note that a diversity of groups and individuals from a great variety of faiths visit these places, including a significant number of Protestants and a less numerous but diverse range of others, including Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, Jews and New Agers. In spite of the famous opposition to pilgrimage at the time of the Reformation, it seems that religious tourism is becoming one way in which Protestants now engage with their spirituality, either in the form of walking pilgrimages or other modes of tourism such as package holidays to the Holy Land or other ‘spiritual wells’. Religious tourism represents a growing market, and a variety of services have emerged to cater for the needs of these travellers. For example, a


\(^{52}\) [www.latvianembassy.org](http://www.latvianembassy.org) – accessed 01/04/2011
representative of one of the dozens of tourist agencies in Britain focusing specifically on sites of religious significance wrote that:\(^{53}\)

As a company we carry approximately 3,000 passengers a year, 75% to the Holy Land. About 15% of this number would be to destinations like Greece and Turnkey associated with St. Paul and the early Church. About 10% to other destinations including Rome and Santiago. Our Pilgrims are mostly Protestant so we don’t operate to Lourdes or the Catholic shrines. We have been operating for about 25 years with very stable numbers. The exceptions are Oberammergau passion play years (this year!) when we carry an additional 10,000 people to see the play.

A representative of a second tourist agency based in the U.K.\(^{54}\) also notes that ‘In twelve months we would take at least 5,000 travellers to U.K., Europe and the Holy Land...’ There are a number of agencies, not–for–profit organizations, church–led groups, pilgrim associations and individuals (including clergy men and women, Protestant, Catholic and others) in the U.K., and indeed all over Europe, who promote and make possible people’s access to places of religious or spiritual importance. These include visits to cultural itineraries, religious monuments and natural landscapes imbued with religious and spiritual meanings. With this in mind it is appropriate to conclude, as the Mintel Report does, by saying that:

...Generally, the prognosis for religious tourism is positive...As travel patterns continue to change – for example, in response to consumer demand for more authentic, spiritual and cultural experiences, the diversification of a country’s tourism product, the increased availability of religious tours and cheaper international travel – an increase in the number of holidays that incorporate a significant element of religious tourism (such as a pilgrimage route, or a visit motivated by visiting churches and places of worships, as is the experience in Malta already) is a natural progression (2005: 47).

Following on from this it can be said that this situation:

\(^{53}\) www.mccabe–travel.co.uk – accessed 10/09/2010
\(^{54}\) www.toursforchurches.co.uk – accessed 09/09/2010
...supports the argument that the number of religious tourists and pilgrims has grown in recent decades, in line with the dramatic rise in tourism on a global scale...and will continue to increase, over the years (Mintel International Group Report, 2005:4).

Whilst the data presented above is necessarily limited in its scope and does not claim to be representative of Europe as a whole, or even to be essentially exact (in a quantitative sense), it indicates clearly the importance of studying places where heritage, religion and tourism are transforming landscapes and being used as a form of cultural exchange and learning as well as religious practice. Referring back to Sydney and Mary Nolan’s work (1989), this claim seems to support their contention that:

...the late 20th century is...the latest epoch in a dynamic pattern of rise and decline in enthusiasm for pilgrimage that has characterized the European Christian tradition for nearly 2,000 years (1989:3).

Spiritually and religiously motivated journeys are among the most common motivations for travel and this trend seems to be increasing rather than decreasing (Timothy and Olsen, 2006). It is also important to mention the ‘apathetic or curious tourists’, who are becoming more abundant at pilgrimage sites than spiritual pilgrims, as sacred spaces become commodified by marketing and a broader trend towards cultural tourism (2006: 1–2). Yet we must keep in mind that this is nothing particularly new, as the historical analysis of the pilgrimage to Santiago has shown (see chapter 1). This ‘fusion’ of seriousness and play, between movement and place, sacred and profane is something that has accompanied pilgrimage centres from their origins throughout their development and establishment as ‘traditions’. One has only to think of those allegorical (literary) pilgrimages such as The Canterbury Tales or The Pilgrim’s Progress to see the diversity of characters and the wide array of motivations that drove people in former times to seek shrines, holy wells and miraculous objects. From the ludic need for entertainment to the seriousness of penitence, like everything else, the motivations for pilgrimage have also changed, although some affinities still persist.

Due to the rich history often found in these locations (one that maybe constructed, re–invented or indeed authentic), pilgrimage sites both modern and ancient must be understood as part of a wider phenomenon born out of the modern need for [re]creating traditions. This phenomenon involves not only the ‘invention of a tradition’ as such, but the giving of new meanings to old traditions. Most pilgrimages are formed from a plethora of narratives and
discourses that simultaneously diverge and converge at the pilgrimage centre or shrine (see Chemin 2007). Such discourses represent the beliefs and practices of a variety of groups, living in distinct social environments, who establish a connection to a place through a variety of socially constructed narratives. In this light, movement is aligned with place in the production of landscapes that are underpinned by both religious and consumer (secular) impulses. In this sense, places of pilgrimage act as vortexes where a variety of socio-cultural, political and economic drives come to coexist in the production of (utopian) spaces. Despite the individual nature of the pilgrim’s quest, each performance is part of a collective move towards ‘places of power’ that represent a wider search for the qualities symbolically locked in such landscapes.

Despite this understanding of such places as incorporating a plurality of meanings, and despite efforts to reconcile theoretical extremes, there is a dichotomous tone in the literature concerning pilgrimage. This is well entrenched in both popular and academic circles: including the nature of religious devotion, de–traditionalization, secularization, what constitutes religious phenomena, definitions of religion, behaviour and so on. In the next chapter I therefore turn my attention to theoretical arguments which in my view have, in one way or another, focused on the assumed – yet inherently dominant – dichotomies which pervade the scientific study of religion, and consequently pilgrimage, in contemporary Europe.
Chapter 3

Social Theory & the Return of the Pilgrim

‘In the middle ages people were tourists because of their religion, whereas now they are tourists because tourism is their religion.’ (The Rt. Revd. Lord Robert Runcie, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1980 to 1991)

So far I have described the historical evolution of the Camino de Santiago from an eclectic religious ritual focused on place to its present day manifestation as a place of heritage and religious tourism. In this vein I have attempted to establish a link between the rekindled enthusiasm for pilgrimage and a growing market favouring this form of movement. First, the historical overview showed continuity between past and present and the relationship between so-called sacred and profane motivations. Second, this idea was re-enforced by various sources of data showing the current popularity and importance of religious sites for European tourist markets.

In this chapter I highlight the most significant theoretical and empirical studies on the theme of pilgrimage and tourism, focusing in particular on the dominance of Durkheim’s differentiation between sacred and profane. Ideas about sacred and profane space are implicit in the central academic discourses underpinning notions such as convergence and divergence, communitas and competition, religion and tourism as well as in popular and literary descriptions of pilgrims (religious) and tourists (secular). Hence the overall aim of this chapter is to challenge this polarization of meanings. In this light I give continuity to a growing interest in the study of tourism and its importance to the understanding of pilgrimage, religion and spirituality in Europe (see Cohen, 1984; 1998; 2004 and Stausberg, 2011).
Convergence & Divergence

In the media and in academic discourse, the terms ‘pilgrim’ and ‘pilgrimage’ have long been used as metaphors to describe journeys and experiences ‘redolent with meaning’ (Digance, 2006). Such journeys imply contact with an object, symbol, place or person of importance to the visitor. In this context, however, pilgrimage is not necessarily related to any creed or organized religion (Dunn & Davidson, 1996; Margry, 2008). For those attempting to study pilgrimage seriously, the ambiguity of this form of ritual is often seen as a theoretical hurdle. The eclecticism and fluidity of meanings have been noted by many scholars – especially anthropologists. In academic discourse the extraction of the word ‘pilgrimage’ from specific religious contexts has its roots in the functionalist views of two scholars, namely Dean MacCannell (1973; 1976) and Nelson Graburn (1978). Influenced by Durkheim’s work, and attempting to find some theoretical coherence, they focused on dichotomies such as pilgrim/tourist, community/individual and sacred/profane, in order to differentiate and classify motivations. However, rather than bridging the supposed gap between these binaries, both theorists have implied that our ideas of sacred and profane became rather reversed; that is, the tourist is the modern ‘secular’ pilgrim, and tourism a new religion.

These views became heavily influential and, as with the work of Victor and Edith Turner, they set the scene for much of what was to come. Indeed Turner’s celebrated Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture (1978) became a landmark in the study of pilgrimage. So influential was this text that it provided the basis for much that was written in the past three decades with regards to the practice of (especially) Christian pilgrimage. Of particular importance are the concepts of ‘Communitas’ and ‘Liminality’,55 which I discuss later in this chapter. The Turners’ work dictates that pilgrims and tourists cannot be altogether distinguished from one another, yet at the same time they recognize that the act of pilgrimage is differentiated and special. For them, pilgrimage sites are confined to a ‘sacred periphery’

55In Turner and Turner (1978) Communitas is described as ‘a relational quality of full unmediated communication, even communion, between definite and determinate identities, which arises spontaneously in all kinds of groups, situations, and circumstances…it combines the qualities of loneliness, sacredness, homogeneity, and comradeship…’ (p. 250). Liminality (from lat. Limen, a threshold.) is the state and process of mid–transition in a rite of passage. During the liminal period, the characteristics of the liminaries (the ritual subjects in this phase) are betwixt and between. The liminal state has frequently been likened to death; to being in the womb; to invisibility, darkness, bisexuality and the wilderness (see Turner & Turner, 1978: 249 for a more complete description of liminality).
that is far removed from mundane (and profane) daily life. Hence implicit in this literature is an inherent contradiction, which still pervades the study of pilgrimage.

These theories now constitute a core discussion in the study of pilgrimage, which is often referred to as the ‘convergence’ and ‘divergence’ debate (Cohen, 1992a). In this debate Graburn (1977), who defines tourism as a modern equivalent of the medieval sacred journey, and MacCannell (1973, 1976), who sees in tourism a modern substitute for religion, belong to the convergence side. Both believe that tourism is essentially a form of modern (and secular) ‘pilgrimage’. For example, in MacCannell’s work we find that ‘tourist attractions are precisely analogous to the religious symbolism of primitive peoples’ (1976/1999:2). Along these lines, modern individuals see their own living space as less authentic than that of those who lived in other epochs, other geographies and within the more simplistic social environments of traditional societies. In this sense, tourism is a reflection of the modern nostalgia for a more authentic past, rather than simply a concern for the natural and an eagerness to collect souvenirs of ancient cultures. Indeed, for MacCannell, the figure of the tourist represents the ‘conquering spirit of modernity’ (1976/1999:3).

MacCannell further contends that there is a place for tradition in the modern world, but that its role is relegated to the supplanting of that nostalgia. In sum, it provides a sense of history, of profundity for the modern project (ibid, p.34). Here we find an explicit differentiation between what is understood as the ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ realms – despite MacCannell’s willingness to recognize tourism as a valid sociological whole. Indeed, he constantly draws parallels between the tourist and the religious traveller, whilst also pointing to tourists as those who show a ‘ritualistic attitude’ when in contact with special sites (ibid, p. 43), whether secular or religious. MacCannell’s preoccupation with the relationship between tourism and religion is undoubtedly linked to his interest in other elements of social practice. However his view is unbalanced in the sense that for him, tourism comes to be a ‘replacement’ for religious practice. As he puts it:

Traditional religious institutions are everywhere accommodating the movements of tourists. In ‘The Holy Land’, the tour has followed in the path of the religious pilgrimage and is replacing it. Throughout the world, churches, cathedrals, mosques, and temples are being converted from religious to touristic functions (1976/1999:43 – emphasis mine).
Tourists tend to embody a quest for authenticity, but this quest is a modern version of the traditional (religious) concern with the sacred. The functionalist view of pilgrimage analyses this phenomenon in terms of existing social orders, as a process that reaffirms such order, welding communities together and creating or reiterating a sense of group consciousness, as opposed to other forces that come to represent its ideological opposite. In sum, here we see a thesis that incorporates Thorstein Veblen’s idea that ‘leisure reflects social structure’ (Veblen, 1912). This was at the time a ground-breaking development, which needs careful attention, but one which also needs to be refined and translated to late-modern contexts.

In a similar vein, Nelson Graburn (1978) also suggests a dichotomy between the sacred and the profane. His main argument dictates that tourism is a non-ordinary event. For him individuals leave the profanity of mundane everyday life in order to step into the sacred and extraordinary. Following Turner’s concept of liminality, Graburn holds that tourism becomes a modern form of pilgrimage. Again, however, it is a secular and different one; in fact here we see the development of the oxymoron ‘secular pilgrimage’ (see also Moore & Mayerhoff, 1977). Graburn contends that:

...for traditional societies the rewards of pilgrimage accumulated grace and moral leadership in the home community. The rewards of modern tourism are phrased in terms of values we now hold up for worship: mental and physical health, social status, and diverse, exotic experiences (1978:24).

For Cohen (1992a), ‘divergence’ was the chronologically earlier position and it emerged largely as a criticism of the cultural critics themselves (MacCannell 1973:598–601). By evaluating rather than understanding tourism, these critics failed to realize the more profound cultural meaning of tourism, which allegedly makes it a functional equivalent of the pilgrimage of traditional society. For MacCannell (1976), for instance, the tourist’s attitude to places of aesthetic value is characterized by ‘respectful admiration’ (p.40) and his or her visit to them is expressly called a ‘pilgrimage’ (p.43). Hence the tourist attraction becomes the new shrine of modernity. Similarly Graburn (1977) notes that the traditional division of times into profane and sacred periods found in tourism a novel expression: everyday life, the ‘daily humdrum often termed a ‘dog’s life’, since dogs are not thought to ‘vacation’’ (p.22).

Although it became widely appealing, this approach has been criticized, in particular MacCannell’s idea that tourism is a replacement for religion as such. The most important of these criticisms is offered by Cohen (1992a, 1992b, 1996, 1998). He argues that tourism is ‘a
modern, mass leisure phenomenon’ (Cohen, 1992a:48; see also Cohen, 2004), and hence is
devoid of any deeper spiritual or cultural significance. In other words, the tourist is a
distortion of the earlier, serious traveller, and the modern pleasure trip is an ‘aberration of the
Grand Tour’ (see Turner & Ash 1975:137). I find this to be clearly a value–judgement not
really based on empirical reality, but on an inherent belief that the tourist is (unavoidably) a
secular and apathetic being.

From this perspective tourism and pilgrimage, although phenomena originating from the
same source, have profoundly diverged with the advancement of modernity. For all of the
theorists mentioned so far, modernity distorts the meaning of pilgrimage. That is, tourism is
seen as a shallow form of (hedonistic) travel, devoid of deeper meaning and, as such,
antithetical to the profound spiritual quest of the past epitomized by the figure of the serious

Just like those he criticises, however, Cohen also uses Durkheim’s distinctions of sacred and
profane to create a typology of tourist experiences. He contends that those who argue that the
tourist should be seen as a modern pilgrim have not accounted for the internal world in which
each of these characters live. Accordingly, the tourist and the pilgrim should be differentiated
on the grounds of motivations (1996). Although both tourism and pilgrimage imply
movement, tourists and pilgrims move in opposite directions. That is, whilst the pilgrim
moves towards his cultural centre, tourists move away from it. Based on this argument,
Cohen’s typology postulates five types of tourist experiences. In order to better understand
his views I offer a brief description of each one of them.

_A Typology of Tourist Experiences_

Cohen begins with what he terms the ‘recreational’ mode, a process that could also be
understood as the ‘secularization of tourism’. Tourism originated from pilgrimage quests for
a sacred centre. So for Cohen, modern tourism serves as a space for high class socialising.
People are ‘healed’ by the recuperative ‘powers’ of a vacation and this is a secular enterprise
that benefits the individual through leisure activities, a change in scenarios, a break from
routine and so forth. He further argues, however, that in treating travel as recreation, the
journey loses its spiritual content.
In the second of these categories, the *diversionary* mode, he describes those travellers who need a break from routine in order to make ‘alienation endurable’ (1996:96). This type of tourist experience differs from the recreational as it is ‘the meaningless pleasure of a centre-less person’ (1996:97). However, at this stage a question arises: what happens when people are no longer adhering to their societies ‘because’ they have become aware of their own alienation and disenchantment?

Going back to MacCannell, there are two ways in which one can consider such a problem. One is as a revolution of the system in the hope of social reform, and the other (less radical) is as a search for meaning outside these societies; in other words, a search for meaning by looking at the other (MacCannell, 1976). This summarizes the third stage of Cohen’s typology: *experiential tourism*. It is at this stage that MacCannell likened tourism to pilgrimages. For MacCannell, both tourists and pilgrims are on a hunt for authenticity, but from now on the gap in opinion widens. For Cohen there are some crucial differences between the two: ‘the tourist always travels to the centre of ‘his/her’ religion, though that centre may be located far beyond the boundaries of his life–space or society’ (Cohen, 1996:99). Cohen admits that there are similarities with pilgrimage in this sense, for the tourist may also travel to ‘artistic, national, religious and other centres of his own society or culture and pay them ritual respect’ (ibid). Yet, for him such similarities do not make a tourist into a pilgrim for two reasons: a) the tourist looks for the strangeness of other cultures and environments, and b) the pilgrim, on the other hand, is centred in his own culture.

Even if the tourist becomes completely immersed in other cultural environments, he does not ‘convert’ to other forms of living; he is constantly aware of its role as the other. Whilst the pilgrim senses spiritual kinship with even a geographically remote centre, the *experiential tourist* remains a stranger even when living amongst the people whose authentic life he observes. MacCannell’s tourist seems to experience only vicariously the authenticity of the lives of others, but does not appropriate it for himself. The quest is essentially religious, but the actual experience is primarily aesthetic, owing to its vicarious nature. The aesthesis provoked by direct contact with the authenticity of other cultural settings may reassure and uplift the tourist, yet it does not provide a new meaning and guidance to his life.

This can be seen most clearly where experiential tourists observe pilgrims at the shrine; the ‘pilgrim’ experiences the sacredness of the centre, whilst tourists may experience aesthetically the authenticity of the pilgrims’ experience. This is often observable when
‘tourists’ take pictures of ‘pilgrims’. In this act, tourists are separating themselves from pilgrims by admitting that pilgrims (the authentic part of the landscape) are now part of their ‘tourist gaze’ (see Urry, 2002). In this ‘experiential’ mode, even though it is clearly more profound than the ‘recreational’ or ‘diversionary’, one would rarely find ‘real’ religious experiences simply because the ideology that motivates movement is different from religious practice or spiritual search (Cohen, 1996:99).

That said, in the experiential form of tourism we find those who no longer engage with the spiritual centre of their own society, but who then find the ‘need’ to engage with other forms and alternative meaning–making ideologies. Cohen calls this group ‘disoriented post–modern travellers or drifters’ (1996:100). That is, they lack priorities and do not engage in serious commitments as they are pre–disposed to try alternative life–styles in their search for meaning. For those who travel in order to search for a new spiritual meaning, travel becomes highly significant as a process. According to Cohen this group is indeed on a ‘religious quest’, but without a clear target or goal. The spirituality is diffuse, a mosaic of beliefs and meanings that are forged in modern urban and affluent societies. For these travellers the religious seeking may be interminable since the more they seek, the more difficult it becomes to commit to anything that has a structural form. For Cohen, this type of tourist cannot be converted, and therefore differs from the pilgrim.

The last of Cohen’s typology refers to what he calls the existential tourist. By that he means those who are committed to a form of travel through the veneration of an ‘elective’ spiritual centre that is at the same time external to their own culture. This process, however, does not imply an explicitly religious (in the narrow sense of the word) commitment to orthodox doctrine. According to Cohen, these travellers can find fulfilment in a new environment that offers the possibility of more simplistic living as well as greater contact with nature. It often carries spiritual connotations and can also be projected on to a ‘centre’. As Cohen puts it, ‘The experience of life at the centre during his visits sustains the traveller in his daily life in ‘exile’, in the same sense in which the pilgrim’s new spiritual strength, is ‘re–created’ by his pilgrimage (Cohen, 1996:101).

In his critique of the functionalist view Cohen exemplifies how complex the motivations of those who undertake such journeys can be, and how there are grounds for the differentiation between certain types of tourists and pilgrims. It is interesting to note, however, that this typology follows an ascending scale where the recreational tourist is at the bottom of a
pyramid, whereas the existential tourist is closely aligned with the pilgrim at the top. So although Cohen sees differences, to a certain extent he also acknowledges the similarities between the two. Movement becomes extremely important in this case, but he emphasizes that it is ‘motivation’ that defines the pilgrim and consequently sets him apart from the tourist.

Despite his more insightful (integrative) ideas, I still disagree with the core premise of Cohen’s work which, like the other theorists analysed so far, inevitably still draws on a supposedly ‘essential’ difference between pilgrims and tourists, despite elements of overlap. He does however, take into account the effects of longitudinal interaction between biography (self–narratives), place (landscapes and heritage) and texts (religious, spiritual, fiction novels, diaries, autobiographies), which I see as being an important way to think about those who seek pilgrimage sites today. Cohen also positively begins a conversation that brings us to the question of how pilgrimage sites might embody these differences in motivation into its structure. There is also room to understand how pilgrims and tourists interact in such sites, and their relationship with the explicit religious discourses that often frame pilgrimage and heritage sites. Before I discuss this in greater detail, however, it will be useful first to return to the work of Victor and Edith Turner.

The Turners & the Study of Pilgrimage: Communitas & Liminality

As noted earlier, the study of pilgrimages has been heavily influenced by the work of Victor and Edith Turner’s work. Their often quoted statement, ‘a tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist’ (1978:20), became a mantra in pilgrimage studies for more than a quarter of a century (Swatos & Tomasi, 2002). In Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Cutlure, pilgrimages are seen as religious ‘kinetic rituals’. Adapting Arnold van Gennep’s ideas of rites of passage (1909), Victor Turner (1969) – then on a solo project – developed the view of pilgrimage as a transitional ritual. The central notion of his theory is that pilgrimage is an anti–structural liminal or liminoid (temporary) space that differs, and therefore embodies, an opposition to the structures of social order. For him pilgrimages should be thought of as utopian spaces which people enter when in contact with a pilgrimage route or shrine. Accordingly, this process occurs when agents leave one structured social sphere but fail to enter another. They exist then ‘betwixt and between’ social spheres where mundane social
discourses and structures do not apply. Despite the interdependent character of the tourist and the pilgrim, pilgrimage is synonymous with sacred (egalitarian) spaces, or normal day to day life with a profane (unequal) environment (see also Graham & Murray, 1997). For the Turners, pilgrimages are spaces where people exist without the usual constraints imposed by modern social structures. Indeed, for them pilgrimage is a space which allows people to step out of normal everyday ruled and regulated existence.

This, however, is only half of the story. The *liminoid space* that comprehends pilgrimages also offers what Turner terms *communitas*. *Communitas* in turn can be differentiated into three different levels – *spontaneous, normative* and *ideological* – although broadly speaking it refers to a sense of connection to a whole: a ‘humanness’\(^{57}\) felt by people once they enter the *liminoid* space. Pilgrimage, in its essence, incites the expression of universal, human bonding, an experience that breaches formalities imposed by socio–cultural normative expectations. For the Turners, although pilgrimage is necessarily anti–structural, it is not to the extreme of what they called *existential communitas*, meaning the de–structuring of community experience ‘organized into a perduring social system’ (1969:132). Most importantly, they see pilgrimage as a product of the religious system which has generated it (1974).
Figure 26 Tourist or pilgrim? A Brazilian ‘turigrino’ a pseudonym given to people walking the pilgrimage. It means a ‘pilgrim’ who behaves like a ‘tourist’.

Source: photograph courtesy of Jackie Twitchett.

After asking the traveller pictured in this photo why he was taking the picture of the altar, he told me his mother was a devout Catholic who was suffering from Cancer and he wanted her to walk the pilgrimage with him. As she was too ill to do so he was taken her with him in memory. Photography came in as a good resource as he constantly e-mailed his mother the pictures.
Competing Discourses

Although these concepts have become an essential starting point for most conceptualizations of pilgrimages, there are various disagreements amongst scholars regarding them, with *communitas* and *liminality* being fiercely debated concepts. One of the most influential critics of the Turner’s work, and specifically of *communitas*, was Michael Sallnow (see Sallnow, 1987; Eade & Sallnow, 2000). His main argument is that pilgrimages are, in fact, ‘contested sites’. In his study of Andean pilgrimage (1987) Sallnow comes to the conclusion that, in reality, pilgrimages affirm and strengthen the social boundaries and distinctions between groups rather than dissolve them in a universal sense of *communitas*. In Eade and Sallnow (2000) we find that pilgrimage routes and sites express a multiplicity of meanings, written into them by the different and competing convictions of the various categories of pilgrims, as well as the ritual specialists, officials and others involved in organizing the pilgrimage. Their view is that pilgrimage is an arena for the expression of competing religious and secular discourses (2000). In this light the pilgrimage process is characterized by a heterogeneity which they contrast to the homogeneity seen in Turner’s work. There are ‘...varied discourses with their multiple meanings and understandings, brought to the shrine by different categories of pilgrims, by residents and by religious specialists’ (2000: 2–4). These carry ‘mutual misunderstandings as each group attempts to interpret the actions and motives of others in terms of its own specific discourse’ (ibid).

For Eade and Sallnow the very category of ‘pilgrimage’ should then perhaps be questioned, if pilgrimages are proven to be dependent on their particular historical contexts. Here they contest the universalism of the Turnerian view by arguing that if we are unable to provide an universal meaning for those who take part in pilgrimages, then the term pilgrimage – as Turner uses it – should perhaps be disregarded. Further criticisms can also be found. For Alan Morinis, for example, ‘Pilgrimage is too varied in content to be analyzed as if there were a single, recurrent, common, manifest factor’ (1992:9). According to Morinis pilgrimages are also fragmented phenomena composed of an array of different elements often incorporating mythology, ritual, belief, psychology, social roles, heritage, geography, literature, drama and art, as well as spiritual concerns. In both the medieval and the modern forms of pilgrimage, the pilgrim emerges out of the human need to solve problems and the belief in a world beyond the physical. Thus for Morinis, the cornerstone of every pilgrimage or sacred journey is a ‘quest for the culturally validated ideal’ (1992:3).
Furthermore, in Coleman and Eade (2004), we find a focus on the concept of ‘movement’ as a parameter for understanding modern pilgrimages. They argue that pilgrimages ought not to be seen as ‘exceptional or set apart from society’ (2004:7). ‘Place’ should therefore be studied in conjunction with a diversity of wider ‘semantic fields’ that use movement as a form of expression of values and ideas. In other words, the idea of pilgrimages cannot be ‘divorced from aspects of social, cultural or indeed religious life’ (2004:17; see also Badone & Roseman 2004, Chemin 2007 and Margry 2008, for collections of empirical studies that essentially criticize Turner’s views).

Coleman and Eade share the view that the Turner’s ideas helped to create a ‘theoretical cul-de-sac’ with regards to pilgrimage (2004: 3). For others like Margry (2008), communitas is also only partly applicable to pilgrimages of any kind, for ‘[if] individualisation is a sign of the times, then this is also reflected in pilgrimage’ (2008: 23). However, defending her and Victor turners’ work, Edith Turner contends that pilgrimage is ‘not an intellectual activity but rather a religious one. Many middle–class people also undertake it, not because they are doing something ‘in’ or touristy, but because they too have felt the call to do so’ (Turner & Turner, 1978 – preface to the paperback edition, xiii).

The Structure of Pilgrimages

So far I have shown the deconstruction of the term ‘pilgrimage’ within academic circles, a discussion that considered pilgrimage as either closely associated with religion or as a form of ‘secular tourism’. This was an important development in the socio–anthropological study of these sites. But it is clear that there is still much confusion in these attempts to capture the essence of the term. For example, in Morinis, we find a definition of pilgrimage as

...a journey undertaken by a person in quest of a place or a state that he or she believes to embody a valued ideal. At its most conventional, the end of the pilgrimage is an actual shrine located at some fixed geographical point... (1992:4).

He adds, however, that ‘a person who travels to a place of importance to him/her alone may also be a pilgrim’ (1992:4). This could easily include forms of tourism that are engaged with the fabrication of meaning exemplified by Cohen’s experiential and existential tourist, or by the types of tourists that MacCannell describes. In other words, it could include those who...
search for meaning in the modern ‘secular’ world, but whose experience is not motivated by an explicit religious belief or spiritual longing.

Despite this, like Cohen, Morinis finds that the distinction between pilgrims and other travellers is attainable because some travellers tend to incorporate the term ‘pilgrimage’ into their journeys as a self-labelling process. In other words, although for the observer, both pilgrimage and tourism imply movement, for those who take part the differentiation between journeys in terms of their purpose becomes an important element of the experience. This is why, for Morinis, the length of the journey or the nature of the destination is a lesser factor when compared to the opinion of those who take part in pilgrimages. It is the ideological, psychological framework that structures an individual’s journey. It is their motives for travelling that establish whether he or she is a pilgrim or a tourist (1992).

In this light, someone visiting Santiago de Compostela in a Holy Year could not be considered a pilgrim as such if he or she is not committed to the pilgrimage shrine or the process of getting there, as a place and activity that reflects his spiritual emotion or forms part of a personal or transformational process. For these reasons Morinis elaborates instead a typology of pilgrimages rather than a typology of tourists (see Cohen’s typology above for comparison). The aim of Morinis’ work is to illustrate why certain people are attracted to certain sites from the perspective of the shrines themselves. Hence he discerns six main pilgrimage types: devotional, instrumental, normative, obligatory, wandering and initiatory. In the following I describe the core characteristics of these different modes.

Devotional, Instrumental & Normative Pilgrimages

The principal aim of the devotional type of pilgrimage is the veneration of a deity, object or human remains (and other forms of relics like paintings, landscapes, buildings and so on), or of a place where an episode or ‘character’ (usually a messenger, a charismatic person) is believed to have existed as an embodiment of the sacred within a particular belief system. This type of pilgrimage is found in Buddhism, for instance. By instrumental pilgrimage, Morinis means pilgrimages ‘undertaken to accomplish finite, worldly goals’ (1992:11). Some, by no means exhaustive, examples of this are evident in pilgrimages sites around the world, for example in Marian shrines such as Guadalupe in Mexico, Lourdes in France, Fátima in Portugal and Czestochowa in Poland, and the virgin of Aparecida do Norte in
Brazil. The primary goal of the pilgrimage is the granting of a ‘special favour’ to the individual by the deity, be it related to physical or psychological issues.

*Normative* pilgrimages, on the other hand, although reflective of a particular culture, exist within a multitude of environments. They are examples of stability outside cultural ‘centres’. Such pilgrimage sites become points of reference in the form of annual or seasonal festivities that celebrate and re–assure the basic units of a culture. These are exemplified in annual Hindu pilgrimages and Latin American pilgrimages that take the form of yearly processions. They also serve to mark rituals or rites of passage such as transitional periods in individuals’ lives, which serve as a remainder of the change and continuity of a civilization. Thus for Morinis, they represent ‘ritual cycles’ (1992:11).

**Obligatory & Initiatory Pilgrimages**

In *obligatory* pilgrimages, we find examples of rituals such as the *hajj*. In Christianity, by comparison, this type of pilgrimage would be represented by acts of *penance*. Morinis mentions Santiago de Compostela as an example of this process when in the middle–ages pilgrims were condemned to go on a pilgrimage to a holy shrine in order to repent for their crimes. *Wandering*, on the other hand, is a type of pilgrimage that ‘has no predetermined goal’ (1992:13). According to Morinis, this pilgrimage form is related to an inner craving. For him, it reflects the incompleteness of the here and now through an idealisation of the *other*: place, culture or people. In other words, this refers to those forms of life one may come to perceive as more satisfactory (perhaps more authentic) than one’s own. Here a movement from the familiar to the unfamiliar is believed somehow to ‘realize the quest of the pilgrim, be it social, instrumental, salvic, or whatever’ (1992:13).

The last example of this typology, *initiatory* pilgrimage, clearly overlaps with the *normative* one, as the performance of rituals serves as *rites de passage*, hence changing the social and cultural position of the pilgrim on his return home. In the Islamic *hajj* for example, returning pilgrims become *hajjis*, a title that values the accomplished pilgrim by placing him higher in the ‘ranks’ of that culture. Similar notions are also found in the Hindu pilgrimages. According to Morinis:

> Because the essence of pilgrimage is concerned with the pursuit of ideals and salvation within the human condition, many pilgrimages are oriented toward
initiation, in the sense of both change of social status and transformation of personal state (1992:14).

In addition to this typology, and more importantly, Morinis also divides pilgrimages between being *formal* and *informal*. By formal he means those pilgrimages with clear prescribed formulas for conduct and goals (i.e. the *hajj*). Informal pilgrimages, on the other hand, are associated with the idea of the ascetic pilgrim wanderer, whose goals are unclear from the outset. Specifically in Christian pilgrimage, this takes the form of an individual undertaking, as opposed to the more formal, collective, rituals found in more traditional societies.

This last division between formal and informal is one of the main differentiations that now guide most texts dealing with the problem of the [re]–emergence in the popularity of pilgrimage sites. These were not normally associated with the tradition of religiously motivated pilgrimages, yet they gained, over time, a religious/spiritual character. Places such as Elvis Presley’s Graceland or Ground Zero in New York have become ‘places of pilgrimage’, sacralised spaces that attract millions of visitors every year. It is interesting to notice how often these places are called ‘shrines’ and the people who visit them ‘pilgrims’ by a wide variety of commentators – including visitors themselves. In this sense Cohen’s and Morinis’ works complement one another. Whilst in Cohen’s theorizing we see an attempt to classify the ‘tourist experience’, which falls short with respect to the religious motivation of the pilgrim, in Morinis’ we see the opposite: pilgrimage culminates in similarities between pilgrims and tourists. However, despite the importance of these debates, there is a need to incorporate this discussion into a wider set of theories which I believe have direct relevance to the rekindled interest in pilgrimage today. This should also bring pilgrimage closer to broader philosophical and sociological debates which, in my view, could be used to set a theoretical context to the study of religious tourism.

**Pilgrimage, Religion & Consumer Culture in Late Modernity: Moving Beyond Dichotomies**

The study of pilgrimage has become a burgeoning multi–disciplinary field, but it is yet to be incorporated into mainstream theorizing. Despite the diversity in understandings of what constitutes religious belief and practice, in definitions of pilgrimage and in what it means to be a modern pilgrim or a tourist, pilgrimage is one of the few universal forms of religious expression to be found, in one form or other, in most cultures around the world, including
Protestant ones. Pilgrims may ‘belong without believing’ – to invert the ‘believing without belonging’ formula (see Davie 1994, 2000a). Despite pilgrimage being associated with religious practice, today, as in the past, its doctrinal meanings converge with other (non-religious) behaviours and sentiments, which inevitably transform the character, and sometimes the meaning, of the experience. This often occurs in tandem with challenging traditional religious significance of place, or even the community aspects associated with such movement.

In this light the continuous (or renewed) popularity of some pilgrimage sites could be seen as affirmation of secular consumer values (individualism, indifference, self-indulgence), rather than as a challenge to them (see also Phillips 2004). That is, it can be seen as a clear example of how secularization and consumer culture have infiltrated and eroded religious meanings through, for instance, the glorification of the material over the spiritual, comfort over nature (and simplicity), convenience over hardship, and predictability and control over unforeseen circumstances and instability. For this view to make sense, however, we must also take for granted that consumerism (of which tourism is an expression), is an inherently secularizing and self-indulgent force with the power to transform concerned, resourceful and integrated ‘citizens’ into isolated and detached, apathetic, ‘consumers’. This is an important point which I will return to in chapter 10. First though, it is important to discuss some recent theoretical developments in the sociological and philosophical study of religion, which deal with the relationship between religious belief and practice and notions of place and movement.

The Spatial Dimension of Religious Expression

In the past, sociological understandings of religion have often taken for granted the importance of place and orthodox traditions for the vitality of belief and practice. This encompasses factors like attendance of rituals at religious buildings, the reading of sacred texts, ritualistic attitude, frequency of attendance and so on (see the work of Wilson, 1969 and Bruce, 2000 for examples). However, these ideas have been consistently challenged by both theoretical as well as empirical studies concerned with religion in the modern world. One good example is to be found in the work of Danièle Hervieu–Léger (2000). Her work shows that, in late–modern contexts, religion is better understood against a background of movement, thus challenging ideas of ritual as located in ‘place’. Imaginatively, she begins her analysis by drawing on the idea of ‘memory’, something that at first seems unrelated to the
idea of movement. She argues that the lack of religious memory in the public sphere, the noted religious illiteracy and lack of influence of traditional religion do not necessarily equate the eradication of religion from the lives of individuals. This occurs partly because modernity, as a process, constantly restrains people into ever more complex social paradigms. Hervieu–Léger refers to the discontinuity of religious thinking with a description of religion as a ‘chain of memory’, a chain that is broken due to disruptions propelled by secular ideology. Rather than being completely detrimental to religious vitality, this process can, paradoxically, create spaces where a sacralisation of everyday life becomes a not only important but essential provider of alternative realities or ‘utopian spaces’. Thinking about the spatiality of religious forms, Hervieu–Léger then asks the question: ‘how does the religious imagination, with its dual components of memory and utopia, understand places?’ (2002: 100).

To tap into this spatial dimension Hervieu–Léger uses the image of the pilgrim as a metaphor to illustrate how modern individuals come to experience religion today. She moves from ideas of spirituality, primarily grounded in dwelling, to those expressed (unlocked) by forms of movement. Here is where the triad formed by memory, movement and place becomes important. Against the background of French Catholicism, she uses the image of le pelerin (the pilgrim) and le converti (the convert) as examples that come to contrast with the traditional way of understanding religious practice through the usual focus on indicators like church attendance – represented in her work by le pratiquant (those who practice). Hervieu–Léger’s work is complemented and further explored by Grace Davie, who is able to translate this theoretical shift to the study of British Protestantism (see also Martin, 1979, 2005). Although Davie does not make explicit reference to the idea of le pratiquant, her work indicates an understanding of this difference between ‘churched’ and ‘unchurched’ forms of believing and practising. She applies this notion to the study of what she perceives to be a clear (quantitative) discrepancy between ‘believing’ on the one hand, and ‘belonging’ on the other.59

The notion of le pratiquant in this case refers to static forms of religious rituals, which both Hervieu–Léger and Davie believe have become less useful theoretically. Our routines have

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59 A number of studies point to a noted difference between ‘believing’ and ‘belonging’. That is, a high proportion of people report that 1) they are Christians and 2) they believe in God. However the figures for church attendance are much lower. For examples see the 2001 Census (http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001 – accessed 01/07/2011) and the European Values Survey (EVS) (http://www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu/ – accessed 01/07/2011).
changed, our daily habits have been transformed by new social, cultural and political processes, some of which are particular to western European societies and which are then reflected in the way in which we relate to religion. In Hervieu–Léger’s work, the image of the pilgrim, the transient person, captures the fluidity, the multi–locality of religious sentiments, its cadences and rhythms, and arguably a tendency for people to want to ‘experience’ religion and spirituality, rather than being told about it. In her work Davie does not refer (explicitly) to the image of the pilgrim either, but she also agrees with this spatial and experiential way of understanding religion in consumer contexts when she states that ‘…late modern Europeans are much more likely to go to places of worship in which an experience of the sacred is central to the occasion’ (Davie 2007:146). Despite this Davie remains cautious with regards to the ‘fluidity’ of religious meanings, and so points to the seemingly vicarious nature of religion in Europe. She exemplifies this by drawing attention to religious traditions, places and spaces (e.g. churches, cathedrals and other buildings) which have remained important for communities and individuals alike. I find that the concept of vicariousness, especially when coupled with Hervieu–Léger’s idea of religion as a ‘chain of memory’, becomes an important theoretical resource for a better understanding of the vitality of places like Compostela today, for it bridges those two seemingly unrelated concepts: movement and memory.

Drawing further into the concept of movement, space and memory, the relationship between these variables has been given a more focused attention by two other theorists whose work is gaining prominence in this field. Kim Nott and Thomas Tweed are both interested in finding the ‘religious’ in the ‘secular’ by applying a spatial analysis to the study of religion. In her work, Knott (2005a, 2006) uses the idea of ‘fields’ as a theoretical tool for the understanding of religion as something that transcends static forms of ritual based on notions of ‘place’ (see Chemin, 2007 and Swatos 2009 for an application of a similar idea to the study of pilgrimage and Possamai, 2007 for a critique of Knott’s work). In a similar manner, Tweed (2006) finds in the words ‘flow’ and ‘confluence’ metaphors indicating the move from ‘dwelling’ to the ‘multi–locality’ of religious belief and practice and the conflation of meanings it entails. Somewhat unsurprisingly, Tweed uses the example of a pilgrimage site in Miami to validate his broader theory of religion, one based on the concepts of ‘crossing’ and ‘dwelling’. Whilst both theories are highly relevant to the present study, due to their complexity and breath, I refrain from detailing them any further. The crucial point to grasp is simple and requires no

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60 Even in Sweden, a country with a strong Protestant ethic, despite low percentages of church attendance, most people voluntarily pay high church taxes, religious buildings are impeccably preserved and are often used in baptisms, weddings, funerals and other ceremonies.

Eduardo Chemin 106
further interpolation: there is a growing realization within the social sciences that, as far as religion is concerned, we must move beyond ideas of ‘place’ to notions of ‘movement’. This is the so-called ‘spatial turn’ (see Knott, 2008, 2010). I find this focus on ‘spatiality’ incredibly important, not least for those of us concerned with the study of modern pilgrimage, where space is coupled with movement in the creation of what philosopher Jürgen Habermas has termed ‘communicative spaces’ (Habermas, 1987).

It is clear that religious heritage (traditions, buildings, rituals and ethics) is playing an important role in keeping memory alive (see Coleman, 2004a), despite the re–adjustment of traditions to suit new socio–cultural (consumer) environments. With the acceleration of our life–styles and the continuous emphasis on movement, essential to understanding the modern enthusiasm for pilgrimage is a consideration of the creation of spaces where people can engage with one another and their own beliefs and practices, places that provide people with a sense of ‘home coming’ (see Schramm, 2004), roots and/or a material dimension to their spirituality, places that are elementary simple and ‘grounded’ in a ‘chain of memory’ or tradition. The important thing to recognize is that the idea of ‘place’ has (relatively recently) gained prominence not only for the religious but also for (secular) tourists. A turn to a better understanding of ‘movement’ and how it influences beliefs and practices today has occurred, but it needs to take into account the simultaneous (growing) institutionalization, protection, and ‘reverence’ of ‘place’ and the drive to re–invent traditions.

*The Subjectification of Religion & the Importance of Place*

Places, spaces and experiences, represented here by the *Camino de Santiago*, should further be considered not simply as a return of (or continuous) interest in forms of religious traditions, but, more importantly, as part of consumer (tourist) markets. These markets feed from a growing interest in more fluid types of spirituality, which are broadly defined as ‘New Age’. Pilgrimage sites and routes have the potential to absorb new cultural meanings which are forged as much by consumer culture as by the religious traditions in which they are embedded. Indeed a number of theorists have pointed to the importance of ‘experience’ in the process of adaptation of traditional religion to consumer contexts.

Lynch (2007) has proposed, for instance, that this mingling of meanings would be better understood as the emergence of a ‘progressive’ form of spirituality. He elaborates Paul Heela’s and Linda Woodhead’s work based on subjective forms of religious expression.
(Heelas & Woodhead, 2005a, 2005b). Here we see how consumer–oriented religion is characterised by the late–modern impetus towards forms of grass–roots movements. It looks for new ways and new resources to think about religion and spirituality in a way that ‘connects with people’s beliefs, values and experience in modern, liberal societies’ (Lynch, 2007:23 – emphasis mine). For Lynch, and indeed for a growing number of theorists in the field, modern popular usage of the term ‘spirituality’ embraces formal religion only to reform it. That is, it creates forms of spirituality that are fluid and are constantly being shaped and re–shaped by the ideologies of choice and individualism inherent in consumer culture (see also Heelas, 2008). These new cultural movements and tendencies claim previous traditional religious sites only to open them up to wider consumerist practices. The cosmopolitan, liberal, nature of these progressive forms resonates with those who may prefer less traditional (unchurched) practice (see Davie, 2001, 2002).

However, and precisely because of the already noted persistence of notions of ‘place’ and the cultural drive to re–invent traditions, I only partly agree with the subjectivation thesis. Despite the importance of acknowledging these changes and the importance of movement, ‘subjective’ or ‘progressive’ spirituality in Europe often occurs on the back of Christian–informed doctrines, practices and spaces. In this sense I believe there is still some work to be done with regards to the place of heritage as ‘repositories of memory’ and the power of religious traditions to offer modern Europeans a sense of place and continuity (see Reader & Walter, 1998).

**A Secular Age: Pilgrims, Tourists & Consumer Culture**

More broadly this focus on ‘experience’, as a result of a shift in understandings of movement and place, has been a central issue in the study of consumerism. Some important theorists writing on the theme have also used the concepts of ‘place’ and ‘movement’ in their work. Most notably, this has been at the centre of Zygmunt Bauman’s work (1993), who uses the metaphors offered by the ‘pilgrim’ and the ‘tourist’ as representations of modernity (production) and post–modernity (consumption) respectively. For him, the pilgrim or the vagabond represent the aimlessness of the modern individual – the outsider who is detached from ‘place’ but who nevertheless has a destination, an aim so to speak. The tourist, on the other hand, characterises a time when any destination is a viable option, although not for very long. The assumed existential anxieties displayed by the tourist are then likened to the
shallow post–modern consumer who lives inauthentically and who seeks, without success, authenticity elsewhere (see MacCannell, 1973 for ‘staged authenticity’). The transitory and aimless nature of the tourist in this case represents the non–spiritual character of late– or post–modernity. Despite the pessimism and scepticism inherent in Bauman’s views and the purely theoretical nature of his later work (and consequently its elusiveness), I believe his focus on a shift from ‘dwelling’ to ‘movement’ – from community, religion and static forms of life to multi–locality, movement and secularity – is an idea worth engaging with and I will return to it later.

Despite many criticisms, other important theorists have also tackled the problem of place, movement and authenticity in late–modernity and in doing so have also engaged with the concept of pilgrimage. For example, in Charles Taylor’s magisterial A Secular Age (2007) we find that a need for ‘authentic’ (expressive) forms of spiritualities is a salient characteristic of late–modern cultural forms. He describes ‘modern seekers’ as:

...the heirs of the expressive revolution, with its roots in the reactions of the romantic period against the disciplined, instrumental self–connected to the modern moral order...they are seeking a kind of unity and wholeness of the self, a reclaiming of the place of feeling, against the one–sided pre–eminence of reason, and a reclaiming of the body and its pleasures from the inferior and often guilt–ridden place it has been allowed in the disciplined, instrumental identity (2007:507).

Taylor believes that it is crucial that we come to understand modern [consumer] cultures as ‘informed by an ethic of authenticity’ (2007:507). For him, individuality plays an important role in this, as the focus is on the self. Unlike Bauman, he is against the view that consumerism is necessarily detrimental to the sense of community or even the spiritual authenticity of the times. For him there should be no binary opposition between the cult of the individual and institutional religion for in reality, people may re–discover religion in their own individual quest; just as the opposite may also be true. As such for Taylor, ‘much of today’s spiritual or religious life is to be found in this middle ground’ (Taylor, 2007:512).

Pilgrimage is an obvious example of an array of places and experiences situated at that level. He asks an important question which I believe is directly relevant to the purpose of the present study: ‘if we don’t accept the view that the human aspiration for religion will flag...where will the access lie to the practice of and deeper engagement with religion?’ (2007:515). The answer, he argues, is to be found in:
...the various forms of spiritual practice to which each is drawn in his/her own spiritual life. These may involve meditation, or some charitable work, or a study group, or a pilgrimage, or some special form of prayer, or a host of such things’ (ibid – emphasis mine).

Although a range of such forms has always existed as ‘optional extras’ for those who are already and primarily embedded in ordinary church practice, now it is frequently the reverse. That is, people are first drawn to a place like the Camino de Santiago or Taizé, or Glastonbury or even a World Youth Day, a meditation group or a prayer circle, only to (perhaps) find themselves then embedded in practice of various forms. They may even retain a general interest in spiritual practices. Taylor believes that the orthodox case of a linear regression in belief and practice, caused by the incompatibility between some features of modernity (such as consumerism) and religious belief is less satisfactory an explanation than the one–directional view expounded by a number of historians and sociologists. Like Davie and Hervieu–Léger, who both see continuity rather than sharp contrasts, Taylor believes that adding to this complexity is the belief that religious longing, the longing for and response to a more–than–immanent transformation ‘…remains a strong independent source of motivation in modernity’ (2007:530). He further contends that:

...the same long–term trend which produced the disciplined, conscious, committed individual believer, Calvinist, Jansenist, devout humanist, Methodist; which later gives us the ‘born–again’ Christian, now has brought forth today’s pilgrim seeker, attempting to discern and follow his/her own path’ (2007:532 – emphasis mine).

Besides those concerned with looking at religion from the consumer perspective, there are also those who look at the evolution of capitalism through changes in the nature of belief. Here we find that the idea of the spiritual seeker is in fact somewhat entrenched in the fabric of late–modern (consumer) contexts. The most prominent and authoritative text on this issue was written by Colin Campbell who, echoing Max Weber’s work (see Weber, 1930), attempted to describe the ethics underlying consumer culture. Here we find that, amongst the characteristics of what is often associated with the romanticism he believes underpins modern consumerism, is a tendency towards:

...the new, towards individualism, revolt, escape, melancholy, and fantasy, dissatisfaction with the contemporary world, a restless anxiety in the face of life, a preference for the strange and curious, a penchant for reverie and dreaming, a leaning
to mysticism, and a celebration of the irrational...Although it is difficult to identify a romantic philosophy, it is still possible to describe a general ‘theodicy’, or metaphysical paradigm, shared by most romantics. This is best seen as resulting from a sentimental Deism that has been infused with the spirit of evangelical Protestantism, with beliefs about the inspirational and redeeming power of art functioning as a catalyst to unite the two streams of thought. It is, therefore, a rather special mix of Enlightenment, and more specifically Christian, ideas (1987:181).

In Campbell’s work, the idea of religion and consumer culture, as antithetical to one another, seems to be suspended. In Campbell’s description of the consumer ethos, there is an evident mingling of religious and consumer discourses powered by what he describes as a ‘general theodicy’, which modern consumers have inherited from literary fields, media, religious and mainstream political discourses (see also Stewart, 2010). If religion and the tradition that it represents is interwoven with the fabric of such culture, and this same culture places emphasis on consumer practices by promoting and framing places as ‘touristic’, then we must also consider the importance of such experiences and sites for the creation, expression and re–enforcement, challenging and negotiating of religious and spiritual sentiments. Despite the so–called ‘touristification’ of religious sites (see MacCannell, 1978; Timothy & Olsen, 2006), as seen in chapter 2, religiously or spiritually motivated travel is becoming increasingly popular, making up an important slice of international tourist markets around the globe. Although fears emerge from religious institutions themselves with regards to tourism, the ‘touristification’ of religious sites seems in fact benign to the vitality of religious belief. During their vacation people take time off whilst engaging with contexts that are replete with religious symbolism and messages which may also incite an interest in religion or re–enforce already existent beliefs.

**Movement & Place: A Dialectical Approach to the Study of Religion**

*Secular Pilgrimage*

Focusing on the sacralisation aspect of modern (secular) sites, Ian Reader and Tony Walter (1993) noted that the concept of pilgrimage has become open to other forms of popular expression of values and especially to what he calls ‘secular spirituality’. Here the oxymoron
‘secular–pilgrimage’ is once again applied to the study of these sites. Whilst prior to Reader’s and Walter’s work pilgrimages tended to be studied as examples of explicit religious sites, we find that the term itself is widely used in secular contexts and that it appears in popular discourse as such. They therefore turn their attention to events that take place in secular societies but which come to express similar structural components found in religious pilgrimage. For them, the term ‘pilgrimage’ should be more broadly applied and as such we should avoid confining it to the traditions of traditional religion.

In popular discourse, pilgrimage is used to describe flows of people to a place where a person, incident or object is framed and open to wider audiences: a heritage and/or historical site for instance. From Graceland to war memorials, concentration camps, and old monasteries in Spain, there are innumerable examples of places which in recent years have become ‘magnets’ for people of all cultures. These ‘places of power’ would fit with most theories and typologies of pilgrimage and pilgrims (including those of Morinis and Cohen I presented earlier). Indeed there are many manifestations of pilgrimage reaching from the sacred religious inspiration to the personal and profane world of mainstream popular culture. These popular representations of ritual incorporate the similarities of tourism and religion, for both the tourist and the pilgrim leave home in the search for something ‘that enriches their lives, and stands outside and in contrast to the normal modes of their existence, returning home again to the familiar world’ (Reader & Walter, 1993:6). For Reader and Walter:

...the idea of the journey out of the normal parameters of life, the entry into a different, other, world, the search for something new, the multiple motives of participants, ranging from homage and veneration to the simple impulses of curiosity...are extremely common, if not always universal, denominators of pilgrimages (1993:8).

The widespread usage of pilgrimage in the secular sphere and its specific symbolism within religious traditions both point to the idea of pilgrimage as a quest or odyssey. Hence pilgrims seek:

...something that lies outside the accustomed patterns of everyday life, and that hence requires a process of movement from the everyday. In doing so the participant or pilgrim is seeking something that will enhance or affirm his/her being and existence

61 Although Reader has, more recently, stopped using this term (see Reader, 2005).
on one or more levels, that may make him/her whole, more complete,...affirm a sense of cultural identity,...or open the doors to what is seen as a better world (1993:9–10).

In this case, places of worship framed by religious traditions (tombs of saints, churches, cathedrals and temples) are not essential to pilgrimage. As such, this movement towards a particular geography can be manifested in secular environments just as well as those established as (traditional) ‘sacred’ spaces. This view is important because it was one of the first attempts to bring prominence to those (secular) environments or consumer contexts, often thought simply as points of reference, useful as a ‘contrast’ to other (religious) phenomena and contexts (for a critique of this view see Margry, 2008).

Religious Tourism

Other efforts to reconcile the secular with the sacred by understanding the process of sacralisation of secular places can be found in the work of William Swatos and Luigi Tomasi (2002). They propose that, in order to understand this (romantic) process of sacralisation, one should consider what they called ‘religious tourism’. This implies a conscious move towards merging the terms ‘religion’ and ‘tourism’ in an attempt to overcome the dichotomous tone in which they have been addressed in the study of pilgrimages, where pilgrimage and tourism have become synonyms for ‘religiosity’ and ‘secularity’ respectively. Tomasi describes religious tourism as:

...not tourism tout court; rather, it is a form of tourism motivated partly or wholly, by religious motives and closely or loosely connected with holiday-making or with journeys undertaken for social, cultural or political reasons over short or long distances... (2002:19).

Conversely, in their definition of pilgrimage as ‘...a journey undertaken for religious purposes that culminates in a visit to a holy place, one considered to be the locus of supernatural forces and where divine intervention may be more easily forthcoming’ (2002:207), they relate pilgrimage with the religious rather than the secular. For them, pilgrimage is a term that is inextricably linked with the search for other worldly ideals that are not commonly found in secular spheres. To complicate matters we also find that even in the case of so-called ‘secular pilgrimages’, there can be a differentiation between those who ‘seriously believe’ in the site as embodying sacredness and those who visit it for curiosity and other reasons.
Following this discussion on what defines, signifies and is perceived by observers or participants of how we could define the act of pilgrimage, I find that words such as ‘ambiguity’ and ‘positionality’ come to mind regularly. By that I mean that by reading the various descriptions and attempts to define pilgrimage, there is a sense that such phenomena should be understood within the contexts in which they occur – that is, as in an interdependent cycle, connected to new cultural flows that incorporate ambiguous, sometimes paradoxical forms of religious expression of beliefs and cultural (often secular) fields. In the study of pilgrimages there has been either an emphasis on place (the holy place or shrine and its symbolic value) or the journey (movement) as a focus of study. It is important, in my view, that we link these two theoretical poles only to relate pilgrimage to the context (time and place) in which it occurs. Typologies are useful at times, but only to a certain extent. I find a more promising path would be to focus on the broader cultural, political and economic events occurring on a global level, changes which affect the vitality of pilgrimage sites in Europe and beyond. These include migratory flows, the expansion of tourist industries as a consequence of de–industrialization in some parts of the globe, a resurgence of religious discourses in public (secular) arenas – especially after 9/11 – and the importance of heritage in conflicts between national, supra–national and local ideas of identity and belonging, as well as world–wide post–modern interest in New Age spirituality and pre–Christian myths.

Today, with the mingling of discourses, places and time offered by globalization, it is no longer possible to choose between ‘place’ or ‘movement’ when conceptualizing pilgrimage and, for that matter, religion. The word pilgrimage has acquired new meanings, meanings that reflect the sentiments of modern individuals who seem to approach belief from a consumer perspective, with ‘choice’ being the key word in this process. It is true that consumerism has transformed sacred spaces into products. But tourist markets have also brought these very same places to the attention of people who would otherwise not consider joining a pilgrimage route but for the new meanings and ‘benefits’ it provides them with.

In Nancy Frey’s phenomenological work on the Camino de Santiago, we observe an emphasis on modern ideas about movement. She argues that such movement contradicts the modern dictum of speed, secularity and efficiency. Frey follows the Turners’ arguments when she states that pilgrims are agents performing ‘anti–structural rituals’. In her view ‘…in choosing to go in a non–modern way pilgrims make statements (expressive and communicative purposes) about their society and their values’ (Frey, 1998:27). In her longitudinal and very comprehensive anthropological research, she finds that motivations for
pilgrimage varied widely. However questionnaires sent to respondents’ homes by Spanish ecclesiastical authorities suggested that amongst the most popular motives for pilgrimage were ‘spirituality’ and ‘contact with nature’ (see Frey, 1998: 258 for more details on these data). It is important to note that for Frey, ‘becoming a pilgrim to Santiago does not necessarily mean making a religious journey, but it does often signify for cyclists and walkers an inner and outer journey, a means of finding transformation’ (1998:27) through contact with the ritual and the heritage of the route. That said, some commentators see Santiago as well as as other places like Rome as ‘anomalies’ amongst pilgrimage sites, where the journey has become an end in itself (see Margry, 2008; Coleman and Eade, 2004 for example). This has occurred due to the ‘romanticization of the journey’ as a hazardous and strenuous undertaking. For Margry, although in some cases (like the Camino de Santiago) the pilgrimage focus is on movement, ‘there is no justification for reducing the phenomenon primarily to the journey element’ (2008:26).

In sum, from this overview it is clear that typological notions of pilgrimage like those formulated by Morinis and Cohen in fact complement one another, yet they cannot be integrated. In their structure there is a constant reference to that differentiation between sacred and profane which I believe is no longer helpful if we are to understand pilgrimage (and for that matter religion) in late–modern consumer contexts. Pilgrimage sites and the motivations of those visiting them are inexorably ambiguous as they often incorporate different aspects from aesthetics to devotion, from relaxation to penance: elements which occur simultaneously and without a clear (rational) differentiation. These are by no means opposites as they often complement one other; they are shades of the same colour. Religious experience can and does occur through aesthetic sensibilities, and there is no justification to relegate the appreciation of art, culture, food and entertainment to the realms of the secular. Michael Stausberg, for example, writing in a recently published work, mentions that:

There is overwhelming anecdotal proof of the ability of art and liturgies in generating ‘spiritual’, ‘reflective’ or ‘religious’ moods that deeply touch or move tourists who did not come for that experience in the first place... (2011: 89).

He also points to the importance of not only architectural heritage, but also the nature that surrounds many pilgrimage sites as well as other places of religious importance. For him:
In the West, Romantic notions of ‘nature’ and ‘the sublime’, which were important for the formation of the ‘tourist gaze’ (Urry, 2002) often have imbued the experience of natural sceneries with supernatural attributions (2011:85).

Thus it would be only appropriate to accept that this movement is at least symbolic of a curiosity, perhaps initially purely aesthetic, that can lead at times to forms of ‘sacralisation’, rather than simply a purposeful movement towards a ‘sacred’ site (see Coleman and Eade, 2004). In cultural contexts where secular values are expressed through bureaucratic and ever more specialised social, political and economic systems, it appears that places of high aesthetic and spiritual value offer, above all, enchantment and escape. Hence the process of [re]creation of traditions could be seen as a result of tensions created between subjective needs and (macro) objective structures. For instance, as found in Campos (1998), modern pilgrimage seems ‘...at odds with our widely held belief in the progressive development of the West into a complex modern civilization based on science, technology, and reason...’ (p. 41). I will return to this point later on, in chapter 10.

For now it suffices to say that the ambiguous relationship between aesthetics, emotions, consumerism and spirituality make pilgrimage a rather dynamic phenomenon, one I believe is representative of the problems we find when conceptualizing and studying religion more broadly. This intertwining of meanings is however, difficult – if not impossible – to quantify. In this case in–depth qualitative studies are essential if we are to gain a deeper insight as to what attracts people to these places. Hence in the following section, I turn to the analysis of my own inductive (qualitative) research focused on the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela.
Part II

Tales from the Field: Pilgrim Stories on the Road to Compostela
Chapter 4

A Study of British Travellers on the Road to Compostela

‘The point for the ethnographer is not to bring some external criterion for judging whether it is safe to believe what informants say, but rather to come to understand how it is that informants judge authenticity.’ (Christine Hine, Virtual Ethnography)

In the past two decades there has been an increasing interest in pilgrimage and such interest is reflected in the number of qualitative research, primarily ethnography, carried out in this field. The Camino de Santiago has been the focus of great attention and during the time I studied it I encountered a multitude of other studies ranging from undergraduate projects to doctoral dissertations and published articles and books, all of which attempted to study the Camino through the use of ethnography. In fact according to one source (see CETUR 2007–2010), 7% of everyone who joins the pilgrimage to Compostela does it for research reasons. Hence the question is: why did I feel the need to produce yet another qualitative study of the Camino?

The answer lay not in the suggestion that existent research is incomplete or incoherent. The Camino is one of the best studied pilgrimage sites in the world and I am certain one could find much of value in all that has been done so far and also on the internet without the need to generate yet another ethnographic study. The need for an in–depth study in the present case sprang out of the need to use a different methodology, and to probe into areas that I found had not yet been fully opened up to scrutiny. Following some important new quantitative research (for some of which I was involved in the data collection process), the need to probe deeper into the data became evident as I moved on from micro explanations of why Europeans seem attracted to pilgrimage sites today to macro cultural tendencies, in my effort to establish a mid–range theory of pilgrimage.

One of the main factors I try to introduce in the methodology for this study relates to the emotional dimension of pilgrimage, one that is often incoherent and impossible to quantify or understand in quantitative terms. This is an element that relates to a pervasive and ever more important word that has gained much prominence in social research in the recent past:
reflexivity. What this means is that I needed to probe further into the data while using a methodology that afforded a space for a subjective view of the performance of pilgrimage, but which did not transform it into a simple account of my own experience. Instead it took my experience into consideration in order to help understand the emotive dimension of walking a pilgrimage route.

Reflexivity is an intrinsic element of the ‘subjective-turn’. In social research the use of reflexivity can bring to the surface voices that were previously unheard, in that subjective data reveals a wealth of detail and insights often overshadowed by pre-established notions of objectivity. Methodologically, it is not enough to write about subjects or participants as ‘others’. With the addition of reflexivity, the relationship between data and theory is transformed by the introduction of a third person to the research structure: the observant participant, as an active constructor of meaning. To put it more succinctly, ethnography has become an exercise in autobiography (see Okely & Callaway 1992, Marcus 1998, Wengraf 2001, Bernard 2006, Corbin and Strauss 2008), but it need not be centred uniquely on the researcher’s experience or point of view. This change has occurred in an effort to bridge the pervasive distinction between positivism and other interpretive–phenomenological approaches that still divide the social sciences.

In the following, I disclose as openly and coherently as possible the journey that I undertook in order to conduct research on the Camino de Santiago. This cannot be called a ‘phenomenology’ of pilgrim experiences, however, as I do not offer a description of people’s actions as an end in itself. Instead I attempt to construct theory that is ‘phenomenologically oriented’. That is, my aim is to explain action by adding causes and consequences to the story I am telling. Admittedly I did not find the process of writing about my own experiences an easy one, and I can only imagine that this says something about the personal meanings pilgrimage acquires. This also shows how the researcher (like all others involved) is not immune to such meanings – even when fully conscious of their inherent power. Before I tap into the more personal experience of the researcher, however, I first describe and explain the range of qualitative and quantitative methodologies I used in this research, which helped to set a context for the qualitative investigation. I begin with a brief discussion of the quantitative studies which support the need for this research, and describe the broader empirical context within which this study has emerged.
Quantitative Studies of Pilgrimage

In Europe there is an increasing interest in pilgrimage and cultural heritage, which has been captured in a variety of quantitative and qualitative studies. For instance in Spain, CETUR (Centro de Estudos e Investigaciões Turísticas: Centre for the Study and Investigation of Tourism) has developed an observatory focusing on the Camino de Santiago. CETUR (see CETUR 2007–2010) uses large scale quantitative surveys and one of its main objectives is to measure and characterize the behaviour and profile of modern day pilgrims. Between 2007 and 2010 they conducted approximately 10,000 interviews with travellers on the way to Compostela. This pool of data partly complements the more in depth qualitative investigations from elsewhere (including my own – see chapters 5 to 9). It also offers some interesting contrasts for – due to the volume of questionnaires distributed – the CETUR study can in fact claim statistical representativeness. It is important to notice however that this is a longitudinal study and as such the results are still being analysed and data is being released in stages. Therefore, we must approach this material carefully for it, like the Camino itself, is continuously evolving.

Based on the data I was able to access so far, we find that the majority of Camino travellers report architectural and natural landscape to be an important component of their experience. In my own research (see chapters 5 to 9), I came to understand the architectural and natural landscapes of the Camino – churches, monasteries, natural settings, ancient pilgrim hostels, ruins, castles, fortresses, chapels, cathedrals, convents and so on – as the ‘spiritual landscape’ of pilgrimage. Despite its importance for all kinds of travellers, I found this aspect of pilgrimage to have been somewhat understudied. Interestingly the work of the CETUR also shows that only a minority of visitors do not engage with the liturgical activities that take place in the variety of buildings of heritage and high aesthetic value adorning Santiago de Compostela, and indeed all the pilgrim routes that lead there. The famous pilgrim mass celebrated every day at Santiago’s Cathedral, for instance, is a well–attended event (see chart 8).

Following an in–depth analysis of responses given by travellers from more than 150 nationalities, the CETUR reported that almost 90% of those who visited Santiago de Compostela attended mass – often more than once. Additionally, they found that more than 80% also went to Santiago to collect the pilgrim certificate and over 70% went through the famous ritual of embracing the Apostle James – a statue of St. James dressed as a medieval

Eduardo Chemin
pilgrim which stands prominently at the Cathedral’s main altar. The CETUR study also found that more than 60% of those interviewed visited the apostle’s crypt where his remains are (allegedly) kept in a silver urn. However only approximately 30% of those interviewed said they confessed or took part in the communion ritual.

**Chart 3 Reasons for being in Santiago**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>collecting the compostela</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embrace The Statue of St. James</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend Mass</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting the Crypt</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confession &amp; Communion</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from the work of Prof. Ruben C. Lois Gonzáles University of Santiago de Compostela & Dr. José Somoza Medina University of León on behalf of CETUR – with permission (see Lois–Gonzáles and Medina, 2010).

Revealing as these figures might be, the most interesting findings of the study are to be found in the motives for ‘going’ to Santiago rather than the reasons given for ‘being’ there (see chart 4). According to the survey 18% of walkers, cyclists and others travelling on non-motorized modes of transport joined the Camino due to their religious beliefs and 28% were on the Camino as a way to express or think about their spirituality. However 17% said it was the natural heritage of the route that had attracted them, with a further 12 % saying that the cultural heritage of the Camino, its history and architecture were a primary source of interest. 8% explicitly declared that their journey was exclusively for recreation, but they did separate categories such as sport, which amounted to the motivation of 10% of respondents, as not comprising recreation.
As it will be made clear in the subsequent chapters, it was often difficult, if not impossible for respondents taking part in my qualitative enquiry to separate their motivations into specific categories. Often the very act of pilgrimage blurs the boundaries of what may be considered spiritual or recreational, or healing and religious, or cultural or personal. When we group CETUR’s closely related categories together – such as religion and spirituality or natural, architectural and historical heritage – an interesting image appeared. This image partially informed my understanding of the success of Compostela as a pilgrimage site. For example, 42% of CETUR respondents walked or cycled or horse–rode to Compostela for either religious or spiritual motives, and 29% due to an appreciation of the natural, historical and architectural heritage of the route, whilst 22% were there for recreation (see chart 10). This narrows the wide spectrum of motivations down to three main clusters: 1) religion and spirituality (terms that are difficult to define and often incorporate a wide range of personal meanings), 2) a need or desire to engage with the heritage of the route, and 3) the understanding of pilgrimage as a form of recreation.

These categories, however, are not mutually exclusive. In my qualitative research I found that these meanings and categories indeed coexist and feed from one another. In other words, to
be religious and to use pilgrimage as a time for vacation does not contradict one’s notion of the journey as an important act or even the overall aim of the pilgrimage. Examples from my own research, as will be seen in the following chapters, also reveal the same process taking place in which motivations overlap and coexist. It is also clear from these findings that landscape (natural and otherwise) is another important element for travellers’ experience, one that often acts as a link between the so-called ‘spiritual’ dimension of the experience and the ludic aspect of the act of walking through a ‘tourist spaces’. Another curious finding in the CETUR data is that there appears to be as many people travelling to Santiago for ‘ethnographic’ reasons (academics and students and other intellectuals) as for ‘recreation’. An even more interesting aspect of these data is not related to what it shows, but to what it omits. This is precisely where I found the need to implement Grounded Theory to the study of the pilgrimage: a detailed ethnography that aims at theoretical, middle–range, theory building.

In my qualitative sample, we see a prominent search for forms of ‘healing’ being manifested in the motivations of my respondents. In the CETUR study, however, this aspect is nowhere to be seen. In my view this does validate the need for a multi–methodological approach to the study of motivations. It also re–enforces the case that motivations are multi–layered and difficult to understand, unless they are understood within the context of the person’s biography: that is, researchers need to take into account the context in which the person lives and the manner in which life is experienced. This is particularly the case with regards to the study of religion, something that is at times almost bizarrely separated from the study of pilgrimages, which in some cases are taken for granted as a secular form of ‘journey’s redolent with meaning’ (see Digance 2006).

Another important point is that, despite the quality and size of the CETUR study, it only concerns one site and generalizations are risky. Do the people attending other sites feel the same way about their experience? This question is important in the sense that establishing continuity and differences was necessary to set a context for my own project.
Recently a multi-disciplinary study conducted at a variety of pilgrimage sites in Western Europe showed a striking resemblance to the findings set out above, despite the differences related to the historical idiosyncrasy of the sites studied. Using psychometric (self-assessed) questionnaires, the researchers focused on the motivations of those visiting five different locations. The study assessed at total of 482 people going to Fátima (Portugal), Lourdes (France), Glastonbury and Stonehenge (England), as well as Santiago de Compostela (Spain). This therefore gives a good basis for comparison in so far as these sites incorporate a wider range of services and beliefs: Catholic (Fátima, Lourdes, Santiago), Anglican and Pagan (Glastonbury), and a variety of pagan and so-called ‘New Age’ practices at Glastonbury and Stonehenge (see chart 6). Respondents were aged between 16 and 73 years old and represented 58 different nationalities. The results of this enquiry revealed that more than 80% of visitors to those sites declared religion or spirituality to be at least one of their main motivations for going there.
Breaking down the category ‘religious’ into denominations we find that 34% of the total number of respondents were Catholics, 29% were Christians (those who did not specify any particular denomination but who considered their beliefs to be Christian related), less than 10% were Protestants (Quakers, Baptists, Lutheran, Methodists and Anglicans), 8% were spiritual or new age, and 2% were Buddhists (see chart 7).
Regarding motivations, the questionnaire probed six main categories: faith, self–realization, the esoteric, tourism/adventure, communality and health and/or healing. After factor analysis, six categories were uncovered: religious growth, spiritual growth, religious devotion, sensation seeking, seeking life direction and communality (see chart 8).
The results show that religious and spiritual growth were given more importance within the 1 to 6 scale than religious devotion by reaching means of over 3 and 4 respectively. Together, spiritual growth (4.03), sensation seeking (3.9) and life direction (3.38) were the most important factors determining motivations of respondents. Taken together, the findings of these two investigations show that by dissecting the meanings of modern European pilgrimage sites in all depths and longitudes, we find a mingling of narratives feeding from a wide range of discourses inseparable from spirituality, healing and tourism.

These categories were not mutually exclusive but complementary categories, which appeared intertwined and interdependent, meaning that often through recreation, for example, people found healing, religion, spirituality, and vice-versa. The importance of looking at pilgrimage and heritage sites for a better understanding of religion in Europe has been manifest in other studies focusing on this issue. For example two multi-disciplinary and multi-sited research projects further illustrate the case. The first was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) in conjunction with the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), and was named ‘Religion & Society’. The program was launched in the U.K. in 2009 and through its various phases it set to map the religious landscape of Britain. More specifically,

in its third phase, a project focused on places of high aesthetic value in Britain was undertaken. Through a variety of innovative visual (qualitative) research methodologies this study (ongoing at the time of writing) is concerned with how people engage with such landscapes and interpret their own experiences. The primary aim of the AHRC–funded project: ‘Landscape aesthetics, meaning and experience in Christian pilgrimage’ was:

...to bring a new perspective to understanding the significance of place in studies of Christian pilgrimage, with a particular focus on landscape as a lens through which pilgrims visualise and experience the spiritual, as well as being the site of the performance of pilgrimage itself. Researchers are interested in whether landscape aesthetics adds to a pilgrimage site's 'spiritual magnetism', how this is experienced and articulated by pilgrims and other visitors, and whether this blurs the distinction between pilgrims and other visitors. Another issue is whether landscape aesthetics attract large numbers to the sites, reducing the quality of experience and environment.

This study was concerned with sites that included Meteora Greece, the Monastery of the Sacro Speco in Subiaco and pilgrimage walks in the Isle of Man (see Della Dora et al., 2011). The results of this study are yet to be published, but the fact that such attention is being paid to pilgrimage and its heritage shows the growing importance of the subject within and without academic circles. These studies occurred in parallel with my own investigation of the Camino de Santiago and in my view they show the growing importance of this kind of travel for our understanding of religious patterns in Europe today, as well as cultural heritage and the way they have been appropriated by political and other institutions and groups.

Another project with considerable relevance in setting the context for this investigation was funded by ‘Norface’, a pan–European, multi–disciplinary consortium of academics from more than twelve European research councils. The latter received funding from the European Commission’s 6th Framework Program under ERA–NET Scheme. Although Norface itself is concerned with a multitude of broader issues regarding European culture and society, it specifically funded ten different international projects focusing on different aspects of religion in Europe. In this project, researchers from a variety of backgrounds set out to

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63 The project website is run by the University of Bristol’s School of Geographical Sciences and can be accessed at http://www.bris.ac.uk/geography/news/2009/136.html – accessed 01/08/2011).
64 Estonia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden UK
65 www.norface.org – accessed 20/07/10
answer the question of ‘the return of religion’ in the European public spheres. One of the many fields investigated by one of these specialist teams was concerned with pilgrimage sites and the people who visit them. This research cluster investigated themes regarding notions about nation, gender and religious diversity. In this project, researchers asked questions regarding the place of religion and spirituality within such traditions and the relationship they have with mass tourism. They focused on a variety of sites including La Sainte–Baume in the south of France, associated with the cult of Mary Magdalene (Fidele 2012), Lourdes and the diversity of groups who converge in that site (Notermans 2012) pilgrims going to the Parisian site of ‘Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal’ (Venbrux 2012), festivals of pardons in Brittany (Badone 2012), those who attend the sanctuary of Our Lady of Santa Cruz, located in a poor and largely stigmatized neighbourhood of Nîmes in Southern France (Albera 2012), and Swedish women walking the Camino de Santiago in Spain (Gemzöe 2012). Other places studied also included the festivities surrounding the ritual of Moros y Cristianos in the south of Spain (Dressen 2012), and various sites in the U.K. and Ireland (see Eade and Krotofil 2012, Eagan 2010 – respectively).

Although the findings of these projects are forthcoming, the overall conclusions are that: 1) pilgrimages are growing in importance with regards to regional (and indeed multi–cultural) identity, expression of religious belief and religious practice in Europe, 2) studying pilgrimages is an important way in which to understand the ‘re–emergence’of religion in Europe and its particular forms, 3) gender plays an important role in the study of new religious movements including the dynamic environment of pilgrimage sites, and 4) heritage and religious sites are important in a time of trans–national flows of people and so–called ‘super–diversity’ of cultures bounded by political boundaries (see also Vertovec 2009).

As I explained previously, the qualitative investigation I conducted probed, not unintentionally, into the emotional realms of pilgrimage. This facilitated the understanding of the quantitative research I have pointed to so far: comparing and contrasting and complementing, sometimes challenging their findings. I now turn to this more personal experience.

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66 This research group was directed by Professor Wilhelmina Jansen from the Institute for Gender Studies at Radboud University in Nijmegen (The Netherlands). An upcoming volume showcasing some of the issues explored in this research is in the process of being published at the time of writing.
A Personal Introduction to the Study of Pilgrimage

My pilgrimage began when in June 2004, after 778 kilometres on foot, I finally arrived at the famous Plaza do Obradoiro, the meeting point for travellers arriving in Santiago de Compostela. It was my first time walking the pilgrimage and the reasons which brought me there were not at all clear at the time. In hindsight, the need to leave it all behind and walk on a pilgrim path came as an impulse. It was a gut–feeling, emerging from deep within, an urge I could neither understand nor express coherently. Somehow the idea of walking on an ancient pilgrim trail, a place I was told was still entrenched in the far–distant (slow–paced) past had an immediate appeal at a time when everything else made little sense – people, places and time. The impulse to leave our familiar environment and to seek distant lands is a vague and universal human need. It is part of that curiosity (or ‘world–openness’ – see Berger & Luckmann, 1967:51) so characteristic of Homo sapiens. Indeed it is unlikely we can assign a rational cause to this primordial desire. But despite this elusive quality, something was clear from the beginning. I was not the only one to feel that way and to walk the Camino as a result. The act of pilgrimage was not simply my own and only quest. When I joined the route I became part of ‘something bigger’ a walking community, a culture or movement so to speak. As travellers we recognized one another as ‘pilgrims’, individuals on personal journeys who, despite their individual quests, were guided by a single point of reference. Our motives may have been different yet our aim was one and the same: Santiago de Compostela.

Through the course of my personal journey I became curious as to what caused others to embark on that adventure. Despite being driven by a variety of motivations, like me, my companions also seemed estranged from their own worlds back home. Something was missing. At the time I could not fully understand what that was exactly, but I knew we all had something in common – we were called upon by something so ineffable and yet so real.

In the summer of 2006 I was able to conduct a pilot study of British travellers on the road to Santiago. This was an investigative study which focused on motivations of Camino pilgrims. It soon became clear, however, that despite some successful months working in the field, the time and resources I had were too limited to explain something so complex. For one, the historical wealth of the route was overwhelming and so was the variety of narratives I encountered. People I met were often true characters in search of an author, warm–hearted, idealistic people burdened by or joyfully entangled in rich life–stories. It then became clear that if I was to make sense of pilgrimage as a place and experience, I had to use a more...
appropriate methodology. Hence in 2009, more aware of the scale of my task, I returned to the Camino once again. My aim this time was to conduct more intensive fieldwork which, although still focusing on motivations, would allow more space for people to elaborate on their responses. On this occasion I adopted Grounded Theory and Situational Analysis whilst conducting open–ended and unstructured interviews.

Despite the importance of the pilot study, I felt there were many layers of narratives I was unable to reach and describe. There were situations, ‘contexts’ and ‘processes’ that made sense to me, but which I could not articulate and explain in a coherent form to others. It seemed that there were important things people wanted to communicate and I was somehow ill–equipped to translate their ideas and feelings into a clear narrative: for instance, the emotional sensitivity displayed during the journey or even the complex relationship between ‘biography’ and ‘place’.

I was now using more sophisticated methods and a range of carefully collected materials: field notes, recorded interviews, pictures, e–mails, paintings, films, books, journal articles, newspaper cuttings, contacts and face–to–face and on–line interviews with travellers, hosts and other individuals. But despite this, I was still struggling to define, understand and write about the experience of walking the Camino. What was so special about this experience that made me incapable of conducting this research? What was so difficult about talking to people taking some time off or going on a holiday (on a long walk) of sorts? The answer came to me slowly but emphatically. The same academic mind I used to devise the research project and its intricacies had become a handicap. It was an unsuitable tool to tap into a world of emotions, beliefs, hopes and dreams, anxieties, pain, happiness and loneliness, aimlessness, passions and fears, pressures and uncertainties, religious and secular ‘callings’ involved in that practice. In sum, the pilgrimage, the Camino is alive and this life could not be captured whilst ‘scientism’ was at work. In other words, in order to understand pilgrimage I had to become a pilgrim – yet again.

**Methodology: Grounded Theory & Situational Analysis**

**Process, Context & Reflexivity**

It became clear that ‘emotionalism’ was the obvious starting point on which I was to build everything else. My primary concern was how people felt about the experience and if these
feelings were informed in one way or another by religious or (more fluid and subjective) sentiments guided by a spirituality of whatever nature. The basic question I had in mind was: why do modern Europeans go on pilgrimages? Despite having read extensively about the particular characteristics of the pilgrimage to Compostela, I felt I somehow had to forget what I already learned about it only to start again from the beginning. The reason for this was simple. I was too influenced by previous experiences and perceptions of place and people through field work and literature. There was a definite need for a constructivist analysis that ‘unearthed’ these dimensions and kept my own subjectivity at bay. In studying the Camino I found this balance was crucial and yet difficult to achieve given the emotional (intimate) nature of the experience.

This reflexivity regarding my position in the research had direct relevance as it concerned the manner in which I was to approach and treat narratives. That is, should I perceive them as giving me direct access to experience or were they being constantly constructed? In other words, were they evolving narratives? Needless to say, this type of questioning became entangled with contradictions raised by the comparative analysis of categories and concepts that I was to develop later through discourse analysis. For instance, how was I to understand my respondents’ eagerness to be seen as ‘spiritual’ or people who ‘believed in something’, but who were nevertheless ‘not religious’ or ‘spiritual’ people as such? How was I to understand those who described their experience as an attempt to ‘find themselves’ or ‘find a direction in life’, but who preferred to be seen as ‘aimless wanderers’? Was I to take this information at face value and simply accept answers uncritically, without further questioning?

According to some ethnographers, ‘One can never really know another person’s motivations. One can know a person to a certain degree, but there is always a hidden core of individuality which one must respect in others, just as one wishes it to be respected in oneself’ (Crapanzano 1980: 136–7, 152 c.f. Okely & Callaway, 1992: 187). Despite my preoccupation with not pushing my respondents too far, I was also concerned with achieving objectivity, and with finding the essence of the experience of walking to Compostela. How much is objectivity compromised when the researcher has to engage with emotions often not even familiar to him? I am not a ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual’ person – I am apathetic at best. So was objectivity at all possible to achieve when studying emotional behaviour that was so detached from my own beliefs and attitudes, in this case non–belief?
Thinking about these questions attracted me to Grounded Theory, precisely because of the two main philosophical trends that underpin it: the pragmatism associated with qualitative research methods, and the interactionism of the Chicago School (see Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Given that this methodology is geared towards the analysis of an emergence but also the evolution of ‘concepts’, it seemed the most suitable device with which to study equally fluid and dynamic phenomena such as this. It allowed me to consider factors such as ‘religiosity’ in much more depth. At the same time, it allowed room for longitudinal changes in opinion and frames of mind by facilitating the description of the ever–evolving character of impressions and motivations, as well as allowing space for my own subjectivity to appear in the transcripts.

In short, my desire was to construct a theoretical framework which would explain why some people went on pilgrimages and what happened during their journeys – and after they returned home – by taking into account my own experience as a pilgrim. The phenomenological approach I had previously used had provided me with rich and indeed suitable descriptions of what was around me. Yet descriptive accounts are not enough when one is attempting to build theory, for much of theory building is a subjective exercise in understanding the world ‘out there’. Through discourse analysis I began to generate basic concepts and these, in turn, were then continuously tested against reality. This is the pragmatist side of the equation. On the other hand, I needed to understand how ‘meaning’ was continuously constructed through symbolic interaction (here I have G.H. Mead and Erving Goffman’s work in mind, rather than that of Herbert Blumer). Participants assumed certain roles according to their own needs and circumstances, and these roles changed according to certain changes in the environment – and so did mine. That is, changes in ‘context’ were negotiated and acted upon in a dual (two–directional) movement. Motivations were not determined by structural conditions, but by individuals’ feelings about perceived elements of these conditions. As a consequence my own subjective understanding of motivations was also a result of these changes.

Through Grounded Theory I first analysed responses by applying ‘open coding’ and ‘theoretical sampling’ which in this case became essential tools for developing the initial theoretical ideas I was to focus on later in more detail. These initial insights formed the basis upon which I began to build the remaining project. The theoretical background which I had previously created prior to field work was no longer guiding results, but guiding the search for them. During data analysis I began the opening–up of the data by pointing to four broad
themes that emerged out of the careful coding of interviews resulting from in–depth analysis of individual transcripts. Through open coding I first arrived at basic or minor categories. Through axial coding, these themes gradually came to be linked to one another and to other smaller categories which shared similar attributes. Throughout this process data was being tested against reality with follow–up interviews and requests for participants to read their own transcript and comment on it (this was usually done on–line).

The grouping of categories thus occurred through the exchange between objective observation and subjective judgement, which guided the formation of wider or meta–themes: for instance, religion and spirituality, healing, metaphors and sensation seeking. Throughout the subsequent data chapters (see part II) I present a breakdown of these meta–themes, so that the reverse process of this grouping can be clearly seen. Each chapter has been dedicated to one major theme and in each theme minor categories emerge. These are the shape of sub–headings that come to form, in their totality, one stronger ‘discourse’ or ‘semantic structure’, which is represented by the main theme of the chapter. It is important to underline that these themes often overlapped and were found to some degree in most narratives, mingled with one another. Sub–categories such as ‘spiritual magnetism’, ‘the calling’, ‘latent spirituality’, ‘spiritual landscape’ and ‘emotional baggage’ are some examples of motives that emerged from interviews via my interpretation of speech and the context related to religion and spirituality. However there were many other sub–categories that I would consider part of the meta–theme which did not necessarily make explicit reference to religion.

Despite the well–drafted paragraphs on distinct meta–themes and the attempt to present the data in an organized manner, in reality narratives were difficult to interpret due to the constant ambiguity and repetition I found in and between people’s stories. Participants often contradicted themselves, their speech was sometimes incoherent and meaning was often lost in emotional outbursts. The apparent order in which I presented motivations and reflections was achieved through what I believe to be accurate, though nevertheless artificial, constructivist techniques. This is something participants were, for the most part, unaware of but it did benefit coherence. In addition to this preoccupation with interpretation of data, and the context in which it took place, I paid particular attention to the processes participants went through as part of the experience of pilgrimage. More importantly, I was concerned with how participants came to see the experience retrospectively.
Before I can go any further, my usage of the words ‘process’ and ‘context’ demand definition. In Grounded Theory they amount to an important part of the theoretical framework of this research. Hence by process it is meant:

...the flow of action/interaction/emotions that occurs in response to events, situations, or problems. A change in structural conditions may call for adjustments in activities, interactions, and emotional responses. Actions/interactions/emotions may be strategic, routine, random, novel, automatic, and/or thoughtful...(Corbin & Strauss 2008:87).

Context, on the other hand, is understood as the socio–cultural, political and economic structures in which people are embedded. Structural changes in these realms affect people’s needs and perceptions of the world. Therefore one must be attuned to them in order to understand fully what constitutes behaviour. In other words, context is composed of ‘structural conditions that shape the nature of situations, circumstances, or problems to which individuals respond by means of action/interaction/emotions’ (Corbin & Strauss 2008:87). In both cases, we see an emphasis on emotional behaviour, one that I attempted to take seriously into account during the process of data analysis.

Theoretical Sampling

There is one other aspect that urges clarification. Besides the importance of understanding changes in context and positionality, another equally important issue relates to the integration of the data and the methodological issues underpinning the choice of place and cohort studied. The difficulty I faced involved the first, and perhaps most demanding, component of Grounded Theory: Theoretical Sampling. According to the Straussian school, Theoretical Sampling is what guides research in relation to questions involving what, where, when and how to proceed with data gathering (Bryman 2010). It also lends the research the characteristic openness and evolving qualities of Grounded Theory. More formally, this form of sampling could be described as:

A method of data collection based on concepts/themes derived from data. The purpose of theoretical sampling is to collect data from places, people, and events that will maximize opportunities to develop concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions, uncover variations, and identify relationships between concepts (Corbin & Strauss 2008:143).
The advantage of using this method in the study of pilgrimage becomes almost self-evident when we consider the multi-locality of this project and the evolving, emergent, quality of the constant flow of people (and narratives) that I encountered. In theory, each interview, after considerable analysis, should produce concepts that would subsequently generate new and related questions. These in turn should generate the need for more data gathering which in due course would produce further questions, moving data gathering forwards in a dialectical manner. This process is followed until theoretical saturation was achieved: that is, categories and themes sharing similarities are accumulated to the point where the individual elements add no new information to the whole composition of meta-themes (see also Creswell 2007a, Tashakkori and Creswell 2007b, Plano Clark and Creswell 2008).

With this idea in mind, in my search for saturation, I followed from one interview to the next as I moved along the first stages of field work with each question and concept derived from the previous interview, with different participants. The exercise of walking along the pilgrim route, sometimes in tandem with my participants, was an advantage in this case, but it became at times also a problem. The initial stages of field work (the first few weeks) comprised a slow and gradual process as participants were at first difficult to identify. Incidentally this provided me with good time slots between one interview and the other. Such gaps offered the space that I needed to work on one interview – looking for categories and processes – whilst preparing my questions for the next participant.

Questions posited to participants were kept to a minimum and when I did ask direct questions these were, in most cases, more like open-ended statements. I preferred to start what I called ‘conversations’, rather than ‘interviews’, with a broad statement such as: ‘tell me about yourself...’ Only then did I proceed to probe the participant with regards to specific points of interest during our conversation – for instance by saying ‘this is interesting, tell me more...’ I would also cross-reference ideas or commentaries I found particularly difficult to understand during analysis with the next participant’s response to a similar question. This would be related to the situation or concept I wanted to learn more about. This process is technically demanding under normal circumstances; it is particularly hard to strike the right balance between interviewing and theory building when constantly on the move. To build theoretical schema one needs time and concentration and the environments I inhabited during field work did not always offer me the right conditions. So work sometimes accumulated and theorizing had to wait until the most appropriate location. A number of problems originated from this, which will be discussed in detail later.

Eduardo Chemin
Conceptual Mapping

Despite the appropriateness of Grounded Theory for this study, I also felt the need to develop theory building and analysis a step further. Hence I took into account Situational Analysis (see Clarke 2005) as a complementary form or updating of the methods put forward by the Straussian school. As I moved along the field, I began to draw ‘conceptual maps’ in order to create an understanding of ‘spatial interconnections’ and ‘complexities’ involving each and every concept. These maps were also a way to visualize the detailed descriptions of each category and their respective properties. Another aim was to visualize the processes of ‘axial coding’ and to show the complexity underlining the simplicity of categories. ‘Conceptual mapping’ is de facto a brainstorming session where concepts and themes are placed within a series of diagrams and drawings indicating possible connections and levels of relationships. One way to understand this is by imagining a series of concentric circles where individual decisions and motivations move from the inner (personal central) to the outer layers of social structures until they reach an abstract level of forces and social currents.

This is a method of ‘drawing’ theoretical ideas that make the imaginative, abstract, process of axial coding more coherent – despite its (inevitable) complexity. My intention was first to complicate the picture in order to permit a better description of the core motivations of my participants. Through conceptual mapping I focused on the process of going on a pilgrimage and the manner in which people used the spaces they encountered: for example, how such spaces affected their narratives, both during and after the experience. The resultant theory benefits from a clear and open (easy to follow) unfolding of categories and themes through a ‘subjective logic’. This process of moving from the inner spheres of motivations to the outer (macro) spheres of wider social forces is well exemplified by the ‘Conditional’ or ‘Consequential Matrix’ (see chart 9).
Besides the aim of clarity, I wanted to show just how complex the process of getting those core concepts was and how many more possibilities I could have taken into account. Doing this made me think of the pilgrimage as forming an arena of competing, but nevertheless, interlinked ‘fields’ or discourses. Hence ‘conceptual mapping’ became an important part of the overall methodological framework of the research as it made explicit possible directions and intersections which characterized this movement of people. In sum, it transformed a complex system of signs into a coherent map. Despite the structural logic of Grounded Theory, it is still a subjective approach that depends almost exclusively in the way ‘I’, the researcher, inductively interpreted people’s responses. Hence conceptual mapping comes to be invaluable as a way to show other possible outcomes and lines of enquiry that could be discerned from the analysis of narratives. The way I chose to interpret the data and use this information in a visual form could, of course, have taken a different form in the hands of another analyst. Hence this approach is ‘scientific’ (objective) in that it follows observation and method, but it is also ‘art’ (subjective) for it depends on imagination and creativity.

The important point to keep in mind at this stage is that, despite this objective/subjective dualism, conceptual mapping shows how I was able to move from complexity to more all–encompassing (higher) categories. To give an example, the concept titled ‘not a holiday’ became a key to a series of minor concepts that explained why, for some, the pilgrimage was

Eduardo Chemin

137
‘not a holiday’. In the example below (chart 10) we can see the centrality of the meta–theme, a concept that seemed to unite all other categories that, despite their diversity, shared essential characteristics. In this case ‘not a holiday’ is a higher category encompassing other minor–categories such as ‘physical and emotional pain’, which themselves were the result of other minor or adjacent categories such as ‘coping with loss’ or ‘transformative episodes’ (see figures 27 & 28). But at the centre of the map is a master (meta) theme titled ‘the pilgrim ethos’, which constituted a bond between all other categories – including ‘not a holiday’.

**Chart 10** Some properties of concept ‘not a holiday’

Source: designed by the author
Another example of the process of axial coding or the identification of sharing qualities between minor concepts is shown (see fig. 28). Here we can see how categories such as ‘depression’, ‘insecurity’ or ‘loss’ came together to form the ‘psychology of healing’, a higher level category that helped to build and give body to the all–encompassing concept of ‘healing’. This in turn fed into the key meta–theme in this research: namely ‘the pilgrim ethos’.
After various drafts and testing of categories, other conceptual maps were drafted that reflected a maturing, yet more simplified version of the many levels of categories emerging out of data analysis. We can see (chart 11) how this movement of people came to be understood as a variety of discourses that revolved or overlapped, intersecting at points and creating the action of pilgrimage. The combination of these forces stimulated the idea of an ethos driving the rekindled interest in pilgrimage. Hence ‘the pilgrim ethos’ came to be a central concept that explained the link between all other categories – the concept that can explain small and larger categories: from the micro individual event to the macro forces impinging upon behaviour.
Research Design: A Project in Three Stages

1) Interviews & Participant Observation

This project was initially divided into three stages, of which the first took shape primarily as unstructured interviews conducted between the months of May and October 2009. In order to identify appropriate participants I joined one of the most popular pilgrimage routes in Europe at a point where other routes join together: the Basque town of St. Jean Pied de Port. This small but picturesque town is situated at the foothills of the Pyrenees (south west of France). It is a route made famous by many writers who focused on it as a departure point for their own pilgrimages to Compostela (see chapter 9). St. Jean is often used as a starting point to the well–known Camino Francés. This particular route carries a constant stream of travellers throughout the year. By focusing on this path in particular I knew that I would find a substantial number of prospective participants. The selection of interviewees occurred on the basis of their nationality – that is, British. Despite the idiosyncrasy of this criterion, this was established for good reason. First, and foremost, by interviewing British travellers only I had a better understanding of context (a Grounded Theory requirement – as described above). Decisions such as where to go on a holiday or what to wear are influenced, at least partly, by Eduardo Chemin
the socio–cultural, economic and political circumstances of the person. Thus studying a particular cohort, one whose culture I was thoroughly familiar with, offered me a good grounding in the context in which participants were immersed in their daily routines. This aspect turned out to be of great importance, especially when I attempted to place the person against a background of socio–cognitive interactions and events that shaped their experience when on pilgrimage. – I explain more about this in the following chapters.

Secondly, by circumscribing participation in such manner, I had the opportunity to conduct follow–up interviews with the same cohort sometime after I met them on the Camino. By focusing on Britons only, I was thus able to give the research a longitudinal quality. Narratives that I began to study in Spain were extended and complemented by narratives of the return home and subsequent changes in environment and expectations. This in turn helped me to identify patterns related to ‘process’ (the other important element of Grounded Theory described above). I was able to link peoples’ stories during the performance of pilgrimage to where and how they lived their daily lives and routines. In sum, I was able to make sense of narratives through a better understanding of peoples’ biographies. I was able to visit people’s homes and conduct visual ethnography and photo elicitation research with some of my participants, which gave flesh to the interviews as I was able to compare and contrast a narrative of an extra–ordinary experience against one of quotidian life.

On a more practical level, by interviewing British travellers only I also made sure that the research was viable and cost–effective. Although my aim was not to construct a research project based on a representative sample – or even to be accurate in the quantitative sense of the word – I wanted to understand the person as a whole rather than simply having a snapshot of a certain moment in their lives. Studying the context along with people’s narratives became important for the final composition of the research. I wanted to know how people felt and the way they behaved on a daily basis with regards to religion and spirituality. This allowed me to access the importance of the experience of going to Compostela within a broader biographical context. This choice should not be seen as a defence of qualitative methods over quantitative, however, for I was able to benefit from both methodologies in this study. The idea of implementing a quantitative element occurred to me only after I had conceptualized the entire project as a purely qualitative enquiry. My reflections in theory and the nature of the research question determined this late addition (see May, 1997; Payne & Payne, 2004 and Punch, 2005).
According to the literature referring to religious patterns in Europe, by focusing on British respondents, I was also quite possibly studying people living in one of the most secularized societies in Europe. It is important to make this point clear as the central tenet of this research is that the rising popularity of places like Santiago de Compostela is increasing at times when traditional religion in the form of practised rituals (i.e. church attendance) is undeniably in decline – in particular in the European North. I aimed initially for a sample of 50 to 60 participants. As I reached a good level of theoretical saturation (and for other reasons that will be discussed later in this chapter), the final number of participants taking part in formal (recorded) interviews was 57. Out of this pool seven interviews were conducted for the first time in the U.K. and one took place online. Out of the 57 participants 16 were re-interviewed approximately a year later. Follow-up interviews were conducted at various localities in the U.K., often in my participants’ own homes. Only one person asked to be withdrawn from the study. Talking about his experience, the participant in question noted that despite an uninterested approach at first, the experience all too quickly became a self-reflective exercise and was ‘too personal to be shared’. Curiously, the participant in question would have been the only person I interviewed who had a background other than Christian-European.

In addition to formal interviews I also talked to people whose first language was other than English. These occurred in French, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian. Indeed I have spoken informally to a multitude of travellers from a variety of cultures over four years on the Camino. Not much of this material was recorded, so I have not used it in the construction of categories and themes – only recorded interviews were analysed and integrated into my theorizing. To include more would inevitably raise issues of validity and interpretation which I was eager to minimize. Non-recorded interviews and talks were only used as a testing ground in the building of context and the questioning of processes. All that said, even when focusing only on the British subjects (a rather restricted cultural basis), I still found a great variety of backgrounds and attitudes regarding the experience of pilgrimage.

In my sample, 34 participants were male and 23 were female. Their religious background varied from atheists, practising and non-practising Catholics and Protestants to those with more fluid ideas about spirituality, which reflected a variety of beliefs and practices: that is, those who ‘believed in something’ but who were not exactly sure what. The age of

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67 By ‘North’ I mean the United Kingdom and Scandinavian countries (see Bruce, 2002).
respondents varied between 19 and 78. There was no great ethnic diversity in my sample. All respondents were either white–British or white–Europeans. Their professional and educational orientation varied: from students, teachers and artists to retired aircraft engineers, U.N. soldiers, civil servants and builders. Some knew about the pilgrimage through their faith, others through tourist brochures, and still others stumbled across it completely by accident.

During the first stages of field work and in order to understand people’s daily habits, customs and beliefs, I stayed in pilgrim hostels commonly known as *refugios* or *albergues*. On the Camino there is an established network of such hostels and it has been in constant expansion since the Camino once became again popular in the 1980s (see chapter 1). Thus I explored this aspect of the pilgrimage by staying in accommodation set up by local boroughs and councils as well as those administered by private owners for commercial or charitable purposes. I used these locations primarily for the identification of prospective participants, but also as appropriate spaces to conduct interviews with a better chance of privacy and sound-recording quality. In some periods I became an unpaid volunteer, working on a full-time basis at different *albergues*. This gave me the chance to spend more time in contact with travellers and the opportunity to learn more about the people who organized and looked after these places. This experience provided me with opportunities to interview more people as I spent long periods of time in charge of reception areas checking them in: something that made the identification of prospective participants considerably easier.

I first approached participants on the basis of their nationality. After asking a few preliminary questions, for instance, ‘where are you from?’ I then identified myself as a social researcher looking to study motivations. Providing the person agreed verbally to take part in the research, the most appropriate location and time for the interview would be arranged. Prior to the interview participants were asked to read and sign consent forms, a copy of which was given to each participant. Interviews were then tape-recorded and further transcribed. In addition I kept a diary which I used to enhance the description of the activities people engaged in and my first impressions of the interview and our surroundings at the time. This information was then added to the main body of research enriching my perceptions of context and process. I also kept information such as age, profession, ethnicity, and creed of respondents, variables which were self-assigned by participants at the time they filled in the

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68 This is described in more detail in chapter 1 – see also glossary.  
69 See appendix B and C for examples of forms.
consent forms. At this stage, participants were given a full disclosure of the research aims and processes verbally and in writing. I made myself open to any further questions before the interview commenced and participants were given the choice not to take part in the research or to withdraw from the study at any given time.

The length of the interviews varied widely: from 20 to 120 minutes. These were conducted in the most appropriate places – away from other people and in quiet locations, whenever possible. It must be said that given the sheer number of people sharing the spaces I was working in, I often found difficult to provide participants with an ideal location to conduct the interviews. Nevertheless, participants were always asked if they were comfortable with the location, noise levels and privacy. Before interviews began I asked them to choose random pseudonyms so that their identity could be protected. Some decided to use their first names, whilst others preferred an altogether different name. I kept information such as e–mail addresses and phone numbers securely stored in password protected memory units that I kept with me at all times. I used this information as a method of contact a year later for prospective follow–up interviews. For the latter interviews, contact was made initially via e–mail with subsequent phone conversations. These were then followed by a formal interview conducted either at participants’ own homes or at another location chosen by the participant: for instance pubs, restaurants or other public spaces.

2) Secondary Sources

The second stage, following the interviewing process, was related to the enhancement of the qualitative data using a range of other materials such as local and international media portrayals of the pilgrimage (see figure 29), as well as published accounts of people’s experiences. Also of paramount importance were the comments left in the book of guests (figure 30) – a guest book kept in most hostels, following a rule imposed by the pilgrim association. Together, these secondary sources provided support for the interview material. These secondary sources also helped to reduce the risk of bias regarding the interviewing process. Although the gathering of this material is here presented as a second stage of data collection, in reality all materials have been collected throughout the project.
Figure 29 English newspaper cut out showing an advertisement sponsored by the Spanish Tourist Board

Source: personal archive. Note the cathedral at Santiago de Compostela in the background. The writing across the advert says: ‘First rule of etiquette when eating shell-fish: forget the etiquette’.
Figure 30 Examples of messages left on the book of guests

Source: personal archive – reproduced with permission. Travellers often leave personal messages about the purpose of their journey and how they experienced it. For instance the last message on this sample, left by two travellers from New Zealand, reads: ‘It’s like a dream to be here in Roncesvalles. May our hearts be open to all the blessings that are here for our Compostela experience’.
In addition I also made use of a wide range of audio–visual materials collected before, during and after fieldwork in Spain. Together with the analysis of the book of guests and other sources found in and around pilgrim hostels, I also resorted to the collection and analysis of materials such as photographs, posters, architectural readings of places of significance, sculptures, paintings, spontaneous symbolic displays of objects – stone pyramids, crosses built with surrounding materials, small *impromptu* shrines, music and even travellers clothes and behaviour of travellers (see the examples in figures 31, 32 and 33). I have also made use of other methods of analysis, varying from interviewing key actors that have an established reputation on the Camino – such as individuals that welcomed travellers in hostels as well as communicating with members of pilgrim associations and organizers – in Spain as well as Britain. Another invaluable source of data emerged from examining the contents of the many ‘Camino Guides’ available in a variety of bookshops in Europe. These texts offer travellers *spiritual* support (main churches, temples and other sites and festivals of spiritual relevance) as well as material guidance (maps and charts) for those who were considering embarking on the journey to Compostela.

**Figure 31** Spontaneous display of crosses along a 2 km wired fence along the French route
3) Follow-up Interviews & Visual Ethnography

The third stage involved the re-visiting (interviewing, participant observation and photo elicitation) of those already interviewed along the pilgrimage route after they had completed their pilgrimage and had returned home to the U.K. By doing this I hoped to study two aspects of the experience of pilgrimage. First, I was concerned with possible changes in behaviour as a result of contact with the pilgrimage site, especially in relation to spiritual or religious beliefs. Second, I was also concerned with the environment in which participants lived and how they felt about the experience (retrospectively) in relation to their beliefs but also regarding life more generally. Participants interviewed in the previous stage were asked if they could be further contacted (either via e-mail, social network sites, telephone or in writing) and if they would be willing to be interviewed again a year later. An explanation for this request was included. The selection of participants for follow-up interviews occurred randomly. That is, it occurred on the basis of opportunity, available resources and people’s replies to my request. Those who replied were then asked to choose a location, date and time most suitable to them. I met all the costs of these interviews, including transport and further
expenses, but I have also enjoyed the hospitality of some of my participants, who sometimes very kindly offered accommodation or a meal. Once agreed upon, these interviews began to take shape as semi-structured open-ended conversations and were accordingly tape-recorded (with due consent) and further transcribed.

Although on-line interviews have been conducted and the internet has been an invaluable tool in this research project, I prioritised face-to-face interaction with participants as well as visiting their homes and seeing the environment in which they lived and how objects and spaces were used, displayed and interacted with. I have observed and taken pictures of living arrangements of my participants and the way they displayed objects (souvenirs) from the Camino. They ranged from mass-produced items (t-shirts, key-rings) to the very personal pilgrim staff (usually made of wood), and the pilgrim credential (see chapter 1 for detailed description). The latter was usually framed and placed at a visible part of the house – commonly in the bedroom above the bed, in the living room above the mantelpiece, in the office or the stairway walls. People also displayed scallop shells around the house – in the kitchen, bathroom and living rooms – using them as important mementos or simply as ashtrays. Hence the shell was often used as a reminder of the symbolic (spiritual) value of the journey, but also for purely decorative (mundane) purposes.

A Late Addition: Quantitative Surveying

There was also a late addition to this project which complemented this qualitative data: I distributed 175 questionnaires containing 42 questions related to the experience of pilgrimage. This sample was part of a larger study conducted by academics from a multi-disciplinary group of researchers from Universities in England and Portugal, of which I was part. The study distributed a total of 487 questionnaires at various pilgrimage sites – Fátima (Portugal), Lourdes (France), Glastonbury and Stonehenge (England). In this study participants were approached randomly at the various designated sites. In my share of the sample participants had a choice between six translations of the same questionnaire (English, French, German, Portuguese, Spanish and Italian). Respondents varied widely in their religious background, age and nationality and there were an almost equal number of male and female participants. Participants were given a brief explanation of the overall research rationale and aims, and they were also given a full list of contact addresses to ask further questions if so desired. These questionnaires, however, were designed not by me but by a
team of researchers from the Department of Social Psychology at the University of Oxford. Questionnaires measured attitudes towards pilgrimage by using a six point psychometric scale where “1” represented “strongly disagree” and “6” “strongly agree”. The questionnaires attempted to capture the full scope of motivations inherent in the act of pilgrimage and, as such, were developed with social–psychological concepts in mind. The outcomes of this data have been integrated into my overall theorizing and can be seen in charts 6, 7 and 8.

First, I conceptualized the research design purely as a qualitative analysis focusing primarily on fieldwork and follow–up interviews with British respondents only. The idea of adding the quantitative element came out of a need for comparative work regarding methodologies and the need to establish triangulation. Doing this also gave the research a better sense of cultural distribution, due to the broader array of respondents and the variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds that I was then able to tap into. The point of entrance for this late addition was during my most intensive period of fieldwork (the summer of 2009) when I became a host in one of the many pilgrim hostels along the pilgrimage route. In this particular hostel I found the ideal location to conduct most of the quantitative research as well as a good proportion of the qualitative data. As a hospitalero, I was also in the position of more intense contact with gate keepers (more experienced hospitaleros and hostel owners) as well as more time with pilgrims: a position that gave me easier access to information and legitimacy. In this I was very rarely refused an interview or compliance with my request to fill in a questionnaire. There are ethical implications and considerations that must be taken into account with regards to this point and I will discuss them in the following section.

**Research Validity & Interpretation**

**Putting Theory into Practice**

As already indicated I worked as a volunteer in two different refúgios. The idea emerged as I found that being constantly on the move made finding participants more difficult than I had anticipated. Hence, by remaining fixed, my chances of identifying participants improved considerably. As a volunteer I performed duties that included cooking for up to sixty people, general daily cleaning routines and first aid assistance, either in the form of direct physical

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70 This was a collaborative work born out of shared research interests. The idea of me taking part in this project appeared during a round table discussion at the annual conference for the scientific study of religion at Santiago de Compostela in 2009.

Eduardo Chemin

151
contact (as in treating blisters or giving therapeutic massages) or taking those in need of care to the local surgery. I also drove, shopped for supplies, did some general maintenance in the form of repair work, as in fixing plumbing or changing light bulbs, and walked the dog, among other duties. However most of my days as a volunteer were taken by the welcoming of pilgrims throughout the day from the moment the doors opened at 11:00 am (in both locales) until the late hours of the evening. I stamped pilgrim credentials, showed travellers the facilities, pointed them to their allocated beds (usually in dormitories varying in capacity from six to fifteen bunk beds or mattresses), stated the rules and regulations of the place, and tended to their general needs.

On average the work load amounted to twelve hours a day. In this period I conducted interviews with the guests whenever appropriate. During the summer months the numbers of travellers increased substantially due to the European holiday season. I worked in this routine for three and a half months (parts of June/July, the whole of August and September) and I was provided with no remuneration. However I was given free accommodation and three meals a day. In both refúgios I shared all duties with an international team of volunteers who also performed similar routines.

The first refúgio I worked for was located in the medieval town of Hospital del Órbigo in the province of Castilla y León. It was located in the centre of the town and was run by the local Catholic priest. It had a capacity to accommodate 110 people with additional mattresses. There was also a courtyard for the keeping of animals. My stay there was limited to ten days during the month of June. The second refúgio I volunteered in was further down the pilgrim route towards Santiago and it was located at the medieval town of Villafranca del Bierzo (province of León). This was a privately owned hostel with capacity to accommodate 85 guests, with additional floor space for mattresses and a courtyard for animals and camping. In the first of these refúgios we, the volunteers, were subordinate to the local priest who, on a daily basis, came to oversee the work and give us support in whatever way was necessary. In the second we were subordinate to the owner of the refúgio whose experience with pilgrims extends for more than twenty years. Both refúgios, despite one being privately owned, operated on donativos – that is, on a charitable basis.

As with the hostel administered by the Church and indeed like most hostels along the way, this refúgio would only accept those who were either walking, cycling or on horseback without a support coach or car and who possessed a pilgrim credential. If travellers had only
started their pilgrimage at that stage and had no credential, one could be obtained by the
giving of a (suggested) minimum donation of €1. For those who purchased new credentials,
in both locales, travellers were obliged to fill in a book with details such as name, nationality,
age, profession, full home address and their motivation for going on a pilgrimage and were
asked to present a valid form of identification. Along with the book of guests this information
became another invaluable source of data.

The experience of becoming a volunteer turned out to be crucial to my understanding of the
pilgrimage and its mechanisms. The concept of *hospitality* for instance, something I had not
considered as a walker, became an important theme within the categories that were generated
from field work notes, interviews and other sources. Hospitality was an important concept,
which helped me to understand the formation of what I later came to see as ‘the pilgrim
ethos’: that is, the overall set of ethics, mind–frames and behaviour enveloping the
pilgrimage (I describe this in more detail in the conclusion to this study). Hence becoming a
volunteer provided me with a greater insight into the lives and motivations of those who help
in the construction of the idea of what it means to be a pilgrim today: their needs, mission and
understandings of the experience. Such people I came to understand later as ‘producers of
meaning’ (described in detail in chapter 9). Without this experience this project would most
certainly be incomplete. Yet it is important to point out that much of the work done during
this period was conducted in conditions which generated a certain amount of physical and
emotional pressure, changing the dynamics of the research and impacting on the overall
result.

*Some Unexpected Problems*

Due to the constraints of conducting ‘multi–sited ethnography’ on this scale, problems began
to arise. These mainly concerned space and time. With the benefit of hindsight, these were
problems that were initially overlooked and which occurred primarily due to an over–
optimistic notion of how field work routines would unfold. For one thing, walking with an
average 20 kg of equipment on my back, for an average of 30 to 35 km a day, every day,
rapidly took its toll not only on my physical health but also on the amount of work I could do
on each interview. I inevitably began to accumulate more interviews than I had time to
analyse. Clarity of analysis gradually began to give way to the pursuit of an appropriate
number of participants. This was detrimental to the fundamental steps of Grounded Theory
which urged me to take each interview, one by one, and analyse them carefully before moving to the next.

As this situation developed, anxiety surrounding the problem of the lack of interviews built up as I concentrated my efforts into finding participants and thus changing my patterns of data gathering. So in order to find a solution I opted out of walking, resorting to volunteering in the pilgrim refúgios instead. This tactic not only placed me in the position of influence that I needed in order to recognize prospective participants, and hence secure more interviews, but also gave me time to rest and a space to conduct interviews. In sum I had a more controlled environment there. Although this change in approach was beneficial overall, it also had its down side. For instance it created the problem of emotional attachment to place and people. In other words I became a host rather than simply acting like one. So the more I remained in such a position the more the research was left on the side in order to give space to my newly acquired responsibilities such as caring for others, cleaning and cooking, driving etc. The days also became increasingly labour intensive and often I would not have the appropriate time to identify participants, let alone interview them. In such days I resorted to participant observation and sought every possible occasion to write some observations in my diary – between duties.

*Conducting Field Work: The Researcher as a ‘Producer of Meaning’*

In my view, one of the most interesting aspects of studying a pilgrimage route such as the Camino was to reflect, in hindsight, about my active involvement in the construction of other people’s experience. Although I made very clear from the beginning that I was a researcher, I am convinced that many of those I came in contact with saw me, not solely as a sociologist but also as a part of their experience, that is, another element on the spatial and cognitive landscapes they were exploring. For instance after my return home I received many e-mails containing accounts of the pilgrimage which pictured me as someone who added something to their journey; or for that matter, impacted on their lives. In one such account, a traveller from England included me in his on–line diary. When I first met him he told me he was suffering from the heat and the hard walk he had just endured in order to reach Villafranca. That day this man had walked approximately 20 miles.

At the age of 73, Reverend ‘John’ (a pseudonym) is a seasoned pilgrim who takes groups of people (mostly from his parish) to Compostela on a yearly basis. He always walks with them
for most of the way. As he recounts in his memoirs, when he met me he felt I was there to help him to reach Compostela. In his eyes I was never a (detached) researcher but also part of his pilgrimage. Indeed I remember feeling a certain ‘connection’ with him as we spoke for hours about all sorts of issues and about his experience as a community leader. Although I was very explicit as to why I wanted to talk to him and what I was doing in that hostel, he saw me as a fellow pilgrim. As he explains:

…One almost wonders whether God’s timing was in all this, because no sooner had I booked in at our ‘usual’ albergues, than a member of staff asked if, as someone who had been on Pilgrimage twice before, I would give time to be interviewed by a Brazilian (running the albergue during the ‘Varsity summer break’) for a research project being undertaken. This lovely man was a student at Exeter University studying why there was such an extraordinary growth of people taking part in Pilgrimages (Lourdes, Santiago and so many others) throughout Europe in a part of the world where the Church was actually declining. How could this be? What was God doing? The two of us had a wonderful time together and became great friends almost instantly and spent much of the day together as his duties allowed. He has promised to come and visit us here, and to interview people like Roger who have had their lives so wonderfully transformed through the pilgrimage experience; also for us to try and arrange a meeting with Ian and Liz re our Diocesan link with Santiago…

He was also a great chef, and prepared a meal that he said would only help my recovery… It was a super meal… When we stop at Villafranca, we normally arrange for our bags to be taken to the top of O’Cebreiro. My kind Brazilian friend arranged for me to travel on this vehicle to O’Cebreiro, saving me the problem of that long and arduous climb...

It is important to notice that Reverend John was by no means an isolated case. Many of those who contacted me after we first met on the Camino included me in their stories and memories and these often replicated that same tone. They often thought of me not solely as a researcher but as a part of ‘their’ pilgrimage, a fellow pilgrim, someone they could confide in, a friend or a host: in sum, someone who ‘made a difference’; a ‘producer of meaning’, so to speak. I was also often asked to give my opinion, sometimes even on personal matters, and this was difficult to negotiate at times. For instance, there was a lot of room for conflict between my role as a researcher and my duties as a host. For someone like John, the help I offered was the
most important aspect of his stay. When he arrived at the hostel he was clearly suffering from dehydration and I felt it was my ‘duty’ to do my best to help him in that situation. The feeling of compassion towards the people that I encountered was indeed contagious and I simply could not refrain from taking up the role of the carer and to a certain extent ‘defender’ of the ethos that underlies the pilgrimage.

Hence in the study of pilgrimage, one of the most challenging obstacles facing the researcher does not pertain to something physical, in the outside world. It resides inside the researcher himself. To study pilgrimage is to be immersed in a constant search for perhaps the same object of devotion travellers themselves seek. In this environment the separation between ‘object’ and ‘subject’ is marked only by an ineffable line often blurred by the values of each personal quest. The subtlety of emotions and thoughts inherent in peoples’ narratives all too soon become powerful messages that, inevitably, come to influence and affect the researcher just as some words of wisdom, when spoken at the right place and time, can replace a life—time of learning. Pilgrimage is an emotional act. As such it demands the researcher to be open to the wide range of sentiments often found in those environments. From religious belief or a search for healing, to having time away under the sun and in nature, motivations for travelling are very wide and impossible to make sense of rationally unless the emotional and imaginary world in which they occur can be also accounted for.
Chapter 5

Religion & Spirituality

‘What distinguishes modern sensibility from classical sensibility is that the latter thrives on moral problems and the former on metaphysical problems.’ (Albert Camus)

Through movement and contact with places and objects of devotion, pilgrimage becomes an embodiment of spiritual needs. Indeed, for some, places of pilgrimage (shrines and routes) are spiritual reservoirs and repositories of faith that people feel ‘called’ towards. Hence in the following I focus on narratives where an underlying hope for personal transformation was made explicit through the performance of pilgrimage. These stories come as evidence of the importance of the body, biography, movement and place in the sacralisation of what is often (initially) understood as a tourist experience – detached from religious devotion. Thus of particular importance here is the evolving nature of sentiments and ideas that are often deemed secular, but which, with time and engagement with place and text, gain new meanings.

Looking for a Path: The Calling of the Way

The idea of a ‘calling’ is one that appeared in various forms, at various stages and in different contexts. In fact it was difficult at times to discern the word ‘calling’ from the inferred religious connotations it implied – even when not explicitly made reference to. For example, the word ‘God’ featured in a number of accounts related to the calling. In other accounts the calling meant a calling from the God within as opposed to the God without: not an authoritative external (supernatural) presence which governed behaviour, but an instinctive impulse, a ‘gut feeling’, an ‘urge’. In yet other cases, the pilgrimage was defined as a way more explicitly to ‘come back to god’ or to live ‘a more spiritual life’. In this case ‘God’ represented the way people felt and expressed these feelings through the medium of the landscape of the pilgrimage.
One such story is told by Steve, a former policeman who walked the Camino on two separate occasions. Unlike the majority of Camino travellers, after completing his second pilgrimage, Steve decided to settle permanently on that same route. He purchased a property, renovated it and began to live a life very different from the one he knew in his native London. For this man going on a pilgrimage was part of a continuing process of spiritual re-vitalization and self-reflexivity, rather than an isolated event. He was a professional going through a dramatic transition in his life, which led him to search for a more authentic and spiritual way of living. For him, this search gained material form through ‘place’ as it was represented by a particular geography. Metaphorically, it reflected the image of the person he wanted to be. I quote Steve at length as he provides good illustration of the type of biographical accounts given by participants in this research.

I was brought up in a village, a small town in the middle of England in Oxfordshire, in a Baptist church very much so with my mother and father. But I was quite a rebellious teenager and I got into trouble a couple of times. But then I joined the police force at the age of about twenty three and was a police officer for thirty years. In the middle of that I was converted very dramatically into Christianity as a result of the work I was involved in really, and the questions that my work asked of me as to why and what and where there was all this, you know, suffering and why were they all...there were lots of questions anyway, and I was...say, dramatically converted to Christianity at the age of thirty five...continued in the police force until 2003 – which culminated with the end of my marriage and relationship, a thirty–five–year–old relationship to my wife. I also terminated my relationship with my children who are adults now. And that hasn’t changed. So when I walked on the Camino in 2006, having being separated for four years and I’m still in a lot of pain... and I just thought it was the right thing to do. I was spiritually in a vacuum and in the years that I separated... I’ll try to put it more clearly actually: I had my own home, I had a wife, I had children, I had a job, and within one year, I had none of those things. My life was turned completely upside down. I had nothing familiar in my life at all, except my belief in Jesus Christ.

On the Camino it is not difficult to find people like Steve, for whom the act of walking becomes an externalization of inner (mental) frameworks. I chose him as an example because his motivations illustrate, succinctly and explicitly, elements of transformation and the calling, which I wish to highlight here. His story makes us ask questions regarding the
cyclical nature of religion and religious belief – as well as ‘spirituality’ as a more fluid term. For instance, until he came to Spain to walk the Camino, Steve had not stepped into a church for a long time. Although his parents were religious, he himself grew distant from religion and stopped practising for many years, only to be converted later in life. His spirituality is one that benefits from a direct experience with the forms of spirituality that are subjective and indeed constructed through experience. This is one trend that ran through interviews. People attempted to make sense of their [spiritual] lives without engaging with traditional forms of religious practices such as church attendance; even when considering themselves as being ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual’.

In Steve’s case religious experience took place through an Evangelical faith. For him the God without was the element that helped him come to terms with the spirit within. But of course, not all travellers were so at ease with using the word ‘God’. In fact people often felt anxious to shed any formal identification with institutional belief. This was clearly reflected in the language used; that is, they sometimes referred to ‘self–spirituality’ instead of ‘religion’, and ‘the universe’ instead of ‘God’, ‘heaven’, ‘hell’ or even ‘sin’. Those I spoke to showed inventiveness in describing their beliefs – or lack of them – and a simultaneous respect for the traditions underpinning the pilgrimage (in this case Catholicism) without necessarily taking everything on board. They discarded elements that did not make sense to their personal experience and biography by embracing the experience as a spiritually enhancing undertaking: a way of re–enforcing their own beliefs and to experiment with new ones.

Using Steve as an example, this temporary state of mind can become a permanent (on–going) search. In his case place (the house he inhabited) was the source of his newly found spirituality – one that rooted him to a particular location and gave him a material connection to the traditions implied by the pilgrimage. He felt that if he had left that place he would somehow lose contact with that ‘something’ which he felt connected to. In other words, for Steve, place represented a materialisation of the spiritual enhancement he was searching for – the new person he was trying to become. The return to the Camino was closely associated with that growing need to access the ‘spiritual well’ he believed existed in that landscape. As he further explained:

This way is blessed. I believe...I’ve read...one example, somebody explained that so many years and years and years of people walking, searching I guess – whichever denomination – but searching, has been recognized by God and God has lowered the
canopy of heaven closer here and I don’t know if you ever heard that? He lowered the canopy of heaven closer to the Camino and that, actually, is what people experience when they feel this joy and this surge of wellbeing. I think there’s something in that. I think perhaps God respects that, you know, the pilgrimage and his presence is closer so I would like to think that that’s the case really...when I finished the Camino and went back to England I felt stale so, in simplicity, I wanted to go back. I’ve got to live on the way, where I feel there’s a spiritual blessing in this route. And I came back here and found this place and bought it... ...and felt it was right. I don’t say I had a blinding vision, a spiritual vision, I have had a vision once but this was more of a...it was me and...a godly experience, perhaps, a bit, but not sort of a blinding flash and you would go here...I just felt that everything was...this is correct, hmmm...and....yeah. And I’ve worked away and had a complete spiritual awakening since I’ve been here. Not since the decision to come here, but since I’ve been here. And my walk with Jesus really has been much closer and much harder – much, much, much harder. Much, much refining I guess you would say. Yeah but having said that, I feel it is right. Sometimes though I feel like running away. It’s so hard sometimes...

Steve is clearly referring to the pilgrimage in its entirety here. However he is also referring, more specifically, to the place where the interview was conducted – an old stone barn he was at the time converting into his new home. We were sitting outside, at the back of the house overlooking a space where he wanted to have a garden. At the time the house comprised a spacious room situated on the upper floor which, as an artist, he used as a studio and exhibition room. There was a lower floor where his bedroom was arranged so that his bed would face the backyard. Perhaps it would be constructive to recall how I met Steve from an entrance I made in my research diary after I interviewed him. This, I think, emphasizes the link between place and experience. I wrote:

This morning I was hiking alone on a quiet and narrow country road when I saw a stone building. As I approached I noticed that post–cards were being displayed on a metal stand half–way out onto the front–steps of the front door. They were for sale. These post–cards were mainly reproductions of watercolour paintings which, once I stepped into the house, I could see hanging on the four walls of the spacious room. There was music being played. It came from speakers placed at the corner of the room: The Doors, *Come on Baby Light my Fire*. There is a cross hanging on the wall opposite to the entrance and facing it a comfortable–looking leather chair. Small
upright rectangular windows were covered in watercolour depictions of the surrounding landscape. It all gave the place an immediate sense of peace, lightness and colour. That was Steve’s art gallery. In the ground floor there was a kitchen, a bedroom and a small bathroom which overlooked a large area of open vegetation with a small stream running through. The place was rustic and idyllic and it felt like something between an art gallery and a meditation centre of some sort. Steve, a charismatic man, received me with enthusiasm and interest. As soon as I identified myself as a researcher, he wasted no time in offering me a cup of coffee whilst showing me the way downstairs on a guided tour of his home. He introduced me to his girlfriend who was washing clothes in the back garden. Soon he began telling me about his life. We sat outside basking in the sun. He looked and sounded very relaxed, but slightly emotional. There were no hesitations. It all happened very accidentally, I didn’t know there was an Englishman living in that house but he certainly looked a part of that landscape as much as the house or the trees that surrounded him (July, 2009).

As Steve explained, the connection he felt with place went beyond aesthetics. It was the very source of his spiritual journey, one he felt he was called upon to make. During the refurbishment of the house he had numerous problems with local authorities with regards to building regulations, the weather, finances, time, and so on. But he saw them as part of his ‘mission’: hurdles he ought to overcome in his path to a more spiritual life. For Steve, moving there was part of a long trajectory that led him to a psychological breaking point. But a further, and perhaps more interesting, aspect of Steve’s relationship with place was the emphasis he placed on the people who were there before him. He believed that because of the continuity found on the route – the number of people who have passed there throughout the centuries – ‘God’ somehow recognized this by ‘lowering the canopy of heaven’, so that pilgrims could feel closer to it. This aspect of continuity, I later found, was to become a marked characteristic of many such narratives.

Others have also expressed how they felt ‘called’ to the Camino. The idea of the ‘calling’ often represented a search for self–realization, one that gradually became a common feature in these interviews. Religion (broadly conceived) formed an important part in the construction of such ideals in one form or other. The idea that one was ‘on the way’ to finding a ‘direction’ became almost an end in itself. For instance, Laura, a traveller from Northern Ireland, felt she lacked something in her daily life and decided to walk the Camino...
in order to find some direction. Despite the fact she found it difficult to articulate what that ‘something’ was, she seemed to be looking for some form of ‘channelling’ that would help her focus and be more objective, both spiritually as well as in more practical matters.

I came perhaps because I’m looking to change direction. I worked as a nurse for a long time but...well, actually I haven’t worked continuously as a nurse I’ve also done other things, but I happened to...what’s the word...I ‘temped’ a lot and...yeah...talking to that priest last night, that young guy I related to what he was saying... he’s got a calling. He’s a young guy who’s got a calling. And he was talking about his friends that they were all floating around, they had the energy but it’s been dissipated whereas he’s energy, of course, he knows where he’s going...channelled...and I think I don’t have that calling and I think I’m very taken by anyone who has the calling. I’m drawn to them like ...[laughs], it doesn’t matter what their age or what they’re doing they are the people who catch my interest as much as the people who are laid back and maybe that’s why I’m doing it...somehow to look for a direction.

Whether travellers I met were searching for something ‘spiritual’ or simply taking ‘time out’ in an attempt to find solutions to specific problems; or in order to spend time with friends or family, they felt there was an initial and often spontaneous impulse to join the Camino. In Laura’s case, the impulse was provoked by a series of incidents she preferred not to disclose at the time. Like Steve, Laura also seemed emotional when describing her lack of direction. She mentioned the necessity she felt to find a focus and how much she admired those who had that focus. Despite emphasising this aspect, she was not as such a religious person. Yet she described a series of journeys she had recently undertaken to sites where religious heritage was central to the occasion. When I met her again for a follow–up interview in London – just about a year after I first met her on the Camino – I asked her about this habit of travelling to places of spiritual significance. As an answer, she gave me a description of her experience of arriving in Santiago de Compostela and what happened when she went to the daily pilgrim’s mass (see figure 34):

...I found the whole thing quite moving and when they did that thing with the Botafumeiro, that thing that swings, I didn’t expect to find that moving – but I did. I found that very powerful and so for me the whole experience... I went back to Santiago de Compostela, I went to the mass three times. The pilgrim’s mass at twelve o’clock. And I went in there the next day and then I went to Finisterre and then I went
again on Sunday so I went three times in there and I went a couple of times in the evening as well and I felt that church had something about it.

It seems that, for Laura, such places somehow offered her the ‘something’ she felt was lacking in her life. Something she was looking for but which, nevertheless, could not be appropriately described. Laura felt an aimlessness she could not articulate and this came to the fore when she began describing why she was attracted to other people’s callings. She went on successive pilgrimages to Santiago, one that took place during the winter months approximately six months before I met her. She visited other places of religious and artistic significance as well, including a prominent monastery in Ireland and the Vatican. She seemed to be on a continuous search and this search mapped a spiritual geography of sorts. For Laura these places pinpointed her continuous attempts to find that something which I have interpreted as a search for meaning and self-realization, but which she could not really define or describe. As she told me: ‘It’s obvious from what I’m saying that I must be looking for some transformation. If I keep saying I’m not getting it anywhere then I must be seeking it someway without consciously thinking...’

Figure 34 Visitors attending the pilgrim’s mass at Santiago’s Cathedral

Source: photograph courtesy of Pekka Scheuerrmann.
The Emotional Journey: The Way and its Spiritual Landscape

As Laura’s interview shows, motivations were often complex, multi-layered and not always planned or rationally articulated into a coherent narrative. As such they seemed to be made of sub-conscious impulses more easily explained as emotional outcomes than the end result of rational processes. They were often ‘gut-feelings’, ‘callings’ so to speak: those ineffable human sentiments which are difficult to grasp. In fact people only became aware of their own motivations when I asked them about it. This made me think that the process of interviewing was framing motivations that for the participants themselves made little sense. Sometimes the realization even came during the interview, as the act of walking the pilgrimage became a response to some form of personal disruption or difficulty. It seemed that motivations were sometimes guided by a need to let go of consciousness or rationality. Travellers seemed to be following inner ‘feelings’ which for a moment allowed them to live in a world of dreams and fantasies – as opposed to practical objective realities. Often this underlying emotional impulse fed a search for spiritual enhancement, as Steve and Laura’s stories illustrate, although this was not always the case.

Julia, a thirty year-old from the North of England, gave me another example of this rather emotional quality of pilgrimage. Before we met, she had a well-paid and stable career in finance and was living the ‘London life’, until she felt a need for a ‘more spiritual, ethical living’ as she put it. Like many others, for Julia the idea of walking the Camino came as part of a wider process of transformation. As with Steve and Laura, Julia felt she was being called towards it. For instance, she told me that:

...for me it’s definitely about my connection with God so I wanted to spend more time with God listening to what he has to say. I’m at a bit of a crossroads and so I just wanted a little bit of time to reflect really. And yeah, it’s been amazing, I think that historically pilgrimage is obviously, if you’re doing it for penance and if you’re a Catholic, it was a route to get to God and your sins were forgiven. For me, as a Protestant Christian, I feel that I have access to God. I don’t feel that I need to do anything I don’t need to jump any hurdles, I just wanted to spend more time with God, praying, listening to what he is saying to me and what I should do with my life.

Julia was very open and was able to describe her motivations rather succinctly. She wanted to put her beliefs into practice. A a Protestant, she was part of a religious community where she helped with pastoral tasks and group activities. Unsurprisingly she felt distant from the
liturgical ritual of Catholic pilgrimage. Nevertheless, the Camino fulfilled other functions. For instance it offered her a form of ‘spiritual landscape’ which she used as a vehicle to establish interaction between herself and her God. In other words, through the landscape she was able to ‘...spend time with god’. In this sense the pilgrimage incorporates more and more alternatives to Catholic narratives and discourses; it has embodied a universal idea of spirituality. This aspect makes it possible for someone like Julia to take part in the pilgrimage without having to conform to the Catholic ethos of the pilgrimage.

In this light, religion and the broader umbrella term ‘spirituality’ can be approached from a personal level. It fulfilled her needs without necessarily imposing obligation. Julia was a religious person in the sense that she followed a particular faith and had a renewed commitment to a life guided by spiritual beliefs. Nevertheless she had not joined the pilgrimage purely out of religious devotion. Her motivations were entangled with feelings of rapid change and uncertainty. The geography of the pilgrimage offered her direction; spiritually and metaphorically. The often–used description of one’s life as ‘being at a cross–roads’ signifies psychological frameworks that join with the idea of walking towards a point of reference in a one–directional manner. The Camino is, in this sense, a well signed route: one that is easy to follow. The actual physical landscape of the Camino for Julia reflected her own need for a secure, well–marked ‘way’: one that showed her a clear path. The experience of walking through such a route also gave her time and space to reflect and engage with her own spirituality as a means to find direction and balance. As with Steve and Laura, landscape and the heritage found in it, became an important feature of her experience.

It is also important to note that the discursive space offered by the pilgrimage opens up an opportunity for people with beliefs based on less traditional doctrines, to learn about religion as they engage with their surroundings – expressing and experiencing some involvement with beliefs and practices, sometimes for the first time. I am not referring to religious conversion, as this certainly represents a minority of cases. I am rather pointing to a heightened sensitivity to the spiritual. It is a common experience that people will return home feeling ‘spiritually enhanced’ or even with a desire to live more ethically as a result of the pilgrimage. There are two elements influencing this: the spiritual landscape offered by place, and the ‘emotional baggage’ that travellers bring with them. These can be subtle changes in behaviour and attitudes, from reading more about religion and spirituality, to continuing to travel to other sites of religious and spiritual significance.
To illustrate this developing engagement between people’s biographies and place, I evoke the words of another traveller: D. Fergus. At the time we met, D. Fergus worked as a U.N. envoy to conflict and disaster zones as a specialist in delivering aid to troubled (often by armed conflict) areas. During the interview this man from Scotland was visibly emotional. He wanted to communicate the way he felt about his experience on the Camino, but found it difficult to articulate this. He described a moment of epiphany when he suddenly realized he responded to a particular place along the route, which surprised him.

...I listen to a lot of people speak about that they're on pilgrimage to learn about themselves, that they're on pilgrimage looking for answers. I don't believe in any of that. I just don’t believe in any of that. But I discovered a lot. Even in the last four weeks which really surprised me. I didn’t think I was religious. But I went into this tiny little church in the mountains and that took my breath away. Absolutely took my breath away. I couldn’t believe it. It was just absolutely beautiful, it was stunning and I just stood there and stared. So I don’t know it’s very strange when you think you know yourself really well and then suddenly you discover things you didn’t know about yourself.

D. Fergus’s reaction to the spiritual landscape of the pilgrimage reflects the influence of place on experience, which I began to notice more and more as I spoke to travellers. The pilgrimage route is comprised of places and spaces which are embedded in layers of history and are often shaped by religion. The person travelling through it very often encounters symbols: the scallop shell, the pilgrim staff, crosses, shrines, statues of the virgin Mary, Jesus, the apostles, mystic and esoteric markers, stone circles and stone pyramids, to mention but a few (see chapters 2 and 4 for examples). Travellers also come across other people’s histories, monuments, landscapes, cityscapes, discourses and narratives, which reflect the history and tradition of place. This seems to intersect with people’s own life narratives, their own biography. It is difficult to explain how such symbolic landscape affects people’s experience, but when talking to people like D. Fergus, it made me realize how landscape can have a deep, emotional effect on the tourist experience. As pilgrims make their way through the landscape they connect or absorb it in different ways. ‘Inner’ and ‘outer’ landscapes may merge into one as boundaries become blurred. D. Fergus finds himself pondering on the quality of the emotions brought to the surface with reference to one particular building. He placed emphasis on the landscape of the pilgrimage and especially on buildings that
represented the religious heritage of the pilgrim route – those places that gave continuity to his action. When I asked him about his fascination with these structures, he said:

...it’s compulsive, you know. You have to go in, you know, you have to try the handle and when the doors are locked you’re disappointed. And every church we pass we want to try the handle, we want go inside and we want to see it. Whether or not you’re experiencing anything, there is a need there, or a want. And you want to see inside. And we’re disappointed when they’re locked, so...that’s odd to me because I would never do this at home – never! I would never look twice at a church...’

The notion of an ‘emotional baggage’ that interacts with the spiritual landscape of the pilgrimage route is something that needs to be considered carefully and I will say more about this as I explore additional narratives. Perhaps this concept could help us to understand the engagement as well as the way some people felt about the experience and the potential for transformation, starting with the self–reflective state travellers adopt prior to as well as during the process of walking. In this light, the emotional character of the experience is brought forth and intensified. Such a state can of course be read in a variety of ways. For some it materializes a sense of spiritual longing. Spirituality, doing the right thing and living a more fulfilling life became somewhat intertwined motivations. I found that, in some of these interviews, there was a marked search for the numinous, even when not explicitly articulated in that specific form. For instance D. Fergus describes his experience during pilgrimage by pointing out that

...there’s a complete freedom here that I’ve never experienced before. Then if that’s a spiritual thing, if that’s a religious thing then I’m starting to feel it. I don’t know, I don’t know. We all go into churches, we go into the Cathedrals, we look around and it’s magnificent but this is all mutiny. So? At the end Santiago...I don’t know how I’ll feel, but in the last three and half weeks I absolutely have changed – absolutely. So it’s been good for me. So far it’s been great.

His story resonates with others I came across. Here I found an important overlap between the longing for a more spiritual life and romantic ideals formulated around the image of a character on a journey or odyssey. I think respondents felt that way partly because the journey coincided with a special moment in their lives. That is, it came to be seen as enhancing a period or ‘stage’ in their existence. To try and put these feelings into words was to empty them of their meaning, for they often contradicted one another. People devoted a
substantial amount of time to reflecting upon their own lives, their ideals and aspirations, their social, cultural, economic and spiritual condition. Yet they were not always able to fully understand or articulate the outcomes. In this case, the participant is more open and the result is a fascinating description of his encounter with the heritage of the Camino. D. Fergus did not tell me he was a religious person or that the idea of coming on a pilgrimage was an explicit movement towards something he venerates, much less that he was ‘converted’ by it. But as he notes, the way he felt when he entered those buildings was a (welcomed) added bonus to the experience.

Finding the Path: A Spiritual Vacation

As we have seen so far, people’s motivations for joining the route were often intuitive. Frequently it was only after their return home that people were able to understand what had first driven them to walk the Camino. Through this process of re–imagining the journey sometimes surprising new meanings emerged. It was also visible that there was a need to step out of one’s familiar environment and be reflective. This, I found, was endemic to the motivations of many (including young) travellers. Again, the place of the landscape in this was central to many accounts and it related to the continuity the journey offered. For instance Lynsey, a young traveller from Scotland, explains that her motivation for walking the Camino was due to the feeling that she was becoming ‘out of touch’ with what was around her, and that she needed time to reflect on the way she felt about the world.

... well, I’m not really happy in my job, I don’t really like my job and I feel as if you can get really selfish and care about yourself and don’t care for anyone else. And I’ve only been here for six days and I feel as if it made me totally question... I feel as if I haven’t been appreciating people as much as I have, so I’m thankful for that. I don’t think I’ve prayed so much as I prayed in this last six days. Yeah I think certain things have happened that made me think that there must be ‘something’, I’m not really good at putting that into words.

Lynsey’s dissatisfaction with her professional and personal life was a theme I found in abundance amongst Camino pilgrims. I got the impression that Lynsey felt rather alienated from her surroundings, expressing a discrepancy between the life she imagined and the life she lived. Her concern with the way her life was unfolding, however, was multi–layered. She showed discontent with what she perceived as the growing distance between herself and other...
people as it made her more individualistic. She combined that narrative with her attitude towards praying and communicating with people. Up to this stage I had not asked Lynsey any direct question concerning religion or belief more broadly. So this was, as it happened in most cases, a spontaneous description of her motivations.

Perhaps due to the spiritual landscape of the pilgrimage, in one way or another, people articulated discourses infused with notions of spirituality and religion as part of a continuum of emotional expression. Although there were also some exceptions, religion or the broader term spirituality were nearly always a topic of conversation and were often given as one of the reasons for taking part in the pilgrimage. This varied from the more orthodox language used by Steve through to the vague ‘need for a more spiritual living’, or the sentiment that ‘I know there is something’.

Motivations would also sometimes be organized hierarchically. As Julia further exemplifies:

...there are three elements to this that made it interesting for me. Obviously first is the religious which we discussed. Second is the Spanish because I speak a bit but I want to get better so to be immersed in a Spanish speaking country is very special to me. And, you know, you do need Spanish in this route you can’t just get by with English. And third is adventure, which I love.

Julia summarizes rather neatly her motivations for walking the Camino and, as I pointed out earlier, I don’t think she was alone in combining many different (personal) perspectives with a religious or spiritual focus in the symbolic quality of the journey. In fact, I found that motivations were intertwined with people’s biography. As such they reflected (personal) broader needs. In other words, if this was often seen primarily as a tourist experience, it was far from being detached from the real concerns people had regarding their beliefs, passions, dreams and understanding of the real world around them. They often incorporated dimensions that referred to the realms of spirituality, in all its forms, and the meanings people give them. Yet the ludic aspects of pilgrimage and the need and opportunity for escaping daily life and the sense of wonder and adventure it implies were equally important for my respondents. Julia, for instance, showed just how the ludic, the abstract, the spiritual and the material were often inseparable concepts. They were made sense of without being considered as contradictory or mutually exclusive. For someone like Julia, to be a seriously committed pilgrim on the route to a more spiritual life did not mean the exclusion of having fun and learning. This was a very clear message that these people were communicating. The
pilgrimage was not only a solemn act of devotion, but also a tourist activity which gained meaning as it immersed them in the religious landscape of the Camino.

Another example of this was given by Pete, a traveller from England, for whom the importance of the pilgrimage was precisely that it offered him much needed personal space – one could read this perhaps as ‘meaningful hedonism’. He wanted to ‘step out’ and take time away from the daily pressures of his busy work and family life. He wanted a place in the sun, to relax, to be alone, in silence, and to read a good book. However due to the traditions the pilgrimage represented, its heritage and history, walking through such a route also offered him an opportunity to engage with the spiritual elements of the journey. Although a Protestant, Pete felt that he benefitted from the experience of walking a route that embodied what he could see as essential Christian values. The experience of pilgrimage provided him with valuable encounters with others, places and landscapes that he eventually incorporated into his life back home – a life in which spirituality was central to who he was. Clear from the beginning of our conversation was Pete’s need to step out of the multi–locality and multi–tasking – the performance actions he had to engage with, the many characters he had to become, or roles he had to perform, in order to keep things going. As he told me:

I would say that one of the reasons for wanting to come is I feel as if I have a job where people want me to make decisions for them all the time. I have a family, who are wonderful, but who also want me to make decisions for them all the time and I felt as if it was time I had a short period when the only decisions I was making was what to eat and where to sleep and just to give my mind a bit of an airing....I’m [also] a Christian and I do anticipate that experiences and thoughts I had along the way will inform the sermons that I preach at churches over the next few months...I have brought my New Testament with me and it is my intention, not only to walk all the way to Santiago, but also to read all the way through the New Testament during the course of this period of time....so the Catholic ethos of the Camino doesn’t really mean very much to me, but the experience of faith does. But I’ve had a number of conversations with people, conversations about faith along the way that I value greatly as well.

For him the space created by the pilgrimage allowed a slowing down and simplifying of his needs, reducing them to the basic tasks of eating, sleeping and walking, and this offered him the opportunity to detach himself from his normal, multiple social obligations. The difference
is that due to the spiritual landscape and the communitarian aspect of the experience, he felt a
need to interact with the ethos of the pilgrimage and be part of a community of others. Indeed
meaningful encounters with others are an important part of the experience of being a Camino
pilgrim.

Another interesting element of Pete’s account is the lasting effect of the pilgrimage on him.
As a person who walked the Camino a few times, he displayed the same enthusiasm for the
pilgrimage that many develop after they completed their first walk. Many pilgrims become
‘souled’ after experiencing the Camino once and returning sometimes on a yearly basis.
During the time I spent conducting fieldwork I met a good number of pilgrims who made a
point of coming back frequently to walk at least sections of the Camino – each time with a
different motivation. A good example of this is found in Ian, a former Anglican priest, now a
blacksmith, who walked, cycled and rode to Compostela on numerous occasions. In
electronic correspondence he told me that:

If I am honest, only one of my journeys was 'spiritual', that from Denmark. I stopped
at every church I passed to pray for peace in the Middle East. The other journeys
were made for little more than the joy of travelling... I have made a number of
journeys to Santiago – one by horse from Jaca, eight by bicycle and two by foot. I
also spent almost two years as a hospitalero. You might say that I am besotted, if you
are charitable, insane if you are not! My fantasy is to have a place in France where I
might offer food and shelter to those going to Santiago...If there are many motives for
making pilgrimage, there are also many motives for being a hospitalero.

The first time I came in contact with Ian was when I watched a BBC documentary presented
by British art critic Brian Sewell who talked to Ian – when cycling to Compostela – about his
experience on the way. In the documentary71 (Green, 2004) Ian is seen giving Sewell an
emotional account of a mother who walked the pilgrimage barefoot with a child in her arms.
She arrived in Santiago only to turn around and walk back with the child. Often seasoned
travellers like Pete and Ian return to the pilgrimage as hospitaleros (hosts), and the nature of
such experience is yet another form of making the journey. For many hosts, volunteering
becomes a stationary form of pilgrimage. The focus changes – from the self to others. There
are certain requirements, however, for anyone aiming to become a hospitalero. The most

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by Brian Sewell.
important is that one must have completed a whole pilgrimage before the time they decide to become a volunteer.

With regards to the religious or spiritual landscape of the pilgrimage, I find that although Pete and various others would find it difficult to relate to the overarching Catholic structure of the pilgrimage, they do relate to the image of the pilgrim as a sacralised, and in many ways romanticized version of the spiritual seeker.

Travellers tended to prioritise communicating with others over privacy – although some struggled to find just the right balance between giving attention to others and spending time on their own. Again, motivations were not mutually exclusive and in the following I point to more examples of the ambiguous relationship people had with the framework of the pilgrimage. For instance Harry, a graduate from England in his mid–twenties, told me that his motivation for walking to Santiago could be understood in a ‘three–fold’ formula:

... [my motivation] it’s kind of...three–fold. It started off as just my chance to get out of my comfort zone and to just think what’s important in my life – who is important, what isn’t important as well, you know, because you kind of realise how cluttered your life becomes...I mean, it wasn’t a religious decision. I mean I am religious, I go to church every week... I believe in God but it wasn’t a religious decision, initially, as I’ve come out here I’ve sort of...I thought it was going to be a biblical track in the wilderness but as I’ve gone on further I realized there’s a lot more people. But it’s actually been good because it taught me to sort of find peace in hectic situations and amongst that, like, prayer and also that your relationship with God doesn’t have to be conducted in churches and that sort of thing. So when I get up in the mornings I try to separate like thoughts, things and pray and think for the first part of the day so yeah, it has developed into, I suppose, quite a religious experience as well – three fold’.

Harry described himself as being religious; a person who practised his religious beliefs on a regular basis. During the pilgrimage however he opted out of that form of practice by experiencing a more intimate relationship with the numinous. Note how this was not a rejection of his beliefs. Rather, and somewhat unexpectedly, Harry came to experience spirituality as lived experience. Like other travellers, he took with him an emotional baggage and through the act of walking and communicating with others he seemed to come to terms with it. The pilgrimage was for him a romantic idealization that relied partly on imagination. In his case, this experiment has made his spirituality more salient. The pilgrimage for him
became increasingly an extension of the self he imagined, the spiritual seeker on a journey of discovery, meeting characters and having meaningful encounters with others: in other words, an odyssey of sorts.

Nearly a year after we first met, I spoke again to Harry during a visit to Leeds (U.K.). On this occasion I asked him how he felt about his experience during and after the pilgrimage. He replied by saying:

Ah very good actually! I didn’t realise how those things had subtly infiltrated my life. You know, one of the main things I was thinking about was not to worry so much about what other people think of me but also not spending time dwelling on things and since I’ve come back I’ve been...well, I live a lot more in the moment I genuinely...I used to be very worried about the future, maybe it’s something to do with my financial state at the moment, maybe it’s something to do with the fact that I live to pay my rent each month, not quarterly, you know, so I’m just a lot less worried about what people think and I feel a bit calmer and maybe a little bit more focused and religion wise...it hasn’t changed hugely, I don’t think but I sort of found I became a bit more fond of it although the more fond you become of it the more you can see it’s flawed. Yeah, I have a problem with the main institution of the church, you know, but then again I love some parts of it so I try to focus on the good parts, like for instance in Leeds I have a great priest and he’s a really nice guy. Actually he was just on the Camino this summer and he’s one of the only people I’ve been able to talk to about it. And, which is nice, you know, and as much as he’s a priest he’s another person who’s done it and it’s just nice to talk to him about it. Yeah so those things I focused on they are still here to this day I would say.

The relationship Harry had with his religion was clearly important to him even though he finds it difficult to reconcile its ‘flaws’ with the realities of his own life experience. It seems that although religion and spirituality could not be said to be the sole or even the most important motives for travelling in this case, the important thing to keep in mind is that they nevertheless influenced the eventual outcome of the experience. Motivations never really come alone and are often complicated by aspects of belief, ethics, psychology, biography and socio–cultural expectations. As seen above, it would be an error to see religion and spirituality as unimportant variables in the motivations of tourist experiences. That said
although religion and/or spirituality seem to inform many of the narratives I discussed above, it is important to mention others who told a rather different story.

**Secular Spirituality: I’m not Religious, but...**

Some travellers were dismissive of the impact of religious elements on their journey. Some emphasized the recreational, ludic and historical, cultural, aspects of the journey. Their motivations were depleted of any other deeper meaning. This apparent indifference towards the spiritual meanings of the Camino, however, was not widespread. As I pointed out earlier, motivations were complex, ambiguous and often confusing not only to the observer but also, at times, to travellers themselves. Motivations and aspirations changed according to the time and experiences accumulated during the journey – through personal encounters as well as through contact with the landscape of the route. Often ‘secular’ motivations would conflate with the ‘spiritual’ forming discourses that pertained to neither of those (artificially constructed) realms. Atheists described their experiences as ‘spiritual’, and the religious or ‘spiritual’ referred to their motivations as non-religious. Nick offered a good example of the complexity of meanings these discourses embodied.

...I’ve been interested, in general terms, in history, in pilgrimage and particularly in architecture associated with pilgrimage and really in Romanesque architecture. It’s largely 12th century on the Camino, not entirely, but I’m just... I love pre–gothic architecture, solid, simple – and as you will discover in a minute – I’m not a religious person and that speaks volumes to me about the people who made those changes and I find that very interesting. So if you add to that the fact that I’m retired, I delimited a range of things I could do which are essentially cycling or swimming, and swimming I find boring I’ve taking up cycling, with a passion for architecture ...and I pretty much exhausted the major routes in England and some in Scotland and this ties in neatly with my interest in history. And of course, I found out more about it through the Confraternity of St. James in England and through them I’ve met people who’ve cycled the whole thing and I thought if they could do it I could certainly do it. So I’m going to do it, probably on my own, I’m quite happy with the idea of doing the journey on my own. So it’s not in any way a religious motivation I liked the idea of stepping out of everyday life and making a journey on my own, which I probably
haven’t done for thirty or forty years... So it’s a bit of an adventure and also a journey of self-discovery.

Nick did not interpret ‘self-discovery’ as a spiritual matter. When I first interviewed him in Spain he was interested in the experience as physical exercise: an endurance test. It is a long journey that is physically demanding even to the young and physically fit. His interest in architecture was a marked feature of Nick’s pilgrimage, and the solid and simple architectural forms he found on the route provided him with a sense of wonder. Once again we see the importance of heritage for the pilgrimage experience. Just as interesting, during a follow-up interview back at Nick’s home in the U.K, he told me that he had been:

...really neat and not commenting in any way in any perhaps ‘spiritual’ aspects of the journey and the impact upon me. And I think when you interviewed me before I was fairly ‘nuts and bolts’ about it if you like and a bit ‘hands-off’ any particular enlightening experience. I might have got out of it because I wasn’t really anticipating that and I think that that was my feeling at the Cathedral...there was a great feeling of the journey done. And I think ‘journey’ in the bigger sense, not just a milestone but it’s a terrific experience of covering the ground and meeting the people and experiencing different things. And I think it’s immensely cathartic seeing another form of life. You know this day to day life we feel we’re condemned to. And it’s wonderful to step outside that and to observe lots of other people doing that with you...parallel, literally parallel with you, which is a wonderful feeling, because you were all drawn towards this magnet. And by magnet I mean whatever you want it to be. I just mean the city of Santiago. That’s a very enriching experience I think and I’m finding it very hard to articulate why because it isn’t for me a ‘religious’ experience.

Nick was clearly overwhelmed by the experience of walking the Camino. The ambiguity of this kind of narrative, however, is exactly what I find interesting, and what defines the importance of this study in many ways. For Nick the experience was somewhat difficult to articulate. First there is the acknowledgement of it being ‘cathartic’ in some sense. Then there was a shift from the former focus on the material (the physical) benefits of cycling the route to a more nuanced and reflective way of describing it as a ‘...journey in the bigger sense, not just a milestone...’ As Nick makes it clear, he is not religious. In fact he told me he was an atheist, so this connection he felt with the experience that goes beyond the material is not something spiritual as in the belief in divine powers or entities. If there was something
spiritual about this, it was a form of ‘secular spirituality’, devoid of engagement with the encompassing religious tradition framing the pilgrimage. For him the connection with place is of a romantic kind; one that struck a chord with him in an important way. As an architect and music enthusiast he found the experience of arriving in Santiago intense, and it was difficult to distinguish his story from other pilgrims who told of their motivations as guided by some form of spirituality. As he explains:

...suddenly you’re in the city and you arrive by the Cathedral and down those steps and through the arch and into that enormous square. And that is...well, it is breath-taking, it’s better than the photos. You really feel you’ve arrived somewhere special. The scale, the busyness, this brilliant sunshine, it really felt journey’s end. Maybe I didn’t stop to analyse it at the time but we were pleasantly tired, it was sort of midday. We’ve done a whole morning cycling and we were there and that felt great. And then the next day, I told you, I’m not a religious person but we attended mass the next day in the Cathedral. And I suppose, as always, that was absolutely packed. But very...is it moving? Some of the singing was, yeah, there was far too much talking, in Spanish obviously, but they had a nun singing on her own with a beautiful voice and that’s...to a thousand people perhaps, in that huge space, a wonderful space. Very moving, very moving, very moving indeed. And it’s been so packed and everyone so attentive. It was rather like you were talking about the Poles attending mass in this country. That’s not a very English experience, of packed churches and the congregation. So quite interesting to experience that because even going to French churches which obviously must be Catholic, they all seemed to be old people, not many people and you have the feeling that their religion is really struggling. This, of course, had pilgrims from every country on earth with different degrees of fulfilment really, a journey’s end celebrated through mass and it made a great deal of sense to me, you know, the church and the pilgrimage and everything else it did seem to have a finality about it which worked for me.

For Nick the pilgrimage was appealing due to matters of practical as well as personal nature. It incorporated purpose and meaning in the sense that it signified a chance to be by himself and step out of the familiar world. It also provided an opportunity to keep physically active, and gave him the feeling of freedom, self-sufficiency and authenticity he longed for. Again, the idea of movement came to the fore, not only as a form of physical movement but of movement through real life–stages: that is, from one circumstance or condition to another. As
already mentioned, Nick was also interested in the architectural traditions of the pilgrimage route, especially the Romanesque style of building. He told me he was really interested in the social aspects of pilgrimage and its unique culture. The aesthetic and artistic vein of the pilgrimage route deeply touched him. He felt he was discovering, through this heritage, something about the people who built it – again, an imagined community of others that he was brought in contact with, even though they were located far away from his own time.

The centrality of heritage is undeniably important in the creation of the tourist experience. Somehow this connection to place also goes hand in hand with a sense of spirituality, and for those engaged in doctrine, of religion. Nick’s account shows just how important places are in the construction of the ethos of the pilgrimage and the sense of wonder it instigates. Despite the centrality of the idea of movement in this pilgrimage – remember that Nick went on the Camino initially because he was an active person and cycled often – contact with place and the immutable character of those solid buildings has a powerful effect on people. Nick constantly mentioned that he was not, by any means, a religious person. Yet it is also interesting to note the emotional dimension of his comments. It is as if he felt a form of deeper connection with the people he shared the experience with, a sense of purpose that brought him close to the community of others, linking him to a tradition that transcended time. In the following chapter I will focus on another important theme that is closely related to emotionality and place: healing.
Chapter 6

Mind, Body & Soul: The Social Psychology of Healing

‘...civilised men have gained notable mastery over energy, matter and inanimate nature generally, and are rapidly learning to control physical suffering and premature death. But, by contrast, we appear to be living in the stone–age so far as our handling of human relationships is concerned.’ (Gordon W. Allport, 1954)

One aspect of pilgrimage that has remained constant since time immemorial is the personal quest for healing. Bearing in mind obvious differences in context, today, as in the past, people travel long distances to places believed to possess special curative powers. In what follows I therefore discuss the importance of healing as an underlying motive for pilgrimage. I present a variety of stories in which notions of healing became somewhat entangled with quests for fulfilment, survival and redemption. Through them we see how these factors give pilgrimage sites their distinctive emotional characteristic. In particular I draw attention to the relationship between ‘emotional’ healing and ‘spiritual’ healing, and how these combine with the physical landscape or geography of the tourist experience.

As I spoke to travellers of a diverse range of nationalities and creeds – as well as those with no creed at all – it became apparent that healing was an important force guiding motivations. Healing was a term encompassing a variety of meanings: the curing of maladies, the re-balancing of the psyche, spiritual ‘re-charging’ and even ‘finding oneself’ can all be understood as forms of ‘healing’. In spite of this variety, healing can be thought as involving a holistic understanding of the self as composed of three basic elements: the body, the mind and the spirit. These, however, overlap with one another. For instance, due to the particular physicality and performative dimension involved in walking the Camino, the body was often considered as a simple vehicle for the non–material forms of curative processes people were seeking.
A Vicarious Act: Remembrance & Healing

The need for healing is a powerful force guiding the renewed enthusiasm for pilgrimage. The term ‘healing’, however, is complicated to define, and understandings vary widely. On the Way of St. James, healing is a word often used to describe the overcoming of emotional states rather than the curing of physical maladies. But healing can also be a vicarious act; that is, pilgrimage performed for the benefit of others. Rosa, a woman from Liverpool exemplifies this well. Her motivation for walking to Compostela was initially triggered by her desire to help her daughter who suffered from ‘psychosomatic pain’. Rosa felt that her faith was instrumental to her daughters’ recovery. A highly educated professional, Rosa worked for most of her life as a teacher. For her there was no contradiction between faith and reason and her pilgrimage was a religious (vicarious) act on behalf of someone else. During the interview Rosa, like many others, spoke emotively about her motivations:

I wanted to walk the Camino as a way of expressing my thanks to God because my daughter had been ill for some years and had gone through about five years of psychological stress, illness and physical pain – psychosomatic pain really. And she had come through that and her life just became, you know, so different. She became a different person and I thought, you know, it’s a way of saying thank you to God for his answer to my prayers so I came and did it last year.

Rosa made explicit her relationship with the religious tradition – in this case Catholicism – using the experience, amongst other things, as a channel for communication with a spiritual realm. She immersed herself in the ritualistic aspect of a journey framed by the religious and emotional landscape of the pilgrimage and the tradition it symbolises. Despite being in her late sixties, she carried her own heavy backpack as she walked to Santiago during the hot summer months. This woman found in her daughter’s newly–found health a great source of motivation driving her to complete the long, at times arduous walk.

There seem to be a number of implicit traditions that go with the experience of walking such a pilgrimage route. The vicarious act is, in this case, a property of the religious tradition still alive on the Camino, as Rosa’s story illustrates. It is equally important for those adhering to so–called new age spiritualties as it is for Catholics, Protestants and non–believers. Some of these narratives displayed the idea of remembrance. For participants, the process of slowing down the body and ‘re–setting the mind’, offered a space to reflect and remember others that were either suffering from an illness or who had died. Remembering friends and praying for
their health was something that was engaged with even by travellers who had no apparent religious motivations or held no beliefs of any kind – those for whom the pilgrimage was not a quest for spirituality in any shape or form. For example, when I met John and Gill, a couple from England, they told me that:

...as we walk we don’t always walk together and talk together because we both, we have our own pace and we very often are by ourselves and I would think meditating on different things. I have a friend who died of cancer a few years ago and I find that she is what I think a lot about during this but...she never had the opportunity and she was stricken with cancer and died at fifty and I was with her when she died.

In a similar fashion, Tony, an artist from Wales, told me that at points he felt he was walking with and ‘doing it’ for a friend he felt he was about to lose.

I think about him every day and like I say, this might sound crazy but he has been at my side with me. So is that some kind of religious reflection? I don’t know, I have no idea. And, you know, I’m really sad with the fact that, you know, he’s probably going to die this year and it will be a great loss to me as well as his family. So yeah, a spiritual thing I suppose. And I dragged him along with me and I said: ‘you’ve got to come with me when I get to Santiago’. And like I said, I haven’t done the entire journey yet but...yeah, but I knew that before I came, you know, I was sad about that before I came. And I write to him, and I used to write to him every other day and I used to take him into hospitals, and he’s over hundred miles away, and I used to get up at four o’clock in the morning to get there so he could keep his appointment. And now I’m really sad because it’s something he brought on his own because it’s alcoholism and his other friends and family have done things to try to help him but he’s beyond that now. He can’t walk and he walks with a frame and he’s in a terrible state. And I write to him every other day, I write him letters, I send e-mails, photographs from our trip down the Missouri. And when he was all healthy and tanned and swimming naked in the Mississippi. But it’s not brought him back, you know what I mean? I’ll sure miss him when he’s gone. But I know he’ll always be around.

Another distinctive theme to emerge from these interviews was the ‘emotional baggage’ people seemed to bring with them. Tony’s motivation for walking the Camino can only be understood if we consider the longer pilgrimage. That is, to understand this apparently
isolated act, we must consider Tony’s life as an on–going narrative that is mirrored on the pilgrimage – turning the rational act of travelling into the emotional act of living metaphorically through the experience. Tony felt he was coming to a point when he needed to make decisions about the future and the new stage he felt he was entering. He focused on the fact he was turning sixty. This triggered a need to find some form of reconciliation with others, especially members of his family, and to heal old wounds. This entailed the healing of relationships, including the distance between him and his sister, from whom he had grown apart even though they live geographically close to each other.

Tony also felt the pilgrimage was a celebration and, as such, a joyful event – not only a healing experience or emotional outpouring. When we first met on the Camino his son was about to join him so that they could walk together for a couple of days. Walking was important for Tony as he was a very active person who frequently hiked in the Welsh countryside where he lived. As an experienced (professional) artist, he was also interested in the landscape and colours of the natural setting of the pilgrimage and hoped that the journey would inspire him to paint more landscapes rather than figures – something he specialised in.

About a year after our first encounter on the Camino, I had a chance to conduct a follow–up interview with Tony in his home in Wales. He told me he was trying to sell his house, where he, his wife and their younger daughter lived. The motivation for that was that he was seriously considering buying a property on the Camino so he could start a pilgrim hostel.

This particular theme of remembrance was also apparent in the vast amount of ex–voto left by travellers at specific points of the pilgrimage. For instance La Cruz de Ferro has become a particularly important point of the journey. Marked by a tall wooden pole with an iron cross attached to the top, it has become a monument to memory and the pilgrim’s mission. Surrounded by a large pile of pebbles and other objects left there by those who visit the site on their way to Compostela, the Cruz is a testimony to all those who left their mark by placing a stone as a sign of a wish or prayer. Stones and other ex–voto may also be understood as something the person wants to leave behind (emotionally), like a thought or memory that causes them particular pain. It is a striking site located at one of the highest points of the Camino Francés. At this place, it is easy to see travellers performing small rituals: writing notes and attaching them to the pole, leaving scallop shells, stones and other objects of personal significance including photographs of relatives, friends, partners and other personal relations. People may also sing, pray, stand, take pictures of one another at the top of the pile or simply sit and stare at the cross and the surrounding landscape (see fig. 35).
On one visit, I spent some time observing people’s behaviour at this site. I saw someone leaving a leather glove on top of the pile – the type usually worn by builders. It was carefully placed next to the base of the Cruz de Ferro with a note attached to it. The note read: “Dad, this is for you, because I know that you are watching me and sharing in this Camino. Thank you, I love you” (see fig. 36). These are common forms of remembrance, part of a range of ex–voto left there.

The act of remembrance and the vicarious quality of pilgrimage – like many practices and motivations – are intrinsically related. These form an important part of the type of healing sought by Camino travellers. A further interesting aspect of the pilgrimage is related to co–
presence and the performativity of the act. *Caminantes* (walkers) sometimes feel that they are in fact walking together with those who they wish to remember or ‘for’ them – as if performing a role in the well-being of that person. There is therefore a dialogue between the real and material world and other worlds imagined by the person: that is, between the emotional world of individual experience through engagement with a material reality, and the world of memory and emotions. Yet in order to achieve healing (of whatever kind), travellers merge a variety of landscapes together in the making of a more concise narrative. Here mental, physical and spiritual ‘landscapes’ – inner and outer images of the self – become blurred.

**Figure 36** Remembering friends and family: example of object left by travellers

Source: photograph by the author.

**Closure & the Fulfilment of Vows**

As already mentioned, for travellers like Tony, the pilgrimage seemed to ‘occur’ within a broader context of change. Change, however, meant moving on and coming to a process of
healing, which pilgrims understood through the idea of ‘closure’. Besides trying to cope with the pain of losing a friend to cancer and struggling with family affairs, Tony was also trying to come to terms with never having met his father. This man was certainly going through a very important time in his life: one that required a re-assessment of his existence, one which he hoped would lead to ‘closure’, one that would allow him to ‘move on’.

...I found out I was adopted, that my father wasn’t my father. My father was a G.I., I don’t know, he was supposed to be from San Antonio. I was there and went to birth, deaths and marriages and try to find him and I had an address which never existed and there was a big naval base there as well and my mother shut him out of her life because that’s what you did in the fifties – there was a lot of women like my mother, left with children by American guys. It was funny really because I had this address and I had this name and I never got anywhere. And I came home and started a painting about eight years ago of me meeting my father. I haven’t yet finished it, I’ll finish it one day, but it was that kind of a closure for me through my painting, you know what I mean? So it’s me as me now and as a young boy at eighteen shaking hands with my father. That might sound a bit crazy but it’s kind of a closure for me, you know what I mean? I’ll never be able to find him, I tried everything and ...but it’s one way of meeting my father, my real father, through a painting. It might sound a bit crazy but for me it’s kind of a closure and I will finish the painting.

Tony is a good example of a person walking the pilgrimage as a vicarious act as well as an attempt to find some form of anchor in a broader period of change taking place in his personal life. His motivations for walking the Camino are complex and difficult to grasp unless one understands another important component of healing, which refers to the emotional aspect of pain. Pain was described to me as a compound of both physical as well as emotional sensations often impossible to distinguish from one another. Such forms of ‘imbalance’ often led people to consider the ‘spiritual side of things’ as they sought comfort and understanding. Tony, for instance, told me repeatedly that he was not a religious person, yet he also spoke of his journey as ‘a spiritual thing’. Rather than becoming more concise and coherent, the ambiguities of motivations and their complexity increased with time. During the follow-up interview back at his home in Wales, Tony was still finding it difficult to explain why he felt the impulse to walk the Camino. Yet he knew he wanted to go back and open a pilgrim hostel there. He felt the route offered him a range of experiences that were distinct from his daily life but which were also representative of his inner state – the emotional time
he was going through. Finding ‘closure’ and ‘moving on’ were represented by the metaphorical meanings of walking every day from place to place, always moving on, leaving ‘things behind’ as he made his way through the landscape. In this way the inner (emotional) landscape became synonymous with the physical path.

Other examples of the vicarious act were found in other accounts of the pilgrim journey. For Paul, an English freelance journalist, the pilgrimage became important as a physical manifestation of ‘...the fulfilment of a promise’. Although Paul felt he had many reasons for walking the Camino – including pure relaxation – at the centre of his experience was a promise he made to himself sometime before he first came to the Camino. The promise entailed walking to Santiago after the death of his only child. Due to unforeseen circumstances, Paul was unable to complete his first pilgrimage and thus the promise he made remained unfulfilled. He then spent the following year going through the emotional turmoil of not having achieved that aim. Paul then returned to the Camino, determined this time to reach Santiago’s Cathedral. Like others, he constantly referred to the fact he was not a religious person. When I first met him, Paul had already become a ‘seasoned’ traveller. He was on his third pilgrimage to Compostela then and, according to him, each one of those experiences had a different effect on him, for they were undertaken for different reasons. As always, motivations for going on pilgrimage embody the ludic, psychological and practical facets of life as well as the spiritual. Just as in daily life, these coexist as part of everything we do.

Paul’s emotional baggage was not a result of direct contact with the landscape of the pilgrimage. In a cyclical process, his emotional state guided how he approached the experience of walking through the landscape, and in turn the landscape shaped his emotions. That is, he walked his feelings into being. Instead of simply articulating the problem and trying to make sense of such emotions by finding explanations, Paul performed these feelings, creating and re–enforcing them through interaction with his surroundings: the natural landscapes and the heritage of the route. The experience therefore became the emotions, and the living of such sentiments became an experience in itself. In other words, in his search for healing, Paul’s concerns were not only being constructed or framed by the pilgrimage, but were in fact constitutive of it, as an important way of achieving healing through a landscape that became an extension of his own feelings. Each journey he took seemed to represent one stage in this process of ‘remembrance’, ‘closure’ and ‘moving on’.
But of course, I, as an external observer, might have been rationalizing a much more complex and unordered process. As he comments:

The first Camino... there was an absolute rupture in my life. And I felt that, maybe, somehow...well I was a bit of a mess at the time to be perfectly honest and yeah, a bit of an emotional wreck psychologically and I went through a pretty rough time. And then, I don’t know why, I was drawn to do this and I did it and it didn’t particularly help me because I didn’t finish the whole thing, you know. When I came the following year, to finish it, I finished it and I kind of left that behind, you know, and that was gone. So I mean, yeah, absolutely people do come for some kind of healing whether it’s emotional or psychological or whatever but this time, you know, it’s very symbolic that yesterday or the day before at El Cruz de Ferro people leave something there and it’s kind of leaving something behind and either from a past life, or a relationship or a tragedy or something...I just walked straight past. For me I’ve done that thing. I’ve been there and I’ve done that.

The act of fulfilling promises is inevitably related to the idea of remembrance. Often people felt the act of walking, cycling or riding to Santiago was also a form of remembering those who were not able to come with them and share the experience but who, nevertheless, were ‘with them, in their thoughts’, as yet another traveller explained. Photographs and other objects – often considered mundane or kitsch by observers – were regarded as important by travellers and were often found at points of importance along the route. They were attached to trees, fixed on fences, walls, bridges, backpacks, or pinned on people’s own clothes. Such objects (images, shells, messages written on ordinary paper, broaches, stones and so on) often depicted those who could not, for one reason or another, ‘make it’, and represented thoughts or burdens people wanted to ‘off–load’. Images often depicted people who travellers wanted to take with them on their pilgrimage, whose presence they wanted to feel. Others represented people who were deceased or suffering from acute illness. Of special interest is the fact that these images and objects were often placed close to important symbols representing continuity with the physical route (see fig. 37).
I also noticed that the act of remembrance can be extended to those unrelated others who have walked the Camino before them and who, for some reason or other, never made it to the end. On the route one is often confronted with miniature shrines dedicated to travellers who either passed away whilst on their way to Compostela (or indeed elsewhere), but who were nevertheless remembered or honoured with a shrine on the Camino. These miniature shrines are often marked by a statue, sculpture, cross, or a variety of other more or less elaborated monuments (see fig. 38).
For people like Paul, in essence, walking the Camino was part of a wider process of coming to terms with loss, accepting it and finding closure. The completion of the pilgrimage was inextricably linked to the ‘off–loading’ of the emotional baggage he carried for many years, a discharging which evidently culminated in the act of leaving something behind at Cruz de Ferro. Furthermore the arrival in Santiago meant not only the conquest and personal achievement of walking the pilgrim trail, but also the fulfilment of a vow, setting him free from the burden he imposed on himself as a coping mechanism. For Paul, the physical act of walking not only put into question his own physical abilities, but also his understanding of...
spirituality. The focus of his first and second attempts to complete the walk was not on himself but on another person to whom he dedicated the pilgrimage. This illustrates that the vicarious act also serves the purpose of healing those who make a sacrifice in the name of others. In asking for the protection of others, in asking for the healing, or well–being of others, travellers achieve a psychological equilibrium, which helps them to cope with the suffering of others. In Paul’s case the Camino was a way to achieve reconciliation and meaning in life. As he explained, when he finally reached Santiago, ‘...it was real meaning, real achievement, it was, again that word, it was cathartic, it was cleansing, it was a weight lifted off my shoulders, certainly’.

Uncluttering

Paul’s idea of ‘cleansing’ is illustrative and significant. Other pilgrims use alternative terms such as ‘uncluttering’, meaning forms of emotional, psychological ‘off–loading’: hence the term ‘emotional baggage’ I refer to constantly throughout this text. In the previous chapter we saw how Harry’s decision to ‘step out’ and to leave the ‘clutter’ behind resonated with this word. Like many young people I met, Harry felt somewhat overwhelmed by the choices he felt he had to make, the humdrum of everyday rhythms and the nature of spirituality he practised in church. These factors were common ground for those I spoke to. Harry’s idea of the clutter, for instance, was picked up by another person whose background, age and aims were very different from Harry’s. Nick, whom I already mentioned, also used the word ‘clutter’ much to the same effect. The word ‘clutter’ did not refer simply to the material objects that surround people, but to psychological states. That is, people felt ‘they’ were ‘cluttered’ with the multiplicity of meanings one needs to take into account on a daily basis – in other words they were experiencing ‘life as being cluttered’.

However, people also referred to this process in terms of the non–material consequences and objects of the pilgrimage. Together with romanticism, religious emotion and the ‘spiritual landscape’ of the Camino, this turns it into a healing centre like other pilgrimage sites in Europe and beyond – despite its status as a heritage (cultural) and tourist route. Thus in addition to the vicarious nature and relatedness of remembrance, the fulfilment of vows and off–loading, I also came across examples of travellers who walked or cycled to Compostela in search of a physical cure for themselves. But despite the focus on the body, this form of ‘uncluttering’ has obvious psychological dimensions: that is, it was negative emotions that
seemed to create a physical manifestation in the body in the form of illness. Hence ‘uncluttering’ also meant ridding oneself of ‘bad sentiments’ in order to achieve physical health. An illustration of this process is given by Bryan, from Belfast. When asked about his motivations for cycling to Santiago, Bryan told me about the relationship he found between the physical path and the spiritual paths he followed. For Bryan spirituality and healing shared many affinities. He said:

I’m here because I want to heal myself because the medical world is focused on one specific area of the body whereas with Yoga and the way I look at things you have to treat an illness, a disease in a holistic manner. So, like I do a lot of soul searching and I swear to God since I left St. Jean Pied–de–Port...I don’t think I cried so much in...you know, since I was a teenager. Because I’m on a bicycle and you’re alone with your thoughts while you’re on the bike it’s just that sort of outpouring. A kind of recognizing sort of stuff from the past that I hadn’t really let go of or released, or still held on to it, you know? I’ve been too attached to it, stuff from my childhood. So, in a way, it’s trying to get rid of all that garbage, all that rubbish that emotional garbage that fills up inside you, you know, because every disease/illness has its emotional component....the Camino is sort of like...trying to find out what I did in my past that I need to deal with and let go. Just coming to terms with it all and accepting it but looking forward as well because with the Camino you’re always moving forward, do you know what I mean? Because with the Camino you’re always looking forward, you’re not looking back. So because I’m not reading books about my condition, I’m reading books about Yoga, about chakra, about meditation and it’s quite strange, before I had got the diagnosis and I started the Yoga courses I started looking at meditation. So I do believe that we all have an inner wisdom or intuitive thing that tells us what we need to do. Nobody else is going to sort this out, except me. The medical profession can do so much...it takes three or four years, its hard work, it takes a lot of determination.

When I met Bryan he had been cycling for approximately ten days and he told me he felt physically and emotionally tired. During the interview he felt at points emotional, especially when talking about certain aspects of his journey. Here the word ‘journey’ often meant the life–course (biography) rather than the actual pilgrimage route; indeed little distinction was made between real life and the (metaphorical) journey. People often referred to aspects of their lives they found difficult to address and articulate through the use of metaphors offered
by the act of pilgrimage. People like Bryan also felt that the interview offered them an
to open up and discuss issues they felt hard to talk about. Bryan, for instance,
was suffering from a serious illness, which he was trying to control and hopefully overcome.
However he was not searching for a ‘miraculous cure’. Instead he was looking for the means
to ease symptoms and to understand his own body and mind. He was suffering from a brain
tumour that had begun to affect his motor–coordination, affecting his leg muscles and making
tasks as simple as walking rather difficult. His illness triggered a much broader period of
self–assessment.

Bryan’s understanding of healing was centred on the notion of spirituality. He began the
interview by stating ‘I am here because I want to heal myself...’ His illness and the need for
healing were entangled with a ‘soul searching’, as he called it. In this case, as for other
participants, healing was an idea comprised of two properties: the physical and the spiritual.
Bryan believed in the holistic nature of illness and the interconnectedness of body, mind and
emotions. Illustrating this point, he likened his condition to what he called the ‘emotional
garbage’ he believed he carried with him. The ‘garbage’ was formed by negative emotions
created by biographical events he believed contributed to the appearance of the malady.
Bryan read many books on the subject: not only those related to illness, but also self–help
texts advocating ‘spiritual cleansing’. During the course of field work I came to feel that this
kind of narrative in fact formed part of a growing and broader theme that related to healing.
For instance Patrick, a builder from England, told me that:

...my idea of coming and doing the Camino Frances was that I think I’ve been on a
spiritual journey since I was twenty and I’m now forty nine. And I think that what
pushed me this way to this particular trip was a book I read by an author called Paulo
Coelho. He wrote many books but one of them is The Pilgrimage and it’s about his
journey from St. Jean to Santiago. I believe there’s something special out there, I
don’t know whether it’s a God or what it is but there is I find that touched me. And
part of the journey is a search for that, but another part is to try and find some answer
to questions that I have about my own personal life. And I think when I took this on
there was a search...my search for meaning I guess in my life. Obviously I knew that
part of it would be a physical challenge as well and it was a mental one as well.

The interview with Patrick began with a difficult, although open, emotional charge. Patrick
was clearly struggling from the start and I wondered whether it was a good idea to conduct an

Eduardo Chemin
interview with someone in such a state. After telling him about my concerns he insisted by saying: ‘No, I want to tell you...’ So I proceeded by asking him to tell me about his experience on the road, to which he replied by saying, ‘I’m on a spiritual journey since I was 20...’ He spoke softly but with a broken voice. His speech was interrupted by long pauses as if to regain strength between one sentence and the next. Undoubtedly he was going through a painful time. Here was a person clearly in search of some form of healing that, like Bryan, was also worded as a ‘spiritual search’ but which nevertheless had clear ‘physical’ roots. For Patrick the pilgrimage was the medium through which he hoped to ‘cleanse’ or ‘unclutter’ himself: to open up to others and face up to a form of life–appraisal. By the time I met Patrick he was struggling against the heat and the punishing walking regime of the pilgrimage. The difficulty of the walk surely exacerbated his emotional state. The sun castigated his skin and unsuitable walking shoes crushed his feet. He had a heavy and, again, rather unsuitable backpack that was causing him pain. His legs and knees ached and he was covered in mosquito bites, sleep deprived and as a result in a general state of exhaustion.

However all of this somehow seemed not to bother him. It was, as he told me, his ‘...search for meaning in life’. As he spoke about pain, he kept placing his hand over the left side of his chest indicating the pain he referred to was emotional – not physical. Like Bryan, he also found himself reading self–help books: works often imbued with notions of spirituality. Through them he discovered an author who inspired him to walk to Santiago. The metaphor of the Camino as a ‘spiritual journey’ is used by a multitude of authors who emphasize the healing aspects of the Camino.

During a follow–up interview in England, approximately a year later, I asked Patrick if there was an outcome from his journey.

I think the main feeling I’ve had and felt is the need for love, the importance of love. I think when I was on the Camino I was going through a transitional period. And although I thought I’d known what love was. And to get so much love from strangers – complete strangers – was incredibly warming and just an unbelievable feeling. To come into contact with complete strangers and just feel that love. I think this is the most important thing that I felt out there; which was different from, not all the relationships but a lot of the relationships that I’ve had by meeting people in my own country. I think England turned into a country where it’s every–man–for–himself and
people are afraid to show their emotions. Whereas on the Camino I felt like I’ve unzipped my skin for everyone to see. I had nothing to hide basically, nothing to fear.

Patrick emphasized the emotional aspect of his experience and the compassion that he felt he was missing in his life. It was revealing to listen to his story. I found particularly interesting to observe how he compared his perceived solitude with the place that he came from as if it contributed to his feelings of alienation and loneliness. He contrasted the communitarian aspect of the pilgrimage and the way people lived at home. When I met him for the second time I noticed he wore a necklace with a pendant. It was a large plain black wooden cross attached to a black rubber cordon. Considering what he told me the first time we met – that he did not hold any religious beliefs – I became curious and asked about it. He replied by saying

...The reason I bought this cross with nothing on it? I met a German...poor guy... and it was the last week or so I was in Spain. We got talking one day and I told him a bit about my life, of how I’d suffered. And he just pointed to a cross with Jesus on it and said: ‘the suffering ended there. He suffered for us [Patrick]. You don’t have to suffer anymore’. And just what he said resonated with me so much that I just went out and bought that cross, but without Jesus on it. The suffering is over.

It was evident that for Patrick the act of pilgrimage was part of a process of healing that took into account his fading religiosity and his need to re–affirm or find some form of spiritual source. His suffering was the result of a long trajectory of failed relationships, dead–end jobs, alcoholism and solitude. Through the accumulated benefits of walking through the landscape of the Camino, interacting with others and the spirituality inferred by its traditions he was able to give meaning to his pain. He could give it a name and then a direction, working it out through ‘stages’, leaving a bit of it behind every day as he made his way through the land. In this light, landscape and biography became entangled into one single narrative of healing. Through his life–long–search for meaning, by reading specific literature and having an understanding of the process of pilgrimage as something that could potentially help him, Patrick made extensive use of its symbolism. Metaphorically the journey became a representation of his life more broadly: hard, emotional, lonely, one he walked alone with a heavy load on his shoulders, with unsuitable boots, castigated by the elements of chance and misfortunes thrown upon him. For Patrick the people and the affection they showed toward...
him, toward his cause, were very important to his well-being and eventual healing. As he explained:

...I think there’s a lot to do with people there who showed kindness, who showed love. One friend in particular I really came close and he did the same and that created a special bond. I think it is the freedom that you feel, you know. As you slowly walk the Camino, you know, you can feel the change and the weight dropping off you and the more you walk the freer you become. But I think you also feel it, subconsciously yourself, even in the days when you walk it on your own... I did query that I might not get the answers I needed I think because of the intensity of the walking and the pain I was in. But I had faith that a month or two, or six months after I had done the Camino that things would start to come back. And they have. So I think it’s partly the people and the walk...

Like Patrick, other travellers also made comparisons between the weight of the material objects they carried in their backpacks and the ‘emotional baggage’ they carried inside. As they made their way through the route, they often left objects behind. Sometimes these objects were treated as more than unwanted weight however. The relationship between the material and the emotional is well understood on the Camino, so much so that often those who volunteer at pilgrim hostels (refugios), rather than throwing away those old boots, t-shirts or shampoo bottles left behind by travellers – either on purpose or because they forgot them – place these items carefully on display. There is a practical purpose to such a practice of course. Others may find these items useful. But there is also an understanding that by keeping these objects on display, other people will be reminded of the ethos of pilgrimage, and the continuity and shared experiences that walking the Camino implies. Furthermore, the simple act of carrying less, of being able and willing to leave things behind, can be a cathartic experience sometimes suggesting the transition from materiality to spirituality. On the Camino, so-called mundane objects are not secondary to the aims of the journey, but are an important (constitutive) part of the experience – that includes the odd souvenir, stone, walking stick or water bottle.

**Moving Bodies, Healing Souls: The Way Within & the Way Without**

Through examples such as these, I began to understand healing as a process that incorporated geography, psychology, texts, objects and various understandings of spirituality and religion,
as well as movement to and from places. This movement, this re–location, often placed people in uncomfortable situations – for instance having to admit failures in relationships, in behaviour, constantly looking back into the past, searching for what went wrong and so forth. It was not something related only to those with a Catholic background and thus familiar with the concept of guilt. It somehow affected everyone independently of their faith: Protestants, Buddhists and non–believers alike.

This multi–faceted character of healing produced the desire to go on the pilgrimage route in the first place – as if by giving all these feelings a concrete direction that the pilgrimage path comes to symbolise; one is physically but most importantly, metaphorically, making progress, moving forwards on a psychological and spiritual path. The end point of the pilgrimage, Santiago de Compostela, became more than a geographical marker, an end to the physical journey. Some people told me they were disappointed when they arrived in Santiago by how they still felt unfulfilled. Expectations were built prior to and during the journey, with an expectation of epiphanies, moments of hyper–awareness and enlightenment. When travellers failed to feel such changes they were, understandably, disappointed. Yet, as Patrick explained, changes often did occur but over a much longer process, in which the Camino became at times only a point of reference – sometimes simply a starting point.

Going back to the physical aspects of walking, another participant gave me an example of the centrality of the physical act for these travellers and how important that was with regards to healing. When I met Tony B., an entrepreneur from England, he was walking to Santiago for the second time. He immediately struck me as a very competitive and athletic person. During our interview on the Camino, Tony B. focused on the contradictions he found between his inner world, his beliefs, and the outer world that he found difficult to understand at times. For him there was a clash between his belief in what he thought to be fair and the attitudes of those around him. He had developed an ‘anger’ that led him to conflicts with his own family and friends. After many years in a well–paid but stressful career in hospitality, Tony B. had an emotional break–down. His motivation for walking the Camino was in many ways related to a need to ‘step out’ and ‘reconnect’ to his beliefs and the ethics that guided them. It is interesting to note that Tony B. chose to undergo this process at the same time that he tried to reconcile his moral values with his somewhat bruised belief in Catholic doctrines. Whilst frying a burger in the kitchen of the pilgrim hostel we were staying in, he told me:
...I used to have terrible problems with anger, getting very angry about things I couldn’t… I would not accept a compromise I would get so angry… Things that I considered unfair I’d get very angry about and I knew I had to resolve that anger and I found the Camino was a big factor in calming me down. Really did, really made me reflect and think on my experiences and, you know, talking to people from around the world who’ve had lots of serious problems themselves, serious illnesses, children dying, things which they would tell me about… so I found the Camino, for me, it’s an absolutely wonderful place because there are so many people to talk to, so many people with different experiences and backgrounds that I just find every day a pleasure on the Camino. The physical aspect to me is… I’ve always enjoyed the challenge and the physical aspects… the physical challenges are a pleasure to me. Although my feet hurt, my legs hurt I never feel… I never ever, on my last Camino and on this one, felt like I wanted to stop. Never, ever… I enjoy the challenge and the beauty… the beauty always overcomes the pain.

Tony points to the centrality of the physical act of walking and the comforting, healing experience he found in doing so. The anger he felt was absorbed through the efforts of the moving body. Movement itself was, for him, a form of healing and, through this process, he reached a calmer disposition. By slowing down he was, metaphorically as well as practically, calming the inner turmoil he felt was taking place. The centrality of others as a source of emotional support was important in his account. By exchanging stories and personal information with people like himself, Tony found camaraderie and understanding from others who were going through similar problems and situations. This seemed to be crucial in helping him to find other meanings and perspectives, where both pain and healing were able to take shape. This I came to understand as the ‘emotional geography’ of the pilgrimage. Indeed the reason why one will find so many references to ‘geography’ when describing emotions is precisely because travellers often understood the two as one. That is, their emotional state and the landscape they walked, cycled or rode through were entangled – they were part of the same settings and interactions. So the way within somehow reflected the way without and vice-versa.

The act of walking is mostly an individual act on this pilgrimage route. However the sense of community generated along the way is an essential source of support for someone like Tony B., who used the Camino as a self-reflective exercise and coping mechanism: a way of reconciling the contradictions between his moral beliefs and what he perceived as the Emotional Geography of the pilgrimage.
unethical behaviour of others, living in the world ‘out there’. Tony also pointed to the hardships imposed on the pilgrim by the frequency of walking long distances on a daily basis. As was the case with Patrick, the walk was also difficult for Tony B. But the hardship was compensated for by the beauty of the natural setting. For many travellers I spoke to the aesthetics of place and the heritage embedded in it played an important role in the whole experience. It helped travellers to construct a vision, an image of the pilgrimage as a distant place – a remote metaphysical space, stable, rooted, natural and open, distant from day to day realities and the confusing or contradictory life at home. The traditions and places found in the pilgrimage landscape – the history, objects, buildings and stories – spoke to people like Tony B. of a metaphorical (inner) home they were seeking, and of the ‘balanced’ existence he so desired. The natural setting and the route’s heritage and history emphasize the link between present (modern and individual life) and an ancient tradition of which people like Tony B. felt a part.

There is an interesting analogy that Tony B. draws between the ‘outer’ and the ‘inner’ landscapes of the pilgrimage. He mentions that ‘...beauty always overcomes the pain’. It would be difficult to escape the fact that such a statement evokes the emotional luggage Tony B. brought with him to the Camino. It also describes a process in which nature (the fields, forests, rivers and mountains that adorn the Camino) as well as people’s ‘inner’ nature (the psychological motives that underlie motivations) sometimes all come together in an effort to overcome pain. By putting himself through the hardships of the physical path, Tony was attempting to overcome the emotional strain he sought to heal. Again there was no real difference between the physical act and the emotional response it caused. That is, there was no Cartesian dualism between body and mind here. They were one and the same as the outer became the inner and the inner the outer. The emotional landscape of being was enhanced by the spiritual landscape of the pilgrimage as the latter formed points of reference marking a journey that was not simply physical, but also biographical and metaphysical. As Tony B. sought a resolution to the conflicting nature of his morals and what he believed to be the contradictions presented to him by the world, he was able to come to terms with contradictions inherent in his own culture, religion and personal relations.

...you have lots of time to think about problems and have shown to myself all my bad faults and all my bad traits, you know, all the things that I do wrong, you know, in my nature, you know, that I need to change and...I also, through meeting some people who are Catholics, who believe, I was able to reconcile my beliefs about the Catholic
Church and maybe be less judgemental that they’re all bad or that all priests are bad. And realize that that’s not the case, that’s a minority. And a lot of the people within the church are very genuine and honest people who mean the best. It doesn’t mean that I’m a Catholic in that I accept everything that comes from the pope, that I accept everything that...dogma...I have lots of issues with dogma, you know, I have lots of...my own belief is...rather strange because everybody asked me... when I was...when I had the heart attack, I was at hospital and I was very seriously ill – I died twice. Yeah, they told my wife that I wouldn’t...no...so they reckon I’ve...first time I didn’t breathe...I wasn’t breathing for eight and a half minutes... [at this stage Tony B. feels very emotional and I ask him if he wants to stop the interview, but after a glass of water and a bit of time, he decides he wants to carry on].

It was clear that Tony B. was carrying with him a ‘heavy–load’. His own notion of spirituality was questioned and he felt the need to re–appraise his understanding of religion. In his case this resulted in a form of reconciliation with the spiritual traditions he was familiar with. Tony’s story, however, and the meanings he gave to his journey, cannot be described as piety or veneration. He is genuinely in a process of re–connecting and re–discovering his spirituality as a result of existential questioning and a need for healing – but this is not an uncritical process. This was an ambiguous and complex undertaking. In this sense, the pilgrimage appeared to Tony B. at a time when he became engaged in an existential searching triggered by traumatic events that nearly resulted in his death. Although Tony B. showed a willingness to engage or re–engage with the religious framework of the pilgrimage, he did not subscribe to the term ‘religious’. Some travellers I spoke to also expressed the same need for a more spiritual living – spirituality being described and understood in a variety of forms, sometimes with a more ‘personal’ meaning, sometimes as a mosaic of cosmologies and philosophies, sometimes simply as the ‘non–material’ component of life (emotions and feelings). This occurred without the compromising of freedoms as travellers adapted to the conditions of being on a pilgrimage while remaining part of modern life. They carried mobile phones, often had access to internet connection and walked into shopping centres in the larger cities.

Tony B. had been through a near–death experience that in many ways provoked a need for change and a re–evaluation of his life as a whole – a self–reflective re–adjustment and re–location as a result of his trauma. In this sense, the walk provided him with a form of ritual composed of yet smaller rituals that offered him the opportunity to integrate his past and
present with images of the future. It offered a space where contradictions were overcome and life became more coherent due to the return to the basic, elementary forms of existence that he experienced through walking and living without the normal material comforts he would have at home. The space created by the pilgrimage became a metaphor for Tony B.’s own near death experience – a place neither here nor there. In his case this ‘in betweeness’ incorporated a form of religious emotion. Here the idea of ‘healing’ was intrinsically related to his ideas of spirituality, providing the vocabulary for the expression of sentiments and feelings that could not be made sense of most of the time.

Sometimes, however, spirituality, or in Tony B.’s case traditional religion, was also one of the causes of psychological discomfort. Addressing ‘spiritual matters’ therefore became an essential part of the healing process. Another traveller, a man named David, also mentioned the importance of place in constituting ideas about the self. He told me that, for him, the Camino offered a ‘...spirituality of land’. I found this interesting because he seemed to merge these very different (often seen as dissonant) aspects of pilgrimage: materiality and spirituality. The fact that a pilgrimage is usually one–directional, a well–marked way with landmarks and buildings of spiritual value sensitizes travellers to the importance of their undertaking. This link between place, emotionality and spirituality that is part of the pilgrimage should therefore not be downplayed or underestimated.

The stories I have presented in this chapter provide some evidence to suggest that the pilgrimage accommodates various discourses: from holiday making, fitness and wine–tours to notions of healing, in both an emotional and physical sense. Associated with the notion of healing is a strong sense of religious and/or spiritual emotion, usually articulated as an individual search or personal quest. These narratives are often extensions of people’s personal biography and intersect with texts, personal encounters and place. The act of walking through such places, spaces and landscapes become extensions of a biographical project that re–locates the self within an imagined landscape where one walks with and for others. These are narratives are clearly influenced by cultural factors that see the increasing importance of belief in alternative medicine, alongside the limitations of modern medical science, in understanding and treating a variety of psychological as well as physical maladies.

It would be a mistake, however, to separate these from the growing popularity of forms of spiritualities and indeed religion as such – organized or otherwise. The idea of life as a journey that needs to be balanced between aspects relating to the body, mind and soul is a
common discourse. Travellers like Bryan were not simply in search of miraculous cures. They were also in search of psychological balance. The ethical currents I find in such narratives were often mixed with ideals of a more spiritual living – the desire to be more in touch with oneself and others and to experience a return to a more humane pace of life. Hence, the idea of healing also functioned as a metaphor, incorporating discourses which sometimes led to profound changes. It is to a more explicit reference to metaphors that I now turn my attention.
Chapter 7

Pilgrimage as Metaphor

‘The geographical pilgrimage is the symbolic acting out of an inner journey. The inner journey is the interpolation of the meaning and signs of the outer pilgrimage one can have one without the other. It’s best to have both’ (Thomas Merton, 1964)

Metaphors are important semantic aids that we use to make sense of reality. For example, they help us to come to terms with the inevitability of death or the scarcity of time. In this sense pilgrimage is understood as a perfect metaphor, potent enough to describe life in all its complexity. Underlining the motivations of Camino pilgrims was a multitude of existential narratives that made use of pilgrimage as a sort of decoder or interface. Some such narratives spoke of age, death, time and meaning as well as a desire for change. Others revealed the act of pilgrimage as a way of living through epiphanies, understood in a context of celebration, loss or spiritual awakening. In the following I focus on the need people showed to tell their stories, to place the often chaotic, dismembered, unrelated events that make up much of what we understand as ‘life’ into one concise narrative: with a beginning, a plot and an end. A prominent theme of the interviews was stories that tell us of the need to escape one’s environment whilst engaging with a landscape that offered refuge from modern living. People focused on the importance of the natural landscape and the heritage surrounding them, using these as channels through which to express sentiments that were sometimes buried deep beneath layers of rationality. In the following I explore the mechanisms through which travellers use such landscapes as metaphors representing individual, subjective, quests.

The Finiteness of it All: Time & Meaning

Time is a fascinating concept. It defines who we are now and where we have come from. It is one element that continuously appears throughout people’s narratives. When I asked Linda, a traveller from England, about her reasons for travelling to Compostela, she replied
...you meet people, which I’m always interested in...hmm...It appeals to me physically...as I’m always interested in keeping fit...I took part on canoeing racing down the Thames about four times...ending off in London (laughs). Yeah...but it’s something it’s been in my mind...well, life is finite so...you want to do these things, you don’t want to regret your life so I... fix on a project...I wait for the opportunity to arise and then off I go.

Linda’s enthusiasm for the great outdoors and activities that challenged her physically was evident. Yet underlying this motive was also a visible preoccupation with time. ‘Life is finite’, and the desire to experience new things before one is no longer capable of doing so is a driving force for people like Linda, who tested her limits constantly by going on ‘adventure holidays’. Ageing can be a powerful drive behind people’s motivations for joining such activities. A feeling of ‘finiteness’ can generate profound anxieties and an urge to experience and live in the moment. Hence for someone like Linda, places like the Camino are appealing in the sense that they respond to such a need. It becomes part of a personal project that not only offers an experiential opportunity but also, in many ways, offers purpose in a rapidly changing environment.

Some of those I came into contact with during their pilgrimage also seemed keen to resolve problems and situations. They invested time in thinking and re–thinking their position in relation to other people, their careers, relationships, studies and so forth. This happened especially when confronted with circumstances that reminded them of such issues. These periods of self–reflexivity were often accompanied or followed by what some saw as episodic changes or ‘ruptures’ – changes in circumstances which affected someone’s life–style or life–course shortly before undertaking the pilgrimage. For instance Chris, a young traveller from London, told me he found himself ‘at the cross–roads’ after he was faced with one such moment:

...I had split up with my ex and so I’m at a bit of a point – and this was last year – so I was hanging around in Madrid, you know, and I was thinking, you know, I’m getting old – nearly forty sort of thing – and then there’s like...although it’s not, but there’s this sort of, you know, life is like withering away and I’ve got to start doing some...you know, I don’t know if I should be staying in Madrid or moving away. I’ve been there for ten years so it’s very much like home. So moving back...., do I wanna move back to London? You know, so it’s that sort of, you know, it’s about time...
For Chris to walk the pilgrimage route involved thinking about time. The slow process of walking, offered him space to reassess priorities in order to try and make the most out of his time. Time he felt was quickly running away, disappearing into the mists of the busy urban life–styles of where he lived. The existential anxieties that surrounded the notion of time in this case were part of a heightened self–awareness. With few exceptions, the issue of mortality and hence the ‘finiteness’ of life was often present in the narratives in one form or another. Some people were determined to do things before they were thirty, forty or fifty, for instance. These were notably important markers. One good example of this is found in Tony, the artist from Wales I have already mentioned. As he explained, he decided to walk the Camino because:

...it is to just kind of reflect about what I’ve done recently, yeah. And I think it’s down to me after all I’m 65. I know it’s only a number but...it’s important to me and... I don’t know how much I got left, I hope it’s quite a while, but...

Similarly, John from England also pondered on aspects related to time and his life–span by pointing out his appreciation of the fact he was ‘still able’ to do this type of activity. He placed some emphasis on the limitations age could and would impose on him – for example restricting places he could go to and the experiences he was able, or unable, to enjoy. For John there was an urgency to experience such places before ‘it’s too late’. When I met John and his wife Gill, he was planning to do some volunteering work in Central America as a way to spend time ‘doing something meaningful’.

You know, I appreciate as much as anything my health and strength to be able to do this because at my age, I’m close to sixty years old, there’s many people that simply wouldn’t even contemplate doing something like this and you know, probably in ten years’ time, nor will I. So having the time now and the health and strength to do it...

The existential preoccupation with time was not, however, restricted to ageing. The same questions were asked by 20, 30, 40 and 50 year olds. Who am I? What should I do? Where should I go? These are questions that come back, again and again, presenting the same challenges concerning the re–location and adaptation to new circumstances and environments. In this case, pilgrimage was an attempt to ‘step out’ of a world not only filled with constraining routines but one that constantly presents the individual with re–shifting boundaries. That is, in this world the only real oppressive structure is the continuous re–framing, re–shaping and re–drawing of boundaries, goals and perspectives. From this angle,
the route of the pilgrimage became, paradoxically, a ‘real’ place – or at least more real than real life. The familiar was left behind. It was a time to find both inspiration and new aspirations and to reflect on the past as a means to move on into something different in the future. In this sense walking the Camino marked a transitional period, but one that I would suggest is far from ‘in between’. Nick, the architect I introduced earlier, illustrates this well:

By the time you get to my age your life is actually quite disciplined and organized and you set out from school very early on, retirement and death after that, it sounds a bit morbid but it’s always at the back of your mind and it would be very easy between now and dying to do nothing...and I suppose in a way this is an attempt just to step outside that world.

Initially, this passage seems to contradict my previous statement. But what Nick is describing, – the sense of impotence before the inevitable progress of time – is an anxiety that is not related to routines and rigid frameworks, but to their opposite. If today the idea of ‘choice’ is what underpins our lives, how can society be seen as constraining? One possibility is that in the current modern landscape, points of reference change rapidly and movement becomes central to this process. As I have noted elsewhere, people like Chris, John and Linda exemplify a growing trend, consisting of men and women who seek experiences that connect them to something ‘bigger than themselves’. In this case they were linked to a tradition that extended back into time, giving the person a sense of connection with history, with other people, and with a purer and more authentic time where solidarity and camaraderie could be experienced and the cacophony of modern life is shared. As with Nick, life may seem at first ordered and ‘disciplined’, yet the experience of pilgrimage is even more so. There is no experience more ordered and disciplined than walking the Camino de Santiago. If their world is disciplined, the confusing, contradictory and material nature of this world becomes less confusing, chaotic and meaningless when contrasted with the perceived permanence of an ancient ritual.

...we’ve got time to talk...to walk, to be silent, to help each other, you know...we’re on a different time scale, perhaps you are going back in time to a sort of ...you know... it’s is modern day pilgrimage and so...going back to ...I don’t know...ethics and what your values in life are...and everybody who’s chosen to do the Camino feels that I think. That you’ve got some sort of values I think....again it’s the values that are
different from our material world particularly where I come from. It’s materialistic, busy, people are angry at things you know...it’s lovely to get away from that really...

For Linda, the ethos of pilgrimage – a term she originally used to describe the attitudes and philosophies guiding her to walk – came to represent her own ideals of freedom, community, the common good, self–sufficiency, discipline, strength (mental, spiritual and physical) and the feeling that one is moving, forwards: that there is a direction or aim and something at the end to be revealed. For Linda, the ethos of pilgrimage became a metaphor for an ideal where human connections were perceived to run deeper than the daily–living she describes as being ‘materialistic’.

**The Pilgrim Ethos & the Spirit of the Way**

The uni–directional flow of the pilgrimage not only frees the person to let the mind wander; it also offers the impetus of an end–point with all sorts of personal meanings attached to it. Santiago de Compostela and Finisterre represented not only a geographical end but a metaphorical end to a more abstract [spiritual] ‘journey’. The physical journey can only go so far, and therefore metaphors associated with life as a journey and the stages people go through in it – the relationships, inspirations, anxieties, fears, passions – are represented by the encounters that take place in that landscape. Whilst the physical path has indeed reached an end, the metaphysical journey continues. One of the most important themes regarding the metaphorical journey associated with the Camino was again highlighted by Linda’s story. During a follow–up interview in Reading (U.K.), about a year after we first met on the Camino, I asked Linda if there had been any insights from her journey that she would like to share with me. She replied by saying that:

it would be true to say that the Camino ideals and ethos have made a lasting impression, one which will continue for the rest of my life as I strive to reconcile 21st century living with a non–materialistic lifestyle which seeks to retain that mutual sharing and helpfulness that became our way of life [on the Camino].

This type of narrative explicitly shows a preoccupation with the materialism of living as opposed to the spiritual, communal, essence of that ‘something bigger’ that people like Linda seemed to have found through the act of pilgrimage. The idea of the journey as a metaphor for the life course ran deep in some of the narratives I studied. Underlying these metaphors
there was a romantic imagination that placed the traveller into a cosmology – an imaginary landscape – replete with characters indicating, re–enforcing, orienting and sometimes denying one’s purpose and place within that landscape. This mirrored the many tales and stories in literary form and in the arts, real and imagined, that now form the culture of the Camino. Such discourses sometimes became entangled with a critique of materialism and a search for a more ethical living.

For Julia, the discontentment she felt with the unfulfilling nature of her work made her seek a dramatic change of circumstances that saw her developing a re–kindled enthusiasm for life as a spiritual journey. As she explained

...I was a professional working in London for...I worked in finance for eight years and then I decided that it wasn’t really satisfying me so I quit that in 2007 and I went away to Guatemala to work with kids, street kids, and part of that was to do with confirming myself as a Christian because before that I believed in god but I hadn’t been taking it quite seriously so part of this movement was...I felt unhappy doing something that was so superficial, working in finance, so I wanted to work like do something better like work with kids so I did that in Latin America and I spent a year there and it was amazing, I loved it.

The need for a more ethical existence was intertwined with Julia’s growing preoccupation with the world around her as well as her feeling of meaninglessness. Religion (or spirituality) was the medium through which she understood the need for change. For someone like Julia, the impulse to go on a pilgrimage came spontaneously and was to a certain extent linked to the events that were part of her biography. It was through a meaningful encounter with somebody enthusiastic about the Camino that she began to consider the pilgrimage as something she would like to do. There is an inevitable story line drawn into her account, which follows a path of self–discovery, reaffirming faith in her own beliefs and the pilgrimage as the space that she needed to consolidate those changes. Despite a tendency for commentators to think of the internet as the primary medium for communication with regards to the dissemination of such places, knowledge about the Camino is often transmitted through face–to–face encounters, where people meet other people with similar interests and qualities and with whom they feel a connection. In that sense the idea of going on a pilgrimage did not emerge through liturgical practice or media advertisement, but, as with most of those I interviewed, through a personal network of communication: by word of mouth.

Eduardo Chemin
Julia’s story brings us once again to the concept of the calling. As a reminder, the calling does not refer specifically to orthodox beliefs in an external god, but to a spiritual as well as psychological search for meaning. Hence, despite its religious connotations, it is not tied only to this idea. It is instead infused with personal ideals and forms of self–reflexivity that draw on the ethical dimensions of daily life.

For instance, Chris from England understood his own spirituality in terms of an ethical framework that was neither personal nor strictly a matter of religious belief. For Chris, to be religious or to follow a spiritual path meant to act according to some basic Christian principles. When asked if his religion or spirituality was ‘self–constructed’, he replied:

...no, not my personal thing, I know it’s been written stuff about it but it’s just this basic type of Christianity, not so much Catholicism, you know, which I think is to help others and forgiveness and sharing and things like that. So it’s sort of doing what you’re supposed to...well, for me the ‘action works’ sort of stuff. You’ve got to put it into practice, there’s no point in going to mass each week and doing nothing else. You’ve got to try to...not that I’m a greatly spiritual thing or anything like that, I mean I try to pray in the morning and stuff like that. I mean, I’m very ill–disciplined and not so good...hmmm, I do forget it regularly and...but I do think it helps, you know, putting to power, turning it over to God as it were...

Chris seemed more preoccupied with living ethically and in a way that expressed his feelings and desires for a better, more compassionate world, than attending ceremonies that seemed somewhat disconnected from reality. He used an idea that came closer to ‘lived spirituality’, than ‘self–spirituality’. Through this he saw as a more active role the routine practice of what he believed in: values that were closer to his understanding of Christianity but which were also fluid, dynamic and, most importantly, adapted to his modern, urban life–style. He does attend rituals, although not on a regular basis. Nevertheless it would be difficult to say Chris was not someone committed or pro–active with regards to his beliefs. The opportunity to walk to Compostela was seen as a pro–active way of reflecting on that spirituality. It provided him with the chance to ‘step out’ and reflect upon personal matters which often led to more general concern about existence.

As mentioned previously, the pilgrimage was frequently understood as an experience that offered a discursive space, one that re–asserted ideals and most importantly, at least for the
religiously inclined, brought about an intensification of the spiritual experience by grounding what seem sometimes diffuse forms of belief and practice in something solid and material. It is an extra–ordinary experience, yet for many who feel distanced from their normal, daily world it is like stepping into a tunnel – being able to see an aim more clearly by narrowing options and restricting the view. As Chris explained, his decision to cycle to Santiago involved a multitude of factors. He felt the need for re–location after leaving a long–term relationship and he was also motivated by feelings of loneliness and a general loss of purpose.

When I first met Michael, a student from England, the mixture of a personal religion, non–denominational belief, and a need to step out and engage in a form of ritual that gave him some sense of structure was also evident. I interviewed him in Birmingham some months after he completed the pilgrimage. But that wasn’t the first time we had spoken. I first met Michael during a gathering of travellers in Santiago de Compostela one evening. After learning he was British, I approached him and asked if he would be interested in talking to me about his experience on the Camino. On that occasion he promptly replied ‘no need, there’s not much to say, I’m here on a holiday...’ Months later in reply to an e–mail, he agreed to meet me again. On that occasion, his reply to my question came as a surprise. Initially Michael talked very broadly about his experience during the pilgrimage and his motivations for doing it:

... I think that the three years at the university had quite a toll on me. And I knew that after university I just wanted to go somewhere where I could think and pray and just reconnect, I guess, with myself and God and that was pretty much why I did it.

I was interested in the way he phrased this initially, considering how he reacted to my request in Santiago. So I enquired a little further into the way he understood faith and how he practised it. I also found the need to ask how and if his beliefs had anything to do with his decision to walk the Camino. To that he replied:

...well I believe that Jesus is the son of God and – basically I grew up in a non–denominational church if you want to label it like that. But I see my relationship with God has been really...well, it’s a personal God, it’s a personal relationship that is based in love. He loves me and so that’s how I live my life. I’m loved unconditionally and so I wanted to go on the Camino to spend time with God. That was pretty much the long and short of it really. Because I know he always wants to spend time with me
and I’ve been so busy and so, you know, I just wanted to have a big chunk of time where it was just me and God in a sense and it’s just yeah, having that time. So for me I talk best with God, I communicate best with God when I’m walking, when I’m in nature so that’s why. When I heard about the Camino I was like, yeah walking for four weeks, that sounds great. Yeah I met so many great people as well...

As some of the young men and women who take the road to Compostela during the summer months, Michael saw on the Camino an opportunity to get closer to his own spirituality and have some time to think and take time ‘out’ of life back home. It was also an opportunity for a long and affordable holiday. Yet travellers I have spoken to tended to associate the experience with two or three main motivations that often incorporated a need to connect or re–connect to some form of spirituality as well as to people: in other words, to spend time ‘out’ rather than time ‘off’. Rather than relaxation, the Camino meant putting the mind and body to work. Due to the daily strains of walking long distances with a heavy backpack, pilgrims, young and old, men or women, found metaphors in this movement that linked this one–directional path with life in general. The simplicity and single–minded nature of the path somehow freed travellers from distractions and the often–mentioned ‘outside noise’ of their social environments. Often notions of spirituality were vague and without a real grounding in any particular theology. Yet, and seemingly paradoxically, this vague nature was to be contrasted sharply with the rooted heritage of the pilgrimage. This fluid spirituality was also of course, for the most part, influenced by Christian ethics and cultural heritage – although eastern philosophies were also present, such as Buddhism, Esotericism and Mysticism.

In Michael’s case, his ‘non–denominational’ faith was based on his own understandings of what the word ‘God’ meant and establishing his own relationship with it. He is not a Catholic, and at times he found it difficult to relate to the nature of rituals taking place along the Camino. He went to mass, he told me, but he did not understand the rituals performed there. Nevertheless, the spiritual landscape of the pilgrimage seemed to offer him the metaphorical elements of time and place: a space to reconnect to a whole. This spiritual landscape is made up of many factors at once: walking through nature, through picturesque medieval villages built around ancient churches, monasteries and former pilgrim hospitals, the communitarian aspect of the walk and the pilgrim hostels.

Michael’s journey was born out of a moment of episodic change. After experiencing the hardships of studying for three years, he found himself going through a moment of internal
conflict where the external world contrasted with his ethical standings, beliefs and ways of seeing the world. In discussing the origin of his motivation for joining the Camino, Michael told me that

...like I said, the university I went to was very, very...well, the culture there was quite different I guess, it’s out there and so I met a couple of people who had done the Camino and a few were thinking about doing it and I just thought ‘that’s perfect!, that is just what I need to do’. I had some time to think and just pray and reflect on the last three years of my life. Just to see where I’m at and...I guess it was a kind of deep searching, just getting to know myself.

He also told me that he found living a life where everything is so ‘available’ and everything ‘out there’ rather difficult. The attitudes involved in a culture of ‘have it all’, challenged his own sense of self and purpose. According to him, this created an ‘imbalance’ between his ideals and goals and the present philosophy of ‘live whilst you can’. For him university was a good experience but it presented him with moral challenges. Michael felt there was a multiplicity of choices to be made but not enough direction. It is interesting to note that those walking the Camino often mentioned that it was something beneficial to them because of its simplicity. In sum, the experience reduces life to basic elementary forms. One gets up in the morning and walks until tired. The way is well marked with signs of all sorts, the most characteristic being the scallop shell or a yellow arrow always pointing west. Even though one is walking long distances, it is literally impossible to get lost. The painted yellow arrow to be found just about everywhere (on trees, rocks, wooden signs, fences, houses, on the streets of villages and cities, on dust bins guides people that come from all corners of Europe and indeed the world). The one–directional journey acts as a metaphor for simplicity, an ‘uncluttered’ life–style which has become a precious commodity for those who lead frantic lives.

Seeking ‘Time Out’: Escape & Refuge

Even for young travellers, the pilgrimage offered a metaphorical – but also a real – escape from a world where people feel they are constantly ‘logged-in’. A number of young professionals I encountered felt isolated as they told me they lived very individual and socially limited lives. They felt their time became increasingly restricted to work and/or study and the social [human] relations dictated by high speed information within a formal
communication network – on–line social networking for instance. The acceleration and multi–locality of the work place requires that people are ‘logged–in’ for long periods of time without the real opportunity to communicate in more ‘personal’ or ‘informal’ ways. Some of the people I interviewed en route showed a keen interest in engaging with the social side of pilgrimage as well as (sometimes) making a conscious effort to leave phones switched off and not check e–mails. The natural setting of the pilgrimage served as a background for the idea of a more healthy form of living. Through the physicality of the act and contact with people, travellers felt more ‘authentic’, as they were challenged both physically and mentally. This was the case with Charles, a professional from England working for a company in Brussels.

I’m quite liking the....again I don’t know if I’m using the right word, ‘pastoral’ life, you know, just buying food from vendors, you know, just interacting, ‘hi how’s it going’ you know, ‘Buen Camino’ and things like that it’s just, you know, ‘Buen Camino’ and things like that it’s just, you know, this is how it used to be. I mean I don’t..., the Camino de Santiago is, I don’t know how long it’s been around for but its hundreds of years isn’t it? And I think, you know, there’s something very...I don’t know if there’s a word for it...fun to do something that other people have done thousands of times and, you know, again achieve some sort of distance from the electronic world.

There is of course a noted romanticism in Charles’s narrative. For Charles, to walk in the footsteps of others was an experience that had the effect of transporting him to a place and time when he imagined ‘things were simpler’. For him the Camino offered the opportunity to enter into a form of temporal vacuum and engage in a form of existence that had a basic, almost primitive quality. The self–sufficient movement of the body through a natural landscape imbued with history and a tradition stretching back hundreds of years were key motivators for him to take up the journey. He told me he was a keen reader of history and was very familiar with Spanish culture. His orientation and motivation for walking a section of the Camino is less connected to religion and/or belief than to a quasi–‘spiritual’ feeling of freedom – to a ‘disconnection’ or ‘disengagement’ with the material elements of life as he knows it. As he further explained:

...I have to say there’s also a... again I don’t think ‘spiritual’ is the best word but there’s a sense of calm and quiet which you can achieve just on walking and walking you know, I don’t have my phone on which never happens, you know, I’m not
connected to the internet, which never happens, I’ve got my iPod with me which is for the plane here and back, it’s in my backpack, it’s not getting used, you know, I’m just switched off to electronic devices and you know I don’t wear a watch generally but I don’t even know what time it is and actually, because the other two have done this before, they know where we’re going so I don’t know, in fact, when we’re stopping or where the destination is so...

There was another recurring theme in this interview that spoke of Charles’s need to ‘step out’ of his ordinary roles and experience life without the confusion of every day bureaucracies, tensions, technology, and what many have referred to as the so-called ‘rat–race’. In this the idea of going on what he considered to be an epic journey where one can ‘be oneself’ resonates with wider cultural trends. There is increasing interest in ‘alternatives’ such as ‘magic’, the idyllic, the idea of romantic characters on a journey, a quest for the authentic, for identity and self–actualization, as well as a way to take time ‘out’. ‘I’m here to get to know myself better’ is a common sentence used by those I spoke to on the Camino. The pilgrimage in this case is not an isolated location or experience. It is one form of experience that offers people what might be called a ‘rooted escape’. For instance, Julie, a social worker from England, told me that:

...I needed ‘time out’ so I worked for two and half years I got my four months off and I went to India and that’s when I met him. Yeah, I’d been travelling, by that point, for three months and there was an older American guy and we were all talking about how, you know, Western existence, is all about ‘how do I hold on to’? How can I exist until I’m sixty working Monday to Friday, nine to five and not lose my individuality? And I think that a lot of people on the Camino are trying to do that but they’re coming at it from a slightly different angle. So when he spoke about the Camino it was like there was this really cool walk that you can do in Europe and you don’t have to go to Asia to do it, you can do it in Europe and you can have that same sense of freedom they have in India and you’ll meet loads of people and you can get to see Spain and you also have that ‘freedom of being yourself’ do you know what I mean? You’re like...people here, and it is interesting to...specially having a friend from home here who hasn’t travelled and is older. You can see that people are free of their home existence and I think in Europe...being labelled as an employee of a company, a mother or, yeah, the class thing and... in Europe I think it’s really difficult to find anywhere where you can do that. Normally you’d have to travel further afield
so maybe that’s what drew me to it because I just thought: ‘Oh gosh...you know in Europe I can do that’.

Taking ‘time out’ became an important theme in these narratives, something to be distinguished from ‘time off’. There are many meanings and the expression varies from person to person. For Julie the Camino was part of a broader attitude towards life but she also mentioned specific elements pertinent to this experience which have attracted her to it. One of them was the fact that it was ‘European’. I find that very relevant especially due to the visible homogeneity of Camino pilgrims with regards to cultural, ethnic and religious background: that is, white, middle–class and loosely Christian. The Camino cannot be thought of as separate from its European cultural milieu. In this sense it also acts as a metaphor for Europe more broadly. The Camino and inevitably the people attracted to it are exercising the act of being European and living by European values. Exercising their free will, to move, to worship or not, to work, to take a holiday. Metaphorically it also represents the union of the different cultures comprising the diversity of European people.

The Camino is also a self–contained experience which is never far from home – even if only geographically – and as such it is cost effective for Europeans who need to travel on a limited budget. Julie also mentions that for her, people walking the Camino route found the freedom to ‘be themselves’. I found this interesting because it made me think of what other people have told me about how social rules and distinctions do not seem to be important in this experience. Paradoxically, however, some people found it liberating precisely because of its regimented flow and organized rhythms. In this sense the pilgrimage is neither ‘anarchic’ nor ‘anti–structural’. At the same time travellers commented on how the social divisions of class, age, ethnicity and creed became unimportant and how people bonded with one another more freely.

Julie asks ‘how can I exist until I’m sixty working Monday to Friday, nine to five and not lose my individuality?’ Like Michael, Julie was also concerned with living within environments that, in her perception, diverted her from more important aims. Routines offered by present socio–cultural set–ups, based on choice, were somehow felt to restrict individual fulfilment because such a life took away selfhood in one form or another. Personal fulfilment therefore seemed as though it had to be found elsewhere, since in modern secular societies it seems rare to find discursive spaces that allow this type of ‘dialogue’. The idea here is that unless one takes ‘time out’ of this environment, personal fulfilment remains a

Eduardo Chemin
distant utopia. I found that the Camino was often used metaphorically as one such utopian space. This is again a romantic form of engaging with reality that sees authenticity in the cultural outskirts of mainstream society. The pilgrimage then becomes a metaphor for an escape – a time away from the technological, rational, material forces that penetrate the inner emotive world. In this sense pilgrimage is not so much a form of avoiding or escaping the structures of social living but a way to replace one kind of structure with another.

In daily living people assume roles such as that of the mother, employee, pupil, manager and so on, and these roles become more than simple occupational labels. As they refer to things one does rather than the way people feel, they remove subjectivity, replacing it with a recognizable label that allows for differentiation on the basis of merit. This is in turn measured through material achievement. During the pilgrimage people became connected to a whole through their relationship with others (which in their perception was more authentic and genuine). More meaningful human relations are what pilgrims seemed to have in mind when they talked about ‘spirituality’. Perhaps because their relationship with others moved beyond the material exchange people normally engage in, they become inherently ‘spiritual’. However, as Lynsey explained, pilgrimage can also offer the opposite form of escape. That is, rather than connecting to people, it often serves precisely as an escape from people and circumstances that are too ‘crowded’, affording no real space for self-reflective thinking.

...I think something just needed to change like, not that my life is really bad, but you wake up and you go to work and get home and you go to bed and you wake up and you go to work and you go out at the weekends, we go to the pub, that’s what you do in Scotland, and you drink a lot, I don’t know, I just needed a change, I just needed something like, you can’t have reflection time at home because I’ve got a big family and loads of friends so I feel like I don’t really have that time to sort of like really reflect or take myself away from it. So I’m taking myself away from it to see what I would do really. Maybe things will need to change when I go back. So that’s the main reason for coming. To take some time out and think about what I want.

We Never Walk Alone: Encounters & ‘Disencounters’ on the Road to Santiago

Besides these broader themes, it is important to uncover some of the other meanings inherent in pilgrim’s narratives. For instance, some travellers used the experience of pilgrimage as the means to either begin or end relationships. I came across people travelling together as either a
last attempt to ‘fix things’ or to begin something new. This was an aspect of pilgrimages that has had little or no coverage in studies concerned with this type of ritual. I found very little written on the celebratory aspect of pilgrimage or the potential for conciliations, reconciliation, romance, building up or breaking down of friendships or marital relations. Many people I spoke to thought the pilgrimage offered them the opportunity to meet potential partners, for instance, or even to rethink already established relationships. For some it also offered a form of rite de passage helping in the transition from life as an individual to life as someone’s partner, or from life together to life apart. The metaphors implied by pilgrimage, in this case, entered deep into the personal nature of relationships. If ‘life is a journey’ it is certainly a journey made with others. The case of Peter and his wife illustrate the point clearly. As he explained:

I’ve always known about the pilgrimage to Santiago, I don’t know why, but it’s one of those things that you always know about. Ummm, but why did I really come? [sighs] ok...we’re actually separating and we’ve had a big row and I said ‘right I’ll just piss off and ride to Santiago’ it’s something I can do...and then we suddenly had a chat and I said ‘ok, if you wanna come you can come then, if not, then no’. And so we’ve come and...[laughs] the battle continues [laughs]. So, there you go...

Peter and his wife saw the experience of cycling to Santiago as an opportunity to address marital issues and to approach them differently perhaps. For others there was an element of learning more about the other person. The long and often physically demanding journey creates circumstances where people must adapt and often compromise between their wishes and those of someone else. By travelling people must find a balance or ‘tuning’ between themselves and the wellbeing of the other person or persons. Some couples I spoke to, for example, found this balance a difficult one to sustain. At times they felt the need to walk separately. Others found a harmonious rhythm and walking became a celebration of union. For those who met on the way, their relationship often extended beyond the duration of the pilgrimage. There are many stories I could tell about new relationships forged on the Camino by people who came with the hope of finding other like–minded people. One of these regards Gaia, a massage therapist from America, and Salva, a Spanish teacher. They met on the Camino during the summer months and walked together for some weeks. As we continued to correspond, they informed me they were not only still together but also thinking about marriage. Others who were already in relationships before joining the pilgrimage sometimes
decided to walk together as a way to test that relationship. For instance Dorothy and Robin, a couple from England who were cycling to Compostela, discovered that the pilgrimage was:

...also a challenge for a relationship and for a couple to do it together...because we don’t live together or anything, we’ve been going out quite a long time but we don’t actually have a lot of time to spend with each other because we don’t live in the same city or anything so we have this long–distance relationship so when you see each other its always just fun because you just have a few days and, you know, you just go and hang out and you never...there’s never really any pressure point on your relationship actually...it’s never particularly ‘tested’, you know, you can always show the good side of yourself to the other person, you know, you always put on your best face... It’s going to be times when it’s like, you know, you’re doing this bike ride you get really hypoglycaemic and it makes you really ratty and then you get up at six o’clock whatever in the morning and that makes you ratty and so you kind of have to deal with the other person when they’re being a bit rubbish and yourself to be willing to, like let the other person see when you’re being rubbish so you have to connect as a team and you help the person when you get strength and they help you when they got strength. So it’s that process of finding out that natural balance and I think that if you are a good couple, than you are a good team. And you support one another anyways that you can and any little oddities that you have you get over really quickly and you say what you need to say and things and I think the Camino is really good for that.

Another couple from England also found that their decision to walk the Camino made them reflect on their circumstances. In this case Bicky, a woman originally from Hungary but who has lived in England for a long time, describes how walking the Camino made her aware of important differences between herself and her husband Bert, and the way they live their lives. She used the metaphor of walking as a way to illustrate how she felt somewhat inferior to her husband in many ways by pointing out how he could simply walk through pain and how she felt that she lacked those qualities.

... it is very interesting how that happened because my issues are exactly about how my life is not as wholesome as his because he is a wholesome person ...he is able to do anything and his abilities are beyond belief – and mine aren’t. I’m a normal human fragile being, I have limitations...it’s like with the walk, it will be the two of us, although I’m more determined and I will not give up unless I’m injured, Bert is the
one who will not get injured and he doesn’t need to think about being determined
because he can just do it...for him it was like a walk in the park and you know he was
still walking around you know as if he hasn’t been carrying a rucksack and he hasn’t
been doing anything ...he looks like he hasn’t done any distance! When he has an
injury, even then he won’t show the injury. He just carries on, his pain thresholds are
really high and you almost feel like you are weak because you show this things – if
you see what I mean? Because compared to this person you look weak.

For Bicky, walking with her husband exposed some of the issues she felt were implicit within
their relationship but which, during the walk, were made more salient. She felt weaker than
her partner as he seemed to be able to withstand pain and walk long distances without much
effort. However, for her, this is simply an example, a metaphor she uses in order to illustrate
the problem of living with a person who, in her perception, is better than her. Although their
relationship seems stable and they related well to each other, the experience of walking
together made explicit some facets of their relationship which needed to be discussed. For
this couple the pilgrimage became a metaphor for the ‘longer journey’, an intensification of
human relations that was understood as such by those who took part in it.

Matt, a young actor from England travelling with his father, offered a further example of the
meanings the journey was given by travellers. For him the Camino was like

...life but squashed down into a small period of time and intensified by about fifty
times. The people that you meet, the relationships that you form, the way that you
behave and the way you act is like you do in life because there’s less outside noise
and there’s less society inflicted routine about it. You get to see yourself and others in
a much clearer light I think. Not necessarily revelations or anything because things
happen so fast and bright and you see things slightly clearer and you feel more as a
result and I think your thoughts are slightly clearer about things as a result as well
because it’s all happening so fast and it’s all happening without bother, without the
tax man knocking at your door, without having to go to the grocery shop to buy, I
don’t know, washing up liquid and crap like that. And all the stuff that gets in the way
of actually learning about yourself during day to day life.

For Matt and his father the pilgrimage turned out to be a revealing time, where their own
relationship became intensified and images from the past resurfaced only to be reworked and
rethought. He recognized that the pilgrimage was of great importance in helping him to
reconnect to his father and to work on a relationship that at times became distant. It was an opportunity for both father and son to come to terms with each other’s different life–styles. As Matt described it:

...there were also other things which came out, for instance my dad being here... I mean I know that that didn’t happen in the same way for you [he addresses his dad] but some stuff happened during this walk which in a way I think changed the relationship which I have with my father and that was just...I don’t know maybe it was something to do with the fact that you can’t hide from anything, there’s just nowhere to hide, there is no way to hide and it makes some changes well, I’ll be honest to what I was thinking then and I probably already talked to you about it and maybe it was something to do with just resentment of not really knowing what my relationship with my dad was really like at that time because of stuff that was going on in the past and that sort of came bubbling into the surface in its own way. Because there’s no hiding from it, there’s no escaping from it because you’re doing it and that didn’t resolve itself as in that’s the resolution but it resolved itself just by the fact that time, like you were talking about [points to his dad] was passing and you were doing something and just worked out that way, which was a really positive thing, a really wonderful thing...

Similarly, for Matt’s father, the experience proved to be somewhat cathartic. When he realized that time had passed and that his son had become an autonomous individual with his own life and aspirations, and was no longer dependent on him or under his influence or protection. Of course all this could have happened anywhere else; the fact that it was a pilgrimage had little to do with it. What was crucial, however, was the space that the Camino created: the walking, the implications inherent in the act of walking, and the metaphors and ambiguities that slowing down the pace of life to a minimum speed brought to their relationship. The metaphor of a journey through the emotional geography of one’s life–course, experienced by walking through a real landscape, made father and son understand their journey as a symbolic experience with personal meanings for both of them. For Matt’s father there was a moment of realization when he suddenly felt he was (practically and metaphorically) letting his son ‘go’.

I was a little bit irritated because we’ve stayed up until three o’clock in the morning and we said we were going to make it an early start so six o’clock I got up, got myself
together and left Matt in the hotel. As I left the hotel I burst into tears and I know what it was. It was not my little boy any longer. You’ll never get up and leave your little boy by himself. He’s an adult and he can look after himself and that was very much that moment of separation I think. And I was thoroughly miserable for about twenty four hours...

It was clear to me when reading such stories that the metaphors implied by the act of walking also extended to the personal relations people had with one another. Relationships in this sense became part of the act of walking on an ancient pilgrim trail – a symbolic act that represented an intensification of human relations. To walk together, to share or not the experiences accumulated during the journey, made an impact on people’s perceptions regarding their relationship with others. Sometimes, as seen with Chris and his wife, the Camino became a way to find ways of coping with difficult decisions such as getting a divorce. In the same vein, when Matt and his father decided to walk together, they entered a space in which they felt they were able to work out their differences and to find the new meanings that their relationship had adopted over the years.

Other pilgrims, however, took the metaphors implied by the journey a step further. Julie, a lawyer from Canada, found the motivation to write a book about the personal meanings that the experience of pilgrimage acquired. For her each day of the walk represented a day in her existence. In the midst of a troublesome relationship with her teenage daughter, and as they walked to Santiago together, she began to ponder on the messages and metaphors that the experience suggested. In the preface of her recently published book, she wrote that:

On a whim, in the summer of 2009, I decided to walk the Camino de Santiago with my seventeen–year–old daughter. The only preparation that I made for the trip was to request twenty–six tasks from twenty–six friends – one for me to complete each day while I walked. I had almost no idea where the Camino was. And I definitely did not set out on a pilgrimage, although I knew that this was an ancient pilgrimage route. In my mind, I was simply going on a long walk with my daughter and for this purpose I closed my law practice for a month and left my life behind. The very real experience of pilgrimage came to me only while walking. The act of putting one foot in front of the other, day after day, with only my tasks to answer to, led me on an interior spiritual journey that I was not prepared for and was not expecting (see Kirkpatrick, 2009).
For Julie the journey only really gained metaphorical meanings once she engaged with the ‘spiritual landscape’ of the pilgrimage. Throughout her book she accurately describes the landscape around her pointing to specific details of the historical sites that surrounded her. The landscape and the people she encountered served as a form of canvas where she painted a portrait of herself, her past, her present and her relationship with others. This included her relationship with her daughter. As she had asked friends to set her tasks that she had to perform at each stage of her journey, she began to reflect upon her relationship with the people, places and memories that this process invoked. For Julie, the pilgrimage became a biographical sketch. She coupled each letter with a day of her walk, and with a particular person to correlate the thought inspired by the day, the task or the person. For example

A: Propel, make me a channel of your peace (Roncesvalles), Mary–Anne.
B: Patience, the millions who have travelled this path (Zubiri), Barbara.
C: Divest one space, one colour, one note (Pamplona), Agda.
D: Breathe, guide my feet, Love (Uterga), Ted.
E: Step, life got in the way (Lorca), Elvira.
F: Laugh, you exist today to hear (Villamayor de Monjardin), Felice.
G: Grace, listen to the wind...(Torres del Rio), Grace.
(...and the list goes on to Z).

In this chapter I have discussed how the pilgrimage was often understood by Camino travellers as a metaphor for life. The metaphors are part of wider cultural fields, contrasting the idealised pilgrim ethos and the socio-cultural milieu in which they lived. For instance some travellers referred to the realities of consumer culture and its dictums of choice, individuality, self-importance, non-commitment and secularity. For these reasons, they welcomed the idealism of the pilgrimage based on limited choice, self-sacrifice, community, commitment, humility and spirituality. In this the act of pilgrimage became a metaphor for the idealised world they wishfully walked into being.
Chapter 8
Community, Performance & Sensation Seeking

‘One thing I notice out here is that everyone is equal: language, nationalities, and cultural differences seem to disappear or at least recede in importance as we all go through the same experience day after day. Everybody is in this together yet everyone is really doing it alone and is experiencing it alone. It has its effect on us, I think. The Camino is doing something to us interiorly but we don’t know exactly what – we sense it – but can’t put our fingers on it yet.’ (Kevin A. Codd, To the Field of Stars)

To go on a pilgrimage is to immerse oneself in a world of imagination where landscape and emotions come together in the formation of narratives of continuity. Through the historical landscape of pilgrim routes, travellers find ways to connect to traditions – real or imagined – by imagining the past as something more authentic then the present. A romantic ethos ensures that modern pilgrims actively construct an image of the past that is often a commentary on the present rather than on bygone epochs. Thus tales of wanderers, spiritual seekers, and mystics faced with great dangers and difficulties in their search for truth were narratives that resonated with Caminantes. This romantic inclination for pilgrimage as an ideal and authentic experience fed into ideas about the mysticism and esoteric qualities of the route. The concept of hospitality, for instance – which acquires a unique form on the Camino – as well as the community forms that emerge out of interactions with other fellow travellers, also re-enforced this imagination. Yet the sense of communion felt by travellers was (perhaps paradoxically) inseparable from their understanding of the journey as an individual quest. These narratives focused on the body as a file conducteur for sensations. It is through the body that the mingling of elements such as the ‘material’ and the ‘spiritual’, the ‘outer’ and the ‘inner’ dimensions of reality occurred. In the following interviews it becomes impossible to separate the mundane from the non–ordinary, the holy from the unholy. Even to attempt to do so would mean to ignore the relationship between these supposedly opposing elements, elements that are bonded by the romanticism, and secular and religious forms of deism, that motivate people to embark on the journey.
Something Greater than Yourself

One of the many recurring themes I have encountered when reading interview transcripts was the deep feeling of connection some people felt when in contact with the heritage and the history of the Camino. Once again, Linda gives us a good example. She describes her experience thus:

...there is an amazing camaraderie and you feel part of something greater than yourself if you like...I mean yesterday, for example, I was carrying too much on my rucksack. I’ve started with too much and just put all this stuff in and not really thought about it and this guy came along and took my rucksack and gave me two walking poles and kind of escorted me down to the hostel (laughs)...and you know it’s that kind of...a kind of kindness...that’s just amazing and I think that you get it all the way along...you know... people were asking how I was, yesterday night and today, and it’s just lovely...just amazing...and I think that a lot of people experience that...it’s like an unique experience it’s part of...you feel part of the...I don’t know, the wider population. Because people come in from such a variety of countries and never...nowhere, could you get this nowhere else I don’t think, could you get all this coming together walking...we’ve got time to talk...to walk to be silent to help each other, you know...we’re on a different time scale, perhaps you are going back in time to a sort of...you know... it’s a modern day pilgrimage and so...going back to ...I don’t know...ethics and what your values in life are...and everybody whose chosen to do the Camino feel that I think that you’ve got some sort of values I think. I mean you feel like you’re completely safe, you feel like as if you could leave your money...if it feels like you could leave your stuff around and it wouldn’t get stolen so...its’ being part of a wider circle from all over the world. I mean there are just so many people from everywhere and of people who’ve walked (laughs) from where they live and...like, I met a girl from Geneva who’d walked all the way from Geneva to here and a guy who walked from Belgium and who started on the 8th March and I just find that absolutely incredible so and he sort of had down–turns and...but he was mentioning that he felt part of a wider gathering of people so...I think that’s what inspired my daughter to tell me to go. She felt the same thing having to talk to people from all different nationalities so...
For Linda, the sense of community she experienced when meeting other people amounted to ‘...something greater than herself’. The connection she felt with the heritage and culture of the route and those who had left their footprints long before she did was, for her, like joining a chain of memory. Such a chain linked people together around an ideal – an imagined (utopian) vision of the world but one that was also seen as authentic. Although she talked about differences regarding people’s backgrounds, she recognized the common grounds people used to communicate. In other words, there was common purpose, strong enough to overcome differences. Yet despite the importance of group cohesion and the commonality of the quest, she also pointed to the significance of being alone and finding silence. For Linda engaging with the past through the heritage around her was an essential part of the experience. The idea of a tradition that stretched back hundreds of years seemed to have a real appeal to her. Sometimes travellers came to view the journey, retrospectively, as a life-changing experience. Heritage, as represented through objects, photographs etc., played an important part in the re-imagining of the experience.

This connection with history and a community, formed around the simple idea of movement, had for some people a quasi–spiritual quality. Linda felt the same way when discussing something she described as ‘religion different from the history books’:

...Well I’m not particularly religious and I know...I went to the pilgrim mass at Roncesvalles yesterday and...but I didn’t understand a lot of it but that was quite interesting because it shows the background and the history I suppose...religion as different from the history books...heritage, as you can sort of feel that as you go along...as this way has been walked for centuries right from early days so that...yes...that’s very interesting plus the architecture is just incredible you know, it’s lovely.

The fact that Linda attended masses but did not consider herself ‘religious’ was something I found interesting, but neither surprising nor unreasonable. What called my attention to this particular passage was that she seemed to understand ‘religion as different from the history books’. Once again it recalls the idea of tradition and heritage as a connecting principle for someone who is clearly not religious – in the traditional sense of the word – but who is in some way searching for meaning or a new direction in life. This aspect of her journey takes place through her reading of the rich heritage found along the route, one with the power to transport her to a time and place in which she could [re–]live the experience of sacredness and purpose through the performance of ritual.

Eduardo Chemin

223
These romantic views of past periods meant that people like Linda saw the Camino as a doorway to an ancient, simpler, natural, communal, purer existence that they longed for. In this light the image of the pilgrim gained appeal as a spiritual seeker who endures pain and suffering, a character on a journey of self-discovery. Camino travellers engaged with an experience that offered them the ultimate sensation of detachment and adventure but which still kept them within well-marked boundaries. The idea of heritage and the traditions that it symbolised showcased stories depicting heroic characters, mystics and tales of conquest, bravery and strong beliefs – a sharp contrast to the way people understand and act upon the world they inhabit today. The metaphors I discussed in the previous chapter in this case became ‘real’ with regards to people’s perceptions of their own existence.

Characters on a Journey

When I interviewed a group of young men from England travelling during the summer months, I discovered that these discourses formed a strong impulse to go on pilgrimage. For instance when I asked Thomas about his motivations he replied by saying

... I like solitude, but I don’t think that it is that [long pause]. I think, It’s like being you know, when you’re a kid and you’re like playing in your garden and you’re used to being the typical army person, captain Roberts, that kind of ‘heroesque’ type of person or warrior type of thing, you know, you take on a persona which is a little bit more...

Ed: A wanderer?

Thomas: ...yes, it’s exactly that, I think it becomes internalized this, it’s become part of you, so that’s probably something. So your activities are all oriented around that, no matter if you deny it or not.

Ed: In your case, where do you think these ideas came from?

Thomas:...well, films, stories of El Cid, you know, Spain, is rugged, the landscape is rugged. It induces that sense of wonder, of mysticism, I mean, as well with us, having massive backpacks, you know, you feel very masculine, yeah, it’s a very alpha male type of thing so, yeah, [laughs], so you kind of feel, you take on the person because of different elements, you’re coming through some pretty rustic places and it’s a
throwback, you know, I’ve done history, we’ve all been really. Simon does history, Neil reads a lot of that sort of stuff, Simon does a lot of that so these ideas and romanticism do influence. I said... it doesn’t mean whether it’s right or wrong. As I said to you before, this romanticism isn’t the reality but in another sense it very much is because that romanticism has influenced the way that you think. You may deny it but it ultimately has influenced the emotional experience that I’ve gone through. And the purpose of it and how you feel and how you react to it, you know, and it’s like why I’m going to take a paracetamol and walk fifty kilometres tomorrow, that sort of thing.

Thomas makes very precise references to tales and stories of ‘heroesque’ characters on a journey, acknowledging the influence these tales had on him. Although for him and his friends travelling to Santiago was about spending time together, having fun and celebrating friendship – they were going to follow separate paths after three years together at university – the experience was also a way of bonding and marking a time of transition. Some were about to enter a life of full–time employment, others were continuing their studies, yet others were preparing to move abroad. Whatever path they decided to follow, it meant in one way or other moving on and following their own ‘routes’. The experience of walking together was revealing in the sense that the pilgrimage also became a metaphor for life. Yet this was also an individual, imaginative adventure that drew on characters, tales and readings of history, myths and heritage that transported them to a distant world of (imagined) landscapes and people.

Another example was given by Peter, a student from England who placed great emphasis on the ‘genuine’ pilgrimage.

…I enjoy walking…I like the sort of self–sufficiency which it implies even though I wasn’t expecting some of the refuges to be so plush ...also part of it is the history of the Camino and the various routes...sort of implies a tradition of walking which...it’s not to say that I’d consider it cheating to do it another way or...not as worthy it’s just that for me personally...walking seems to be the best option and the most traditional way...

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72 I am aware that the correct word is ‘heroic’ but the participant used ‘heroesque’ instead.
Peter also probed the authenticity of the Camino. He made clear comparisons with the past, which he understood as authentic and that in his opinion was being undermined by technology, and the engagement with modern ‘distractions’. He compared the modern pilgrim with the common consumer by drawing a salient contrast between the romanticized idea of the lonely pilgrim, the wanderer of the past, and the modern tourist who is unable to disconnect from the material world he at first appears to object to.

I look around now and I see people on mobile phones… people who have constant contact with everybody who they have contact with at home…there’s internet here, this is in the most refuges…you’re completely and utterly in touch with everything which you’re always in touch with from wherever you come from…you’ve no reason to miss out on anything and I’m not sure that that fits my personal definition of a pilgrim and I’m not sure other than the physical hardship… for people who never walked further then… to the car to get to the supermarket… I’m not sure that other than that there is actually any sort of separation from real life as its real habit and routine so I don’t think that… that fits my definition of a pilgrim.

Here we note an explicit nostalgia, a ‘romanticization’, as well as a belief in a ‘rugged’ and more authentic way of living. As Edward, another student from England, puts it: ‘I just really enjoy the travelling and meeting and the kind of…living it rough in a way…’ This can, however, be a transformative experience, as the idea that one is placed within a tradition can have a quasi-religious or spiritual value. Jenny’s description of her experience provides a further example:

I felt a different person for doing it and the whole sort of process of getting there and walking where thousands and thousands and thousands of other people had walked over the centuries…

Michelle, a traveller from Scotland, also seemed to be taken aback by a feeling of connection with the heritage of the route. Like Jenny she described an experience in which this imagined culture became a synonym for the authentic, through contact with objects and places that had a definitive history and permanence.

…I think that the moment that really struck me was when we were up in the library and I looked at those manuscripts and I thought…it was another confirmation of the
fact of one thousand years’ worth of pilgrims walking this way…it was a very touching moment.

For Simon, from England, walking through Spain was an adventure in itself; the Camino was simply part of a wider itinerary. Nevertheless, he coupled the sense of wonder and adventure with the image of a character on a journey of self–discovery.

It’s something you’ll always want to do. I’ve been aware of it through work I’ve done at the university, which has intrigued me. And for lots of reasons, a sense of adventure, of discovery – a sort of romanticized image of it. Not really to meet new people, but sort of to be with friends. It was really one of the main things really. And in one sense one thing I kind of discovered was that there may have also been a sense of, I’m not sure, expectation to it – of revelation really. That sort of time to think about yourself...

A Moving Community

An important aspect of pilgrimage that stood out in these interviews was the communitarian quality that personal relations acquired. One of the most revealing aspects of this was the altruistic attitude of travellers and the sense of common purpose that the act of walking through that particular landscape created. For example, in Nick B.’s account of his experience, the notion of altruism, and the common experience people shared, seemed to engender an overwhelming feeling of belonging.

Before I started the Camino I think that I was looking for an adventure. I was looking forward to the challenge of trying to walk such a long distance. I was also looking forward to meeting new people, practising my Spanish and seeing parts of Spain that I hadn’t previously visited. Early in the Camino I met people who had completed the walk two, three or more times. I didn’t understand this. I thought that if you had a spare month then why not go somewhere different and new? Why not walk in the Alps or at least one of the other Caminos? However, after a week or so I completely understood why people would walk the Camino Francés over and over again. In fact, very quickly after starting the walk, I think on my first full day while crossing the Pyrenees, I realised that what I was doing was something much more significant than I previously thought....[A] realisation came after spending time with other pilgrims, or
via interactions with *hospitaleros* and locals who live on the route. I have never experienced such warmth and generosity from complete strangers before. Frequently I was given food and wine or shown the way to go by local villagers. Other pilgrims too would often share their lunch. When I started to have problems with my ankles and I was walking at a snail’s pace, few pilgrims passed by without offering me some help in the form of advice or pills and creams or just walked with me for a while to get me along. I felt that the community spirit on the Camino was wonderful. Everyone had the same aim, to get to Santiago; however everyone had different reasons for doing the walk. Nobody considered that their reasons were more important than anyone else’s, and we all wanted to help each other to achieve their goal. I never felt that anyone judged anyone else either for their motives, their background, age, profession or nationality. We were all just pilgrims.

For Nick B. the interaction with people who, without previous knowledge of one another, voluntarily helped and encouraged each other made him feel part of that ‘something bigger’: a higher purpose which, until he began walking, he had no idea that he would encounter. His experience illustrates the theme of community and the importance of others in the construction of something that surpassed the initial motivation. Nick B. felt that he went from being an engineer and teacher to being simply a pilgrim. This stripping down of his persona into the symbolism of the word pilgrim is interesting. This is one of the most important characteristics of walking the Camino because it implies a levelling which occurs between people of very different backgrounds and classes; tourists related to each other without making reference to their position within the social spectrum. On their way to Santiago, people adopted the label pilgrim as a way to connect to the overall ethos of the pilgrimage, of which one of the main characteristics is the sharing of the experience. The pilgrim represents one who is at one with the community that together reaches out for something that transcends social differentiation and their individuality, even though people came alone and perceived the trip as an individual act. Exemplifying this is Amy, an English student who found that the concept of hospitality and the idea of transcending social barriers was the most distinctive feature of her pilgrimage.

...it was just like...right from the start like a fellowship and its what’s mine is yours and people always share and it’s like the Camino meals like how little they charge you and how hospitable they are without the class thing...like without knowing you, like whatever you look like, whoever you are. If you’re a pilgrim and you’re walking
to them, then you’re welcomed under their roof. That’s the main thing. And it’s like the worse the day, the better the things that happen in the evening like we went into a cafe once and the woman just kept on giving us ice-cream and drinks and food and like we went into this bar later on in Reliegos, and you know the bar with the big face on? The man just kept on giving us food and drinks all night and the thing is, we didn’t ask for anything but he kept giving us stuff because he loved us as pilgrims and you don’t get that kind of stuff anywhere else like that kind of hospitality so I think people’s hospitality is what makes the difference, if that makes any sense?

The hospitality experienced on the Camino is at the core of the ethos of the pilgrimage. Many books have been written about this by Spanish authors, but few have referred to it in the English-speaking world. The hospitality principles present on the Camino, and indeed in many historical pilgrimage sites in Europe, constitutes the essence of this type of experience. Most of what I described previously as the spiritual landscape of the pilgrimage is in fact constructed from the remains of structures built for the specific purpose of offering the hospitality that is still present and is still at the core of the pilgrimage to Compostela. Old buildings and ruins like monasteries, pilgrim hospitals, chapels, churches and hostels built initially to offer medieval travellers hospitality are adapted and used to give the modern traveller a sense of care and connection to those others that were there before them. It is true that the meanings of hospitality have gained new attributes, largely because of expectations, individualism and comfort.

For instance for Melanie, a teacher from England who cycled from France to Compostela, the experience – although not explicitly religious – gave her a sense of belonging, especially through her encounter with the hospitality on offer along the route. The experience of being looked after by others helped her to re-establish her belief in people.

...People were being incredibly friendly and I’ve been very impressed by the refuges as well and just how welcoming people have been and the fact that there’s been so many positive comments made even when people might be tired and have had a long day and you’ve been busy then everybody’s always very welcoming and friendly and I think considering the number of people who go through the doors and who you’ll never see again is pretty impressive. Whereas you could argue that some people, you don’t see them but it does make an impact I think. So, yeah, it puts faith in the human being of somebody to take you forward and it makes differences to how you feel.
Yeah, I think it’s been really, really good to hear people and see people and just being renewed by them. Even if it’s just a ‘have a good day’ or putting some ice in my drink when I go to a bar, in my drink bottle for the journey, it’s just this little things and making small comments like ‘I hope you’re doing all right’ and ‘do you want a little hand with this?’ And yeah, I think it’s really, really good.

Along similar lines, Bob, another traveller from England, described his motivations as ‘not religious’ or ‘spiritual’, although he found that the experience itself transcended the usual implications of the word ‘holiday’. Essentially, going on a pilgrimage offered him time to reflect, and he found himself overwhelmed by the way others related to him and the sense of camaraderie.

My experience so far...I’ve been totally overwhelmed by it. In the first three or four days I was like bedazzled by the experience, you know, it’s just, I couldn’t believe how special it was, it was so nice to be in a place where everybody like says hello to each other and they ask how you doing and they say ‘hi how’s your feet?’ And it’s just nice, it’s really...I feel that it’s a special place and I’m glad to be experiencing it.

Although the communitarian aspect of pilgrimage was clearly important in the construction of the ethos of pilgrimage, the creation of such meanings occurred during the experience. Often the initial motivation was to spend time away during the summer months, *peregrinatio vacanti causa*. For instance two pilgrims from England decided to come to Spain on a whim and knew very little about the Camino as an established pilgrimage route. However as practising evangelicals, they made a point of reflecting on their faith when they found the Camino was linked to various religious traditions. Each day as they walked they prayed and recited psalms. For this couple, an important element of the experience was to spend time away amidst what they called ‘a moving community’, being reflective, and enjoying their summer holiday without having to leave their beliefs at home. They had both walked the coast to coast trail in Great Britain and also trekked extensively in North America and elsewhere. They both shared a passion for the outdoors, and now that they had the time, they could explore other places: walking and enjoying the food and costumes, for instance, was a great motivation for them. The pilgrimage was an ideal combination of all the things that were important to them. The experience was about time – the right time – and place, as in the meanings encountered in that landscape and its heritage. But it was also about having a good time. In this space they could relate their faith to the traditions of pilgrimage; buildings and
their symbolic value were often commented upon. But it was also a holiday, a way of meeting like-minded people – there was no contradiction in their minds between faith and enjoyment, consumption and religion. They travelled to various locations in Europe and compared the behaviours of the people who attended these places. They believed the space provided by the pilgrimage was different because it allowed them to be tourists without having the feeling they were alienated from their surroundings and their principles. As they explained:

John: We’ve just come out of a vacation in the South of France to come here, you know, and you go to a place like Nice or Cannes and Monaco and you see huge, untold wealth, you know. Huge yachts and fancy cars and all that sort of stuff and you think: ‘are those the sort of people that you could meet on the Camino?’ Probably not [laughs], I just couldn’t imagine some of these people getting off the yacht and coming on the Camino...maybe I’m prejudging those people, but I’m thinking those people are missing out because we don’t have the yacht but I think they’re missing out because they’re not coming on the Camino [laughs]. It’s a totally different aspect or prospect on life. You know, if you don’t have the fifty million dollars invested in a huge palace in the south of France the yacht and the fancy car, you know, they must look down on us and think: ‘ha, ha, poor people’.

Gill: ... I felt nauseated actually. I was thinking ‘oh my goodness, oh, wow’, like it was pouring out of them like money, like...I’ve never seen... as much money, yeah, I’ve never seen it before.

John: ...Yeah, to come to a very simple life style like this, it’s amazing for me. And that’s partly why we want to go somewhere in South America. A poorer community where you feel valued for your input and your effort.

Gill: Well, it feels good doing something to somebody else and you’re not just me, me, and me. It gives you a good feeling. And that’s what is all about isn’t it? Feeling good without having to spend money to feel good.

For John and Gill, the pilgrimage (and those who take part in it) symbolised the opposite of the material aspect of those other modern spaces where people lived lives they were opposed to. Bearing in mind John himself is a retired aviation engineer and Gill a secondary teacher, they lived comfortable life styles. Nevertheless they believed their choice of holiday and their
attitude was represented by the Camino, a form of leisure, surely, but one where belief mattered.

**Finding Limits**

One more important theme I came across was concerned with the seeking of sensations. Here, ideas about health and fitness fed into motivations that, in one form or another, were present on the Camino. Dorothy, a young medical student from England, exemplifies this well.

...[I] wanted to do something that I sort of had a sense of achievement from doing it. So because holidays are lovely to go, you know, you sit on a beach or visiting a city or whatever but I think I was sort of, because I thought it was my last summer and I wanted to have to show for it, I know you get a certificate at the end in Santiago, but it wasn’t something I wanted to do only to show other people, you have that sense of that long summer that drifts by and you have to go back to school and you think ‘what have I done with that?’ Because it was my last one I really felt like I really, really felt that sort of sense of that sort of weight on myself I need to achieve something.... I wanted like a physical challenge like I do a lot of sport and my boyfriend does a lot of sport and I think we both like the idea of doing a sort of physical challenge together and I think cycling, the emphasis is more on the physical side of things rather than the other things you get out of walking the Camino, so...

Dorothy placed emphasis on the physicality of the journey. She had a casual approach to the pilgrimage which spoke of competitiveness, productivity, body image and so on. For Dorothy the experience offered her the chance to spend time in Spain over the summer months and at the end to feel that she had accomplished something or overcome a challenge that, for some respondents, became an end in itself: reaching Santiago.

Some travellers, especially women, told me that getting to the end helped them to gain self–confidence. Although generally considered safe by most people, the pilgrimage is a physically demanding experience. Its repetitive rhythms, unpredictable weather, simple diet, and the weight of the backpacks (or overloaded bicycles) make it a test of endurance. For female travellers, the reward at the end seemed even greater than for men as they felt they conquered what many have told them it was ‘a crazy thing to do’ or ‘difficult and dangerous for a woman’. Some had never had the chance to travel alone before – especially in a self–
sufficient manner. This element of being able to walk through nature whilst feeling relatively safe added to the appeal of the Camino as a summer activity. A good illustration of that was given by Bicky, a tourist from England.

I wanted to prove I could do things on my own, but a lot of it is to do with the fact that we have friends and I feel greatly loved because he is like a loveable person. He’s like a little gem and that’s true, you know, and I don’t feel they love me and it’s often the case you know that I feel like a little rib of Bert and I wanted to get away from it I actually wanted to go on my own, to be a complete human being again, and be loved for myself and that was a very important...maybe it was a challenge...

During a follow–up interview conducted at their home in England, Bicky felt very emotional when she began to describe her need to re–affirm herself as an independent person. For her, to finish the pilgrimage whilst carrying her own heavy backpack, being able to communicate with others and be liked for who she was became a very important element of her journey. What began as a simple walk in Spain over the summer months (time ‘off’) quickly gained personal meanings that transformed the experience for Bicky and her husband into a journey that somehow influenced the way that they lived daily life back home.

It was not uncommon to see motivations and ideas changing as people walked through the landscape and immersed themselves in the ethos of the pilgrimage. For instance Robin, a young medical student from England in his mid–twenties, described how he became aware of what he called the ‘gradation’ of the landscape and people and how that influenced the outcome of his journey.

...I think my interests have changed over time... I think one of the main ones, is I wanted a different type of travel. I’ve been used to flying everywhere, cheap flights you know, to get somewhere really quickly and sort of you get ‘podded’ from somewhere to somewhere else and I remember I felt disorientated after you arrive and there’s something about it that feels wrong and it’s not to say ‘oh yeah the eco thing’ or anything, I just wanted to cross the country by land. The other thing I think was just the fitness physical, like the friends I heard this from are very fit, he is in his forties actually, him and his wife as well, and they’re just runners as well in the Peak District where my university is because I spend a lot of time with them, I study with them a lot I just find it very appealing how they enjoy their holidays but they also do physical challenges and I’ve never done something quite like this so there’s that
physical thing, and I wanted to see if I could do it and I think I often have a tendency not to finish things through so the Camino is something that when you start you should really finish it. I think it’s a good challenge to start and finish something...I wasn’t in my mind thinking about the history of the Camino or wanted it to be something religious for myself or particularly spiritual. I knew that either during or many, many months afterwards I’d look back and see it as something that has affected me not that I necessarily wanted to concentrate on that aspect when I did it but I think having...whilst doing it I think it will be more after I’ve done it and I’ll be able to reflect on how it affected me whatever you call it, spiritually or spiritual, spiritually or religiously, not religiously, but that’s something that, it wasn’t the aim of it but I think it will be something I’ll gain from it.

Robin’s story shows just how motivations and ideas change and evolve constantly, gaining character and complexity as people make their way through the landscape.

Nevertheless there were some who felt they had little connection with the pilgrimage as a spiritual ritual in any shape or form as they found out about it purely by accident when looking through some tourist brochure. Hence a good number of travellers I have spoken to showed no cultural, spiritual or other deeper connection with the walk except for the physical benefit of walking. For instance Gary, a young graduate from England walked the Camino “...for the hell of it”. He told me he came across the pilgrimage

...purely by accident, I read a thing in a newspaper, it think it was The Guardian [newspaper] just really briefly about the wine festival I think the ‘Fiesta del vino’ in Aro? So I thought that was awesome and so I researched that a little bit and because Aro is close to Logroño something just caught my eye you know, the Camino, so I just read about it...I thought I’ve got about five weeks and then I’d do a week at the start, wine festival in San Sebastian, start the walk and then do a week at the end in Galicia so that’s my...that’s the plan...it’s just for the hell of it. It seemed like a good way of meeting a load of new people and experience something new and...I mean, I’m not the least bit religious but I suppose that spirituality is different from religion and if I get something spiritual out of it, all to the good, but I’m not doing it in search of anything like that...just for fun. I’m carrying twenty four kilos for three hundred miles, for fun!
In a similar vein, another traveller named Shizuoka, a teacher from London, described her motivation as the desire to ‘...do something different from a city break’ and a ‘...challenge’.

The motivation for coming is just, really, for the challenge of walking basically and doing something different and going on a holiday but not being a city break, not being by the beach, but doing something that is enjoyable but a challenge and that you feel like you’re achieving something at the same time.

Equally, Kenny D., an I.T. worker from London, also joined the Camino as a form of leisure activity. For him to complete the pilgrimage was a ‘personal challenge’. His appreciation of outdoor activities led him to choose the Camino as a way of taking time ‘out’ and to think about decisions he needed to make. It offered space for reflection, time in nature and a prolonged, affordable, break from routine.

...I wanted to do something, you know, I just wanted to do something interesting to kind of fill the summer. I wanted to do something outdoorsy because I like the outdoors, I’m quite sporty and that kind of stuff...it was a challenge, you know, I’m quite competitive so it was kind of...and I quite liked the idea of me having an excuse to spend a month on my own trying to figure out what I was going to do next not in a kind of spiritual way but thinking about jobs, my career and having a break from London for a month basically...I was looking to do something different, to do something interesting and this wasn’t my reason for doing it but it was actually really cheap, you can do it and live for a month for practically nothing, hmmm, somewhere where I’m not gonna get bored sitting around doing nothing because I don’t really like that, you know. So it’s an interesting way of spending a month rather than just sitting here, you know or playing golf or whatever I decide to do with my time so you know, so I kept applying for jobs the whole time and actually I kept applying for a job in London the whole time and my girlfriend said I should get out and I came back and got a job, I actually ended up applying for a job via e–mail, four minutes in a cafe somewhere in...somewhere along the Camino. And so I came back and I got a job straight away and came back to work, you know, and I’ve been in London ever since so it certainly wasn’t like a big thing, I didn’t go to have a big revelation moment and decided to be a monk, do you know what I mean? So I came back and ended up doing quite a similar thing as I did before so it wasn’t a transformative type of experience at all.
It is obvious that, for some people, the pilgrimage was not a ‘pilgrimage’ at all. For people like Kenny D. this was an inexpensive way to spend some time in Spain. The Camino has been advertised by tourist agencies in Galicia as a cultural itinerary, and popularly it is known as a cheap holiday – particularly appealing to students travelling on a budget. Hence many travellers that come across the Camino enjoy it purely as a way to relax and take time out of the stresses of daily urban living or taking time off whilst momentarily between careers or even when taking a longer sabbatical break. Kenny D. had no religious beliefs; in fact, like Nick he told me he was an atheist – agnostic at best. So the experience was of a recreational kind. Like many Europeans, irrespective of age or gender, Kenny D. enjoyed the route for its aesthetic and cultural value, and for the fact that it is conveniently located in Europe. This ease of access, coupled with the emphasis on the physicality of walking through nature, has real appeal to those living in urban areas. Yet, as we know from other (larger) studies (see chapter 4), the Camino is seldom seen by travellers as simply a holiday. On this front, people like Kenny D. are in fact exceptions and not the rule. This is particularly true for Holy Years, when more than half of those who go to Compostela are in fact Spanish Catholics for whom the pilgrimage is a religious opportunity to acquire indulgences.

The Camino is a rather ‘elastic’ experience for it accommodates a variety of discourses, ranging from the life–changing religious experiences illustrated by Steve and Julia (see chapter 5), to the uncompromising summer holiday experienced by Gary and Kenny D. Even though religion and spirituality are important themes as sources of motivation for travel, it is important to acknowledge the presence of those for whom the pilgrimage meant nothing more than play. Like visiting a museum or walking through a national park, the Camino offers ample opportunities for distraction. Yet even in such cases, this form of wandering is far from aimless. The well–structured path leads the person to an end point that is stable and immutable. The path itself is carved into a landscape adorned by heritage and history – one that is felt at all levels by everyone involved whether they are more or less serious about its religious or spiritual content. In the following chapters I look again at some of the stories presented so far, revealing the influence of cultural contexts on motivations and examining the wider socio–cultural forces that have encouraged the popularity of the Camino de Santiago.
Part III

Pilgrimage in a Secular Age: Religious & Consumer Landscapes of Late Modernity
Chapter 9

The Return of the Pilgrim & the Social Construction of Meaning

‘Round Lough Derg’s holy island
I went upon the stones,
I prayed at all the Stations
upon my marrow–bones,
And there I found an old man,
and though I prayed all day
And that old man beside me,
nothing would he say
But fol de rol de rolly O...

(W.B. Yeats, The Pilgrim)

Whereas until now I have focused on the stories told by Camino travellers, I now turn to a series of socio–cultural forces that facilitate the sacralisation of touristic sites and the experiences and ‘touristification’ of religious heritage and rituals more explicitly. In particular, I focus my attention on ‘producers of meaning’. These are important because, in an age of low religious literacy, it is through their work that modern people often come into contact with the idea of going on a pilgrimage. Their work gives new meanings to these places, meanings that transform closed religious arenas into open reservoirs of socio–cultural and spiritual capital. As illustrated by W.B. Yeats’s poem, these actors understand the importance of pilgrimage and the usefulness of the image of the pilgrim as a potent metaphor in the production of meaning.

In the following I firstly describe a diversity of agents and their role in the construction of the ethos guiding the modern enthusiasm for pilgrimage. I begin by pointing to the role of personal networks of information and the personal encounters that engender or at least instigate the ‘calling’ towards Santiago de Compostela. Secondly, I describe some of the confraternities and associations responsible for generating interest in and disseminating information about the pilgrimage. Thirdly, I focus on the intersection between opportunities, biography and texts (i.e. the role of education and socio–economic opportunities) and the particular appeal the Camino has for middle–class Europeans. I refer to the importance of
‘local’ and ‘global’ producers of meaning, exemplified by Camino ‘hosts’ on the one hand, and writers, actors, film directors and other cultural entrepreneurs on the other. These are agents who bring the experience of pilgrimage into the broader realms of popular culture. Finally, I briefly discuss the role of advertising and media in bringing people’s attention to this form of travel.

**Producers of Meaning: from Local to Global**

*Informal Networks*

A frequent misconception regarding the renewed popularity of pilgrimage today is that the internet has become a principal instrument in this process. Qualitative and quantitative research shows, however, that people come into contact with these places rather randomly – largely through more personal, first-hand experience. Pilgrimage is the culmination of a series of encounters, memories and coincidences, not always guided by purposeful and practical rational decision making. Hence people often encounter places like Compostela through producers of meaning of various kinds and personal networks of information (see Chemin, forthcoming): through literature, friends, relatives, partners and other close relations. The internet was mentioned of course, but largely as a resource for the gathering of practical advice ‘after’ the person was already attracted or ‘called’ towards the pilgrimage. Those I interviewed mentioned the ‘gut feeling’ they felt when they first heard about the Camino (see part II). This is not only supported by anecdotal evidence or from my own small ethnographic sample. It was a theme observed in a major survey conducted by the Galician Tourism Studies Institute (see chapter 4 for more details, and chart 12). The majority of those who took part in that survey found out about the pilgrimage through personal encounters with others individuals.
Producers of meaning are agents who come to influence the flow of travellers towards places like the Camino. They are individuals who have walked the pilgrimage at least once and who have come into contact with it through various other (also informal) networks of information. Producers of meaning can be influential on a personal or individual level (a friend, or relative who walked the Camino), on a local level (a host or volunteer organization and others who are enthusiastic about the pilgrimage), or on higher level (those with a broader, global reach). The latter includes writers, television presenters, film directors, actors and others who talk enthusiastically about the benefits of going on pilgrimage or use it as a stage for stories, films or songs for instance.

People I spoke to also mentioned learning more about the Camino through confraternities and ‘Friends of the Camino’. Although in most cases confraternities are not (explicitly) ‘religious’ associations, they hold values that emphasize the pilgrimage as a ‘special act’. As a result, they frame the experience with an ethos that carries religious overtones. As their core philosophy, such communities and organizations emphasize concepts such as charity and the importance of a community of others who share the same experience. The Confraternity of St. James in London (CSJ) for instance, successfully runs two pilgrim hostels (restored with the help of donations) at different locations on two pilgrim routes to Compostela. In both cases hostels are run through donativos (donations) so those who can give will leave a minimum (symbolic) sum for maintenance costs.

Source: adapted from the work of Prof. Ruben C. Loís Gonzales (University of Santiago de Compostela) and Dr. Jose Somoza Medina (University of León) on behalf of Galician Tourism Studies Institute – with permission.
Confraternities and associations such as the CSJ are already numerous, but their number is increasing. From South Africa, New Zealand and Brazil to Norway, Sweden and South Korea, they represent a dynamic network of volunteers and charities that stand for the ethos that seems to underpin this movement. Besides forming a network of support for travellers from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures, they provide services that can only be described as middle–range, or part of a third–sector. That is to say, confraternities are to be found somewhere between individuals and institutions such as tourist agencies or businesses and religious institutions that specialize in organizing pilgrimages. Besides offering practical advice, confraternities and associations also communicate the (deeper) messages implied by the act of pilgrimage. They publish their own educational material with titles such as Roads to Santiago: a Spiritual Companion (CSJ, 2008), as well as holding ‘pilgrim days’ where practical information is disseminated and one–on–one conversations with other (more experienced) travellers can take place.

Confraternities and associations represent a slow but gradual movement towards forms of socialisation that also, like pilgrimage itself, offer an experience of empowerment and community, bridging the gap between individuals and institutional frameworks. For instance the CSJ not only offers practical information to travellers; it is also a space where people can meet like–minded others and exchange ideas. Confraternities and associations are also interested in promoting pilgrimage and the experience it entails (see figure 39) as such, they maintain close links with other sectors, for instance the arts and academic circles. Artists, film directors, writers and academics who work with or who have briefly tapped into the theme of pilgrimage collaborate closely with these charities. For instance films, books and other audio–visual material related to the pilgrimage may be promoted in these settings before they are released or presented to wider audiences. Academics often give presentations to their members and writers may benefit from their libraries and connections as well as the knowledge and experience of their volunteers.
The growth in numbers of pilgrims in a variety of sites including Santiago (see chapter 1 and 2) seems to be due therefore to both an institutional and popular movement, which points to places like the Camino as discursive spaces that can be used as resources, in a variety of ways. Between these extremes are the charities and confraternities that are able to bridge a growing gap between subjective needs and objective structures. This movement is even more visible during Holy Years, when Catholic organizations attempt to mobilize as many people as possible to mark St. James’ Day. Selected tourist agencies specialize in these tours by providing services suited to the religious orientation of their clients.

Contrary to popular perception, however, it is not only Catholic groups that take advantage of Santiago as a (spiritual) centre. Many Evangelical, Protestant and Anglican groups, for instance, have for some time organized pilgrimages to Compostela and other sites (see...
chapter 2). For example, an Anglican vicar (see figure 40) who I met during field work described the rituals involved in setting off on the road to Compostela with his congregation:

We met at St Mary’s, Far Cotton, Northampton, on Saturday evening, 12th May, for a special Eucharist and Commissioning Service for ‘the twelve Peregrinos’ (Pilgrims) by Bishop Frank. This was followed by a Paella Supper..., shared together with wives or husbands who were not coming with the group. After the latter left, most of us found places to sleep for what was left of the night in the Vicarage!

**Figure 40** Group of travellers guided by Rev. John Knight (far left), an example of a ‘seasoned pilgrim’

Source: photograph courtesy of Rev. John Knight.

**Social Class & Education**

Despite organized tours and the incentives given by various institutions with regards to pilgrimage, it is mainly through informal networks of communication that people seemed to come in contact with this form of movement. Another key element in the dissemination of such ideas and aspirations (e.g. the meanings that such journeys came to acquire) clearly lay in the social, cultural and economic capital of my participants. The majority of those who
took part in my research were educated professionals (or former professionals) with a distinctive outlook. That is, their ways of understanding and relating to nature, to others and to their own work environments were a reflection of certain values. Participants were asked to fill in a sheet with information such as occupation, religion, age, and ethnicity, which attests to the white, European, mainly Christian and educated character of my sample, although other authors have also come across these same characteristics when studying related activities. For instance according to Urry (1990) ‘trekking through wilderness is associated with the service class and by Bourdieu with intellectuals’ (p.89 c.f. Corrigan, 1997: 145). This is important because it is in the middle–classes that we see a concentrated and overt appreciation of, and preference for romanticized accounts centred on mystic and esoteric experiences of characters on a quest. These are narratives infused with ideals of a purer, more sacred existence and the need for a more expressive way of living. For instance, when asked when he first learned about the pilgrimage to Santiago, a pilgrim from Liverpool told me,

I’ve been to Madrid quite a lot…I remember meeting a girl from Zaragoza who was a youth worker…and part of what she did was way mark and sign post or clean up….make the Camino more ‘walkable’ for pilgrims, as part of the exchange….also I read quite a bit…in terms of mysticism and spirituality, religious traditions …definitely remember Paulo Coelho’s ‘The Pilgrimage’ coming to me at some point…

Lucy, a teacher from London, also said: ‘I’ve probably known about the Camino for a long time through talking to people….reading MacLaine’s book and Coelho’s book and graduated and learned a lot more over the years…’

Others also showed the same tendencies. As John, from England, described it:

First contact that I had…was when I read this book [he produces a copy of Paulo Coelho’s The Pilgrimage]… But when I read it I didn’t realize that it was actually a real thing. Because, the way the book is written, you know, it’s almost…fantasy…

My respondents also displayed similar spontaneity towards embarking on the journey to Compostela. Some were unfamiliar with the idea of pilgrimage even weeks before their departure. This was the case with Gabriel, a pilgrim who travelled with some friends during the summer months.
My friend Joe actually told me about it. I’ve never heard of it before in my life, I didn’t have a clue it existed. He heard from a flatmate in Germany and he said he was gonna go and I said I wanted to come along….jumped at the opportunity [laughs]

Julian, also a student from England, shared a similar experience. It is interesting to note that Julian is not concerned with the destination but the experience. Thus, for him, a cultural festival and a pilgrimage had, in his view, the same experience value. The similarity between the two, however, related to the expressive power of both movements, where identity and ideas are forged, maintained, challenged, made sense of and/or explored and denied.

I was originally going to go to another festival in Serbia. But that kind of collapsed and then Joe just like, yeah we’re still going to Spa…like a week before they left I was like, yes, I’ll book my tickets and I’ll come it sounds like good fun…

Julian was clearly motivated by the ludic aspects of the journey rather than the possible spiritual benefits he may gain from it. In this case we see that the pilgrimage is in fact part of a broader view of Spain as a tourist destination. To walk the pilgrimage route becomes an affordable and convenient way of seeing the country and learning about its culture. Northern Spain has much to offer in terms of art, food, wine, architecture, music, language and natural landscapes. It is this wealth of resources and cultural attractions that seem to attract a growing number of people including young students, who come in search of an affordable month away in the sun (see chapter 8). Seen in this light, they reveal certain middle–class attitudes underlying their motivation. For instance Jenny, from Salisbury, described her first contact with the pilgrimage as part of a walking group:

In our walking group at home somebody said that they would like to do it…but I don’t know how I found out about it. I discovered afterwards that two friends of mine had done it and so I talked to them about it before I did it on my own...

For theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu, preferences, especially in the areas of leisure (i.e. walking through nature, attending cultural festivals) and consumption (i.e. purchasing certain types of books), are guided by the persons’ habitus. This is in turn informed by formal and informal education (Bourdieu, 1977; 1984). If we consider, for instance, the preferences of the middle–class for artistic and aesthetic sensitive discourses (such as choosing to study languages or art) the link between these attitudes and joining a pilgrimage route becomes more salient, as the case of Jackie, a young pilgrim from England, illustrates. She discovered
the pilgrimage ‘…at school when I studied Spanish we did a course on the Camino…so that’s how we all learned about it…’ This was also the case for Katie, a primary–school teacher from London, who lived in Santiago as part of an exchange program during her time at university. She told me that ‘…I knew about it from when I lived in Santiago from seeing strange people arrive with sticks’.

Conversely there is a lack of knowledge about the more doctrinal elements of Catholic pilgrimage. The way travellers came into contact with the pilgrimage had little to do with the traditional religious ritual. Their interest in this form of movement took place through other channels, often via a broader interest in either Spanish as a language or the cultural/ethnic/geographical regions that the Camino passes through (see figure 41). There was also a considerable interest in the art of the Camino, but especially in the rich heritage of the route: its buildings and landscapes. Interestingly, however, these were not learned through tourist brochures, but through education and personal encounters, something that adds to the sense of magic and mystery of the experience.

In short, knowledge, experience and a person’s position within certain socio–cultural and economic settings facilitate the chances of coming in contact with the pilgrimage and permit access to and interest in it. This is also visible on the Camino, where we find a predominance of white, middle–class Europeans taking part.
Local Producers of Meaning

The ethos of pilgrimage, as I have pointed out, is created, transferred and reinforced through the work of ‘producers of meaning’ and personal encounters with others through a structure of opportunities and specialist channels. Those who are producers of meaning are influential...
people in their own right, as men and women who make use of the Camino as a way of sharing their insights.

The role of the host is mainly one of support, both practical and psychological. Often unpaid volunteers, they are men and women who run the hundreds of pilgrim hostels that dot the way of St. James, offering hospitality to the hundreds of thousands who walk to Compostela each year. Hostels vary with regards to facilities, size and historical significance, as well as their approach to pilgrims (see chapter 1 for a detailed description). Some are privately owned, others are run by the Church, and yet others are established and staffed by local government or charities. Some hosts incorporate orthodox religious beliefs in their practices, others a diverse array of discourses ranging from belief in extra-terrestrial ‘entities’ to Zen Buddhism. They are rarely, however, purely secular, business-minded people. I point for instance to Tomás, a man who lives in an ancient ruined village, known as Manjarín. The village is located on one of the highest points of the Camino and it is composed of a small number of derelict buildings. Tomás is a good example of the eclectic nature of the beliefs and practices found on the Camino. At 11:00 each day he blesses pilgrims who arrive at Manjarín with a special (Templar) ritual where he evokes the four archangels. He rings a bell whilst singing their names (Michael, Gabriel, Raphael and Uriel) followed by the bell ring. Subsequently, Tomás recites the Knights Templar’s (mystic) ‘code of honour’. During the ceremony, tourists hold hands whilst forming a circle. At this moment Tomás asks them to reflect on what he considers a world plagued by wars, where famine is still a reality to many. Tomás himself is dressed in a white hooded gown embroidered with a red cross at the front (see figure 42). He talks about the message of the Camino with passion and is entirely dedicated to the spiritual enhancement of those who come to him. In his hostel he offers a variety of services and asks for little in return.

Tomás accepts donativos (donations) from those who want to contribute or simply give something in exchange for a bed and a simple evening meal. An open box sits next to flasks of coffee, tea, milk and tins of biscuits. On this box a sign says: ‘take what you need, leave what you can’. Tomás runs his hostel by what he calls the Knights Templar ‘hospitality code’. Hospitality is a very important theme on the French route and it is indeed taken seriously by most people involved in the pilgrimage. Hosts usually pride themselves in providing for all the needs of travellers – from curing blisters and giving massages to psychological support. Those who reject this ethos are deemed to be unsuitable and are quickly branded as inauthentic. To become a host one must go through a training process where one learns to act...
according to the ethos of the pilgrimage. For a start one must behave in an exemplary manner, and must be selfless in the service of others. The supporting role hosts perform on the Camino sets the experience of pilgrimage apart from other forms of travel, largely because of the potential for personal exchange between hosts and visitors and between the visitors themselves. Hostels in this sense are the spaces in which such exchanges take place. Caminantes and hospitaleros share communal meals, and engage in conversations that often bring to the fore existential matters and other (spiritual) concerns.

**Figure 42** Tomás and me at Manjarín minutes before the Templar’s ceremony

Source: photograph courtesy of Pekka Scheuerrmann.
Tomás, however, is only one amongst many producers of meaning established along The Way. Another influential person within the pilgrimage culture is Jesús Arias Jato, a faith healer whose entire life has been dedicated to the Camino. ‘Jato’ (as he is popularly known) and his family have been involved with the pilgrimage for more than three decades. Since he was born in his grandmother’s house in the town of Villafranca del Bierzo (province of León), Jato has been part of the very fabric of the Camino. That same house is now a crumbling building opposite his new hostel. Having spent many decades sharing his time between driving trucks for a living and helping pilgrims who passed by his home, Jato now dedicates most of his time to maintaining and improving his hostel, which was built with the help of various donations received from pilgrims and associations from all over the world. He proudly displays pictures of its construction showing those who took a break from their pilgrimage to work on the site for a day or two (see figure 43). Many brought with them objects of personal significance which they plastered or hung on the walls during and after the building process. Jato’s albergue is a true ‘pilgrim gallery’ featuring all sorts of artefacts (paintings, stones, flags, maps, photographs, and sculptures) presented to him over the years. One particular (and commonly found) sign hanging on the front door of the hostel said: ‘El turista exige, el peregrino agradece’ (the tourist demands, the pilgrim is grateful).

Figure 43: Albergue Ave Fenix (Jesús Jato) built with the help of volunteers and donations

Source: photograph by the author.
For a small donativo Jato provides pilgrims with a cena comunitária (communal evening meal) and spiritual healing (see figure 44). Tomás of Manjarín is guided by the same philosophy. Their charity, however, does not end at the physical/material level. Jato, for instance, offers pilgrims his hands for curative purposes. When I asked travellers staying there about their experience, some claimed that Jato’s spiritual healing relieved the pains of walking as well as the emotional baggage they carried with them. During my stay in Villafranca as a volunteer, people talked about Jato and his family with respect and admiration. Many visitors coming back years after completing their first pilgrimage looking for him only to shake his hand for his important contribution to their journeys. Tomás’ and Jato’s hospitality is legendary on the Camino and both appear regularly on local television programs covering the pilgrimage and in feature films, documentaries, academic writings, novels, blogs and websites. They are often also consulted by local authorities with regards to matters concerning the pilgrimage. Like Tomás, Jato has travelled to many places in Europe and as far away as South America giving talks about the meanings of pilgrimage. They also go on pilgrimages themselves to other places in Europe such as Fátima, Lourdes, Assisi, Loreto and Rome.

73 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fY–qARu4wMo – accessed 01/08/2011
Figure 44 Jesus Jato preparing the popular *Queimada*

Source: photograph courtesy of Pekka Scheuermann. Note the ‘pilgrim gallery’ on the background and pilgrims standing in a circle whilst Jato (centre) recites prayers and *conjuros*, a form of witch–chanting used to expiate evil.

There are of course many other examples of producers of meaning along the routes to Compostela, as all *hospitaleros* are expected to be helpful and offer their time and dedication to pilgrims as the ethos dictates. The key point to grasp is that such local producers of meaning embody different philosophies, many of which synchronize with the way travellers feel about their lives back home and with their spirituality more broadly. As a result they are sought after by people of all ages and creeds, and the figure of the *hospitaliero* is clearly important in the process of assimilation and re–enforcement of the pilgrim ideals. Although I classify hosts as local, their reach does not end at the geographical boundaries of the pilgrimage route. Their messages spread around the world with travellers who come and go, television programs, best–seller novels, guide books and other forms of literature and media (e.g. internet blogs and pilgrim portals).
‘Glocalization’: Media, Consumer Culture & Politics at Pilgrimage Sites

Global Producers of Meaning: Authors & Tales

In addition to hosts, another significant group of producers of meaning is the authors of international fame who chose the pilgrimage to Compostela for their subject matter. One of the most influential of these is the best-selling Brazilian author, Paulo Coelho. His books have been translated into no less than 71 languages and are distributed in 150 countries. Coelho’s success as a writer started with his third novel, *The Pilgrimage* (1995), an account of the author’s adventures on the *Camino de Santiago*. The 2009 Guinness world record book acknowledges Coelho’s fourth book *The Alchemist* (1993) as a global phenomenon, which was also translated into Hindi, Farsi and isiXhosa with *The Pilgrimage* following closely. *The Pilgrimage* and *The Alchemist* should be considered in tandem, as both represent a journey of self-discovery. In the former Coelho is himself a man looking for a mythical sword which becomes a metaphor for his lost dreams and aims in life. In *The Alchemist* Coelho creates a character, a shepherd named – not coincidentally – Santiago. Santiago follows similar steps to Coelho in his previous novel by embarking on a journey of discovery that brings him to learn about alchemy and eventually to become an alchemist himself. It is clear that Santiago is Coelho’s alter ego in *The Pilgrimage* as both stories lead, through similar processes, to similar outcomes, including spiritual enhancement and a newly-found aim in life. In Coelho’s words:

> It is the pleasure of searching and the pleasure of the adventure. You are nourishing something that’s very important – your dreams. We must never stop dreaming. Dreams provide nourishment for the soul, just as a meal does for the body. Many times in our lives we see our dreams shattered and our desires frustrated, but we have to continue dreaming. If we don’t, our soul dies… (*The Pilgrimage*, p.58).

As already mentioned, during fieldwork many pilgrims mentioned Coelho’s work as a source of inspiration. A good example is Lynsey, from Scotland, who told me that:

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75 *O Diário de Um Mago* first published in 1987
76 *O Alquemista* first published in 1988

Eduardo Chemin 252
...I’ve been reading Paulo Coelho’s book as well but...I don’t know how I can’t explain it, I just feel like there may be things I need to go through, like, something missing that I need to find...

Lynsey is one of many young people who chose to walk the Camino during the summer months. She began walking from the city of León, a two week’s walk to Santiago. Initially she felt she was driven to do it without much consideration and by the influence of a friend who was at the time walking with her. Lynsey used Coelho’s book as a guide – not a practical one since it does not offer anything in that aspect. Coelho has been successful in reaching out to people like her and this success has been largely due to his invitation to his readers to enter a journey of discovery. Above all, what Coelho offers his readers is what the Camino offers its walkers: the prospect of change. As Lynsey explains, ‘...I just feel like there may be things I need to go through, like, something missing that I need to find’. Like many others I encountered over the years, Lynsey fits a general profile of Camino pilgrims: white, middle-class European with a Christian background; someone dissatisfied with life in some way or other and wanting something else. Given their economic condition, what they are searching for is not usually improvement in their material situation, as in asking for more money, or a better paid job, but something rather different from materialism. This very common form of narrative gives the pilgrimage its utopian flavour.

In addition to Coelho, other recognizable actors, comedians, musicians, historians, journalists, as well as amateur and professional poets, academics, members of the clergy and larger associations have contributed to the growing popularity of the Camino pilgrimage. Of particular importance is the growing presence of female authors and participants in this domain. As Laura, a traveller from England, explains:

...one of the reasons [I came to the Camino] was obviously [because] someone who told me she had a great time and actually she’s close in age to me, she’s five years younger. I went in my forties and she must’ve been touching forty when she went. And the other person, she’s on the internet everywhere, you probably seen her: Sue Kenney. ...she’s got loads of stuff on the internet, that influenced me a bit in going and obviously she too is of a similar age group and she too had a wonderful time...

The author Laura mentions, Sue Kenney, has become a familiar face both in the real pilgrimage as well as in the virtual one. Through her book titled My Camino (2004), found in many of the pilgrim hostels I came across and numerous on–line blogs and book shops,
Kenney disseminates messages about the Camino that emphasize its transformative potential. Kenney is a typical case of a traveller–turned–writer who has made an impact on the pilgrimage by publishing her experiences on the road. She has become an inspiration for travellers, (especially for women) who identify with the same issues she was considering before joining the pilgrimage and which changed her life, spiritually as well as practically.

Her book resonates with the work other authors, such as Agneta Sjödin, whose book titled En kvinnas resa (2006, A Woman’s Journey) is inspiring a growing number of Swedish travellers (in particular women) to walk to Compostela. Sjödin, a popular ex–model–turned–television presenter in Sweden initiated a trend identified by Gemzöe (1999; forthcoming), which sees female Swedish pilgrims looking for courage to become ‘big and strong’. It is easy to see the similarities between such narratives. Sue Kenney’s book is currently being advertised as ‘...the spiritual journey of a woman who confronts her deepest fear’. Her website describes her as a ‘pilgrim, author, speaker, leader’, whilst the e–epilogue posted on her website describes her ‘journey’ as a ‘...life altering odyssey...walking with an open body, spirit and mind with the intention of finding self–love, something she had lost in a society that honours material goals and values’. 77

To give yet another example, Shirley MacLaine, the illustrious Hollywood actress who walked the Camino in the mid–90s, has certainly had a global reach, influencing people – again especially women – to undertake a journey to Compostela. Since its publication in 1998 her book, The Camino: a Journey of the Spirit, became an international best–seller. With nine best–selling titles under her belt MacLaine sold more than 20 million copies world–wide. Her books focus on spirituality, numerology, ley–lines, extra–terrestrial life, love, mind, body and ideas about femininity. Like Coelho, Kenney and Sjödin, she toured the world giving talks and television interviews about the experience of ‘becoming a pilgrim’ and emphasizing the ‘spiritual capital’ she gained by walking the Camino. The common themes presented in these narratives are those of the personal survival of overcoming hurdles like serious illness, loss or coping with pain, of a need for a more spiritual life, of becoming stronger, and of finding a ‘spiritual home’. In her official website MacLaine describes her journey as an odyssey that ‘...leads us on a sacred adventure...’ 78 Her book depicting the Camino also points to ‘universal’ themes of ethics, morals and existential anxieties related to spirituality, materialism, the natural environment, personal relations, love and fulfilment.

78 www.shirleymaclaine.com, date accessed: 10/08/2010
These writings are meant to inspire people as they contain explicit messages about ethics and morality, spirituality, life-changing epiphanies and romantic encounters with ancient symbols, nature and places of power. Of course we must account for other factors such as increasing ease of mobility, increasing leisure time and the financial stability of Europeans in the past three decades as important contributors in the renewed popularity of pilgrimage sites. That said, it would be difficult to deny the close relationship between producers of meaning, the wider public and the influence of the former regarding the number of people who visit heritage and pilgrimage sites like Compostela, whether or not these are necessarily connected (specifically or explicitly) to a religious tradition. Writers such as Kenney, Sjödin and MacLaine benefit from the economic prosperity Europeans have enjoyed in the past decades. More importantly though, their stories seem to have struck a chord with a mainly female public who crave an experience where the search for authenticity predominates.

To walk on an ancient pilgrimage route not only favours a relocation of the self; it is also a way to experiment with new forms of communication with the physical/material and the spiritual/divine worlds. The journeys undertaken by modern travellers (male and female) in this sense reflect issues that are at the centre of consumer society and culture. To cite but a few examples, these include a preoccupation with aesthetics, the body (strength/healthy living), mobility, ageing, changing social roles and self-image, fitness and wellbeing and notions of holistic [spiritual/emotional] healing. These represent some of the strongest cultural trends to be given importance in the world of consumer practices that adopt the body as an advertising billboard.

With an increasingly popularized publishing process and the appearance of virtual spaces, it has never been easier to expose thoughts and perspectives of a personal and political nature by making the ‘personal’ truly ‘global’, through expanding networks of communication – in print and/or on-line. Travellers, irrespective of their gender, age or religious background have put forward stories that incorporate a preoccupation with existential matters. This aspect is reflected in discourses focusing on dichotomies between the material and the spiritual. During my field–work, travellers mentioned how the world, or their world, had too much of the former and not enough of the latter. For instance Linda (already mentioned) wrote to me saying that:

...it would be true to say that the Camino ideals and ethos have made a lasting impression, one which will continue for the rest of my life as I strive to reconcile 21st
century living with a non–materialistic lifestyle which seeks to retain that mutual sharing and helpfulness that became our way of life [on the Camino].

It is easy to see the resemblance between such narratives and the general ethos that frames the pilgrimage. In most literary accounts of the pilgrimage the main character, the pilgrim, has meaningful encounters with others. But it is not only solitude that creates meaning, but also the interaction with others they feel close to, despite them being complete strangers. These narratives are influenced by broader cultural (semantic) fields. Besides describing their experiences in a romanticized form, producers of meaning such as Coelho, Kenney, Sjödin and MacLaine feel their main aim in publishing this material is to disseminate a messianic message of self–transformation and empowerment (Hermkens et al, 2009). This message is concerned with wider anxieties and insecurities, which are part of the daily routines of every person living in modern times. It is appropriate that Kenney’s website also describes her as a ‘writer, workshop facilitator, entrepreneur, storyteller and inspirational speaker…’

There are multiple examples across the world of such modern ‘gurus’ who strike a chord with their home and away audiences. This is certainly the case with the German comedian, Hape Kerkeling. His book, I’m off then: Losing and finding myself on the Camino de Santiago (2009), was an instant hit with German readers, who flocked to the Camino in the years following the book’s publication in 2006. According to the book’s publishers, the numbers of German pilgrims going to Compostela increased by 25% and statistics collected at the pilgrim office in Santiago seem to support that claim.

As with other authors mentioned, Kerkeling’s book has now been translated into a range of languages, and has sold more than three million copies worldwide. It entered the list of best–selling books in Germany after one hundred weeks leading in the category of ‘best–selling non–fiction’ of Der Spiegel newspaper. With nearly 20,000 copies sold each day, Kerkeling has become one of the most successful authors in Germany since 1945. Interestingly the main message of the book is Kerkeling’s search for God, who he finds at a specific moment whilst walking alone towards Compostela. I do not intend to portray such success as being due to a wide–spread search for God. But such a phenomenon speaks of people’s fascination with these journeys and the many (spiritual) meanings they acquire.

The experiences and the often comic situations Kerkeling went through on his way to Santiago transformed the journey into an odyssey, replete with colourful characters as in the timeless tales told by Chaucer, Homer and Dante: men on a spiritual quest, walking towards a spiritual ‘home’. In various subsequent interviews, Kerkeling explains his journey in terms of transformation and renewal, which took place through the encounters he had with an array of travelling companions. Often humorous, his account is explicit in the message it attempts to portray. Here is a man in search of personal fulfilment, a search that has little to do with material success. In fact one of the central themes in the book is Kerkeling’s search for the meaning of success. The fulfilment he is after is non–material, as here was a man who had already achieved wide recognition as one of Germany’s, and indeed Europe’s, leading comic artists. During his journey, he shows a high level of emotional response to the experience by breaking down and crying, because as one hospitalero told him, ‘...on the Camino everybody cries’.

Yet what makes Kerkeling’s account truly relevant to this discussion is his entrepreneurial skill and willingness to devote time off from his career as a comedian to talk about the pilgrimage. Besides the obvious and instant influence he exerts by being a much–loved public figure, Kerkeling (a fluent speaker of seven languages) has extensively promoted the ethos of pilgrimage in his native Germany and beyond\(^{80}\). This has been done through various televised interviews, now posted on websites such as Facebook® and YouTube®, through book readings, chat shows, radio programs, interviews, newspaper and magazine articles and on his own official website.

*Examples of ‘Glocalization’*

Kerkeling is, however, but one example in a long list of celebrities that have come across the pilgrimage. Feature films also contribute to the resurgence in interest in pilgrimage. For instance a film titled *The Way*, directed by Emilio Estevez and featuring Martin Sheen as the main character, has recently been released in cinemas around the world (Elixir Films/Icon entertainment, 2010). The story is centred on a man’s journey on the Way of St. James. Sheen’s character, Tom, is an American doctor on a journey of discovery as he follows in the footsteps of his son who died whilst walking the Camino. In the film’s official website\(^{81}\) we find that, through his journey, Tom ‘discovers the difference between the life we live and the

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\(^{80}\) www.hapekerkeling.de – accessed 15/09/2010

\(^{81}\) www.theway–themovie.com – accessed 06/08/2010
life we choose’. Sheen also features in an advertisement for the Galician Tourist Agency, where he stands in front of Santiago’s Baroque Cathedral with a backpack on his back whilst holding a pilgrim’s staff and telling viewers that Galicia is ‘...a magical place of dreams and adventures rich in history and ancient tales’.

*The Way* is not the first motion picture about the Camino to be widely distributed. Spanish director Luis Buñuel, a cult figure in world–cinema, made use of the Camino de Santiago in *La Voie Lactée* (The Milky Way) in 1969. It this satire Buñuel depicts two French travellers on the road to Compostela. As the story unfolds, the two men come across dozens of characters including Jesus of Nazareth and the devil himself. In the same vein as Homer portrayed his protagonist, Odysseus, travelling through a landscape of discovery and encounters, at the centre of Buñuel’s film is a journey filled with mystical encounters, often good–humoured, but fiercely critical of established religion. The two French wanderers are caught in a continuous struggle between faith and incredulity, giving the narrative an ambiguous character from the first to the last scene.

More recently, director Laurence Boulting used the Camino to tell the story of three pilgrims on the way to Santiago. His film, *Tres En El Camino* (Within the Way Without, in English), released in 2004, displays the meanings and metaphors of the journey to Santiago de Compostela. It portrays the journey of people from different cultural backgrounds, during different seasons and walking for different reasons. Their journeys, however, share many commonalities and as such they are interlocked by existential questioning from beginning to end. The film, narrated by British actor Richard Attenborough, discusses universal themes emerging from the individual stories of a Brazilian woman, a famous Japanese poet and a Dutch social worker. It addresses themes such as mortality, ageing, meaninglessness, spirituality and religion: themes also explored in the novels I referred to above. Speaking of his work Boulting writes:

> Each one of us makes the experience of the Camino uniquely our own. Yet, at the same time, which one of us has not had the sensation that we are also travelling in the company of all those who have gone before...and even those who are yet to come? This timeless sense of the collective not only succours and renews us each day, but also foments those equally timeless questions within us through which we seek to

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83 *Three on the way* is the literal translation however the English title is *Within the Way Without.*
understand the life we are born into and the values which most make it precious and meaningful (synopsis written on the back cover of the DVD release).

The emotional and personal character of these productions incorporates and translates their respective directors’, and in some cases the actors’, own experiences and engagement with the pilgrimage. For instance Ramon Estevez (aka Martin Sheen), a Catholic, was born in Galicia. Luis Buñuel’s career was marked by a continuous dialogue (often critical) between faith and reason, middle-class values and the Catholic Church. He used the Camino as the means by which to address such issues in *The Milky Way*. Laurence Boultimg himself walked the pilgrimage to Santiago before he decided to make a film about it.

The impact of this focus on the Camino in the specialist and main-stream media, and its promise of magic, change, spirituality, self-realization, meaningful encounters, romance, healing, community, and purpose, can be measured in the corresponding increasing numbers of visitors to Santiago annually. If there remains any doubt that such productions can indeed influence a growth in the numbers of visitors, there are a number of other examples that illustrate the influence of wider cultural trends on local sites. The experience of Rosslyn Chapel in Scotland, for example, points to the power of literature and other media in attracting attention to these localities.

According to the chapel’s project manager (who represents the Rosslyn Trust), in 1994 there were 9,500 people who visited the Rosslyn Chapel. In 2004 this number had risen to 68,000, an increase of more than 600% in 10 years (Mintel International Group, 2005: 5). What was the cause given for such increase? The phenomenal success of Dan Brown’s novel, *The Da Vinci Code* (2003), and the film production that followed it starring Tom Hanks as a Harvard Professor, symbologist Robert Langdon. Notwithstanding the obvious problems caused by such drastic increase in the influx of visitors to this small derelict building, the ‘Da Vinci Factor’ has influenced the status of that locality, becoming a global phenomenon. In this sense, it seems that ‘glocalization’ is playing in favour of sites of religious importance. Visitors to these places may travel for a variety of motives, but it is no great leap of imagination to think that there is much to be gained from studying such phenomena for it seems that if places of religious significance can become tourist attractions, tourist attractions can also embody religious meanings.

With regards to ‘glocalization’, I point to one last case to illustrate the diversity of producers of meaning and the forms of discourses that their accounts incorporate. John Brierley, a

Eduardo Chemin
popular author of guide books for Camino travellers, is an ex–surveyor–turned–writer in his fifties, who first came in contact with the pilgrimage after what he described as a ‘wake–up call’. In his website, he offers a self–review to his guide–books by giving advice on the practical as well as the spiritual journeys. He tells his readers that:

To maximize the benefits of pilgrimage inner preparation becomes as important as practical planning. We travel two paths simultaneously and need to pay equal attention to both. When planning a holiday we thumb through travel brochures but a pilgrim is well served by perusing a larger canvas that includes reflecting on our inner life and the higher purpose behind our current incarnation. The busyness of our lives, even those dedicated to service, spins us ever outwards – away from our centre. Pilgrimage on the other hand slows us down and opens us inwards to the Source. In one direction lies illusion, the other truth. Thank God I stumbled onto a pilgrim path. The route may still have its ups and downs but the overall direction is set, the way–marks clear and the destination assured. Will you join me along this Path of Enquiry towards our collective awakening?\(^8^4\)

A well respected figure on the Camino, John is often regarded as a local; some of his guides (one of which is its 8\(^{th}\) edition – see Brierley 2012), however, can be found in a variety of bookshops in the English–speaking world – from Canada to Australia. This local/global dualism roots his work simultaneously in the specific cultural geography of the Camino (European), yet they express complex ideals of universality (the global) and spirituality. His guides are divided into easy–to–follow and well–mapped stages and offer personal (spiritual) reflections for travellers at the end of each day. In these he explores his own thoughts whilst walking the pilgrim routes of Spain, offering romanticized accounts of his own experiences. An interesting aspect of such accounts is the constant referencing of something he describes as ‘mindless materialism’: something he attributes to his own dissatisfaction with life, for him filled with ‘...years of unconscious consumerism...’(ibid). John lives in Findhorn, Scotland, defined as ‘a spiritual community, education centre and ecovillage’\(^8^5\) based on eclectic spiritual values that could be loosely comprehended by the umbrella term New Age. It is through the work of such authors that places of spiritual importance like Findhorn and Compostela are linked to wider cultural fields.

\(^8^4\) [www.caminoguides.com/selfreview.html – accessed 20/08/2010]
\(^8^5\) [www.findhorn.org – accessed 13/09/2010]
The Politics of Pilgrimage

It is not only through cultural discourses that the popularization of pilgrimage and heritage sites occurs. Through their messages of self-transformation, producers of meaning also encourage narratives of empowerment. These messages often focus on wider forces, which they see as responsible for the anxieties and insecurities that, according to them, become part of the daily routines of individuals, nations and cultures. Pilgrimage and other heritage sites—especially those embedded in the history of a nation (invented or otherwise) or a people—therefore often acquire political currency. Two prominent individuals, Popes John Paul II and his successor Benedict XVI, made active use of pilgrimage sites in order to intensify and amplify political discourses. This is the case with Santiago de Compostela as well as most other Marian and Benedictine pilgrimage sites in Europe and beyond—including some Catholic shrines in Protestant countries (see chapter 2).

The use of these sites earned John Paul II as well as his successor the title of ‘Pilgrim–Popes’ by various media–channels. This not only shows a continuing theological centrality of pilgrimage in Catholic doctrine, but also the importance of such places for the transmission of ideas. The messages delivered at these locations by senior authorities gain added value. At the same time the attention paid by a pontiff to these (often remote) places shows commitment from the Church to reach out to its pool of believers no matter how distant they are. The example of Czestochowa (Poland) and its crucial role as a centre for the challenging of communist ideology, and the image of John Paul II as the spiritual defender of the people, illustrate this point (see figure 45).

Other political leaders also reach out to people by moving closer to the spiritual nerves of the nation through pilgrimage sites. A more negative example of the relationship between politics and religion at these places is offered by Franco, who in the 1960s used the image of Santiago Matamoros (St. James the Moor–Slayer) to give authenticity to his government. He cleverly associated himself with the positive image that Spaniards had of the Catholic kings who, like himself, had rid Spain of its enemies through a form of modern crusade. Today tourists are still confronted with the symbolic battle between the aggressive image of St. James the ‘warrior’, defender of Catholic Spain and its people, and the peaceful apostle James, humble pilgrim ‘protector’ of foreign and home travellers.

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Eduardo Chemin 261
It is not uncommon to see officials arrive at the main square in front of Santiago’s Cathedral where demonstrations, concerts and political rallies take place throughout the year. Mayors, governors, ministers and presidents have all used Compostela as a political platform. In addition the various routes that lead to Santiago – partly developed and maintained with European money – also cross a diversity of provinces with their own cultures, economies and political agendas. These routes are frequently appropriated and used for the interests of local governments and communities. At times, these interests have fomented discourses of...
difference, despite the pilgrimage’s status as a ‘world’ (European) Heritage. This is hardly surprising given that the relationship between producers of meaning and pilgrimage sites affects the local economy and its surrounding geography (Lois González and Medina 2003), including the daily lives of local residents, the general patterns of commercialization and religious practice of those localities.

Quite apart from anything else, there is considerable dispute with regards to who or what is deserving of devotion, and when. In Marian shrines, for instance, we can observe a challenge to official church hierarchies by the overwhelming presence of pilgrims – especially women – who revere the image of Mary as a spiritual icon despite the Catholic Church’s reluctance to accept this cult in the recent past. Here notions about gender, nation and identity re–surface with notable strength, questioning as well as conforming to hierarchical systems. As we have seen, this is rather similar to the image of Santiago Matamoros as it resists the modern image of the peaceful pilgrim. The latter supposedly symbolises the universal message of inclusion in accordance with the European Union’s ideal of common origins and destiny. Therefore, these two distinct icons speak of very different ideologies and histories.

This iconography is to a large extent invented and was used at different times for different purposes. Both images, however, were employed in the taming of a common enemy: an assumed fragmentation of attitudes and identities. In both examples St. James is employed as a figure representing a common origin, Christianity, in the construction of a common identity, Europe. It is no stretch of the imagination to see how as the European Union expands so does the network of routes that are considered part of the cultural heritage of Europe. Hence I argue that these routes act as cultural highways helping to consolidate the economic project that is the E.U. A considerable amount of money is poured into the maintenance of ‘European’ heritage, including the Camino. Unsurprisingly the regions where the routes pass through are eager to have access to this funding, often highlighting their claim to such heritage. There are therefore tensions between regionalism and universality, which seem to match the old tensions at the core of the political project of the E.U. – a project designed to create peace through economic stability, but one that continually struggles to keep regionalisms at bay.

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87 For an interesting and informative discussion on Marian shrines see Hermkens et al, 2009.
Media & Advertisement

Although only a very small minority of people come into contact with Santiago via media and advertisements, the Camino is a commercially profitable brand, and as such a source of income to impoverished rural areas such as Galicia. Local and national interests in the pilgrimage routes to Compostela stem therefore not only from the historic and cultural (heritage) importance of such pathways, but also from the economic benefits that towns, cities and indeed entire regions enjoy as a result of the influx of people there (see also Guth 1995). Thus the experience of pilgrimage becomes commercialized to the extent that it is detached from its original religious meanings. It becomes appealing to wider audiences, who come to enjoy the Galician countryside, a chilled glass of Albariño wine (see figure 46), or to try the exquisite sea–food of the region. The Camino becomes in this sense a product available to wider tourist markets; it is not necessarily the idea of pilgrimage as such that is being advertised, but a range of products deriving from the same ancient heritage. In other words, the wine is good ‘because’ it is produced on (or close to) the Camino. The experience of being in Galicia and enjoying a relaxing weekend away in that part of the world will be special because it is close enough to the magic, mystic tradition that the pilgrimage symbolises.
Throughout this chapter I have discussed the construction of meaning using the ‘glocalized’ actions of various actors. In this I claim that there exists an implicit ethos or value–set which the pilgrimage comes to represent. That said, travellers couple their needs or wants for a more spiritual life with modern consumer preferences, which in some cases re–enforce the ethos of the pilgrimage, but in others contradict it.
In the following chapters I discuss the implications of these findings for modern theoretical views related to the study of religion and culture within the context of consumer society. Each theme developed during data analysis will be expanded and explored theoretically from a series of sociological perspectives, focusing on theories of religion, secularization and consumerism.
Chapter 10

Religious & Consumer Landscapes of Late–Modernity

“One’s destination is never a place but a way of seeing things.” (Henry Miller)

Places of pilgrimage, in all their variety, are luminous places like stars against the broad canvas of the universe. They are points of reference, bright objects that attract our attention and wonder. Still, they are far from peripheral to our existence or the environment in which we live. They play an important role in the making of cultures and traditions and, as such, they are the material representations of real and imagined identities. The heritage these places contain, the man–made and natural elements that compose such places, never fail to woo those who gaze at them. Yet places of pilgrimage are simultaneously manifestations of belief and, in some cases, the crumbling evidence of a more glorious past. If once these places were considered as marking a ‘sacred periphery’ (Turner & Turner, 1978), due to urbanization, consumer culture, and the speed and efficiency of late–modern life, places such as Compostela are now great urban areas that are at the centre, not the periphery of societies and cultures. They are in fact becoming increasingly important environments that people use as repositories of meaning. This is especially the case when people may feel disconnected and marginal in their own lives and from those who surround them.

These places remind us of the past, but are also a reflection of the present, perhaps even a prophecy for the future. They are part of a growing need to remember, to rescue our sense of wonder, spirituality or imagination. They are also representative of a need for traditional religion to adapt to the consumer culture which, paradoxically, is helping to bring these places to the attention of otherwise indifferent and irreligious consumers. Religious tourism, of which pilgrimage is one manifestation, is symbolic of a movement which encompasses a variety of cultural, socio–political, religious and economic drives. There are, of course, identifiable ambiguities in such discourses and processes, for religious tourism is itself ambiguous phenomena.

In this chapter I bring together narratives I have uncovered through the study of British
pilgrims on the road to Compostela and the theoretical universe that lay in and in between such discourses, which I believe are feeding the interest in places like the Camino today. To do this I consider the Camino de Santiago as part of a range of experiences, in which discourses about religion and consumerism simultaneously converge and diverge. Through such spaces, social, cognitive and cultural contradictions inherent in wider social spheres are understood, negotiated, contested and internalized. Based on what has been presented so far, my argument is summarized thus: rather than being at odds with forms of ‘sacralisation’ and emotional behaviour, consumer culture provides spaces where an exchange between ‘secular’ and ‘religious’ discourses takes place. As such it seems that late modernity facilitates rather than impairs the re–imagining of landscapes and the ‘re–sacralisation’ of space, and consequently of experience, in one way or another. But this is not the whole story, because through this process something else is revealed. This something is an agglomeration of cultural norms, which I intend to follow up on with the help of the data provided so far.

‘Religious Consumerism’: Experiencing Religion through Consumer Culture

Emotional Landscapes

In my study of pilgrims on the Camino I found that the space provided by the pilgrimage and the heritage it contains induces engagement, a reflective mood and often a renewed interest in spirituality and religion through the individual (consumer) quest for authenticity and personal fulfilment. This is something that occurs independently of the original motivation for going on a pilgrimage. The original decision is frequently made on the basis of an emotional (and often sub–conscious) impulse to go places where a concentration of rituals and symbolism conflates into an effervescence of meanings. These are often instigated by ‘producers of meaning’, but they may also come from ‘within’ as the remains of a distant memory, acquired through socialization and acculturation (e.g. formal and/or informal religious education and so on).

In this case, it seems that people may feel the need to re–connect (at least temporarily) to pre–established forms of meaning–making, which often, although not always, include religious traditions and doctrines. A person may position herself within a particular (often imagined) historical context, by enacting the journeys of those who walked the same paths centuries before. The idea of the vicariousness of religious traditions as background or repository of
meaning becomes important, especially in the sense that it refers to ‘place’ as an active element in the re–imagining or indeed construction of old and new meanings (Davie, 2007). ‘Vicarious’ is a word that captures the importance of religious heritage for the imagining of identities. Heritage does not always actively determine boundaries, but nevertheless it frames or becomes in itself an important point of reference for individuals, societies and indeed entire cultures.

Furthermore, the appeal of heritage often transcends cultural boundaries. It can be very intense: so intense that even those who would never step into a religious building at home or look twice at the reliquary of a Catholic church may feel compelled to do so whilst on a holiday, a cultural trip or a pilgrimage. As exemplified by some of my respondents, this frequently occurs out of plain curiosity, but in those buildings and spaces, a variety of ceremonies take place, leading the indifferent curiosity to give way to engagement through bodily experience. As Emile Durkheim showed in his study of rituals, the power of such environments transforms the overall experience of such contexts into something more profound than simple play. The ritual nature of these events resonated with many of those I spoke to along the Camino, marking the experience like the stamp on a pilgrim’s credential. For those travelling on the pilgrim routes of Europe, they are reminded of their own history by the variety of buildings and landscapes and the often romantic and immutable form in which they appear, the ceremonies that take place in them, and the cultural layers and myths which adorn these spaces (see Coleman, 2004a). In other words, these places give flesh and blood to legends, histories, tales, stories and doctrines which otherwise would not only fade into abstraction but lose their more immediate material powers, such as the power to heal.

This is one paradox I have attempted to describe throughout this analysis. These places are at once sacred and profane, because despite their importance and status, they symbolize the series of encounters and coincidences that make up people’s lives. They have an important role to play in the re–imagining of life–styles and choices and the re–living of stories that are so poignantly communicated to those who come to them. This occurs independently of people’s original motivations for visiting and the ways in which they see that space. That is, for some they may be indeed holy whilst for others ‘just another church’. This is why I refer to the accumulation of such sites and the experiences found in them as an ‘emotional landscape’.
Although I would wish this idea was as original as it sounds, serendipity proved to be a much stronger force. Despite the fact that this term ‘emerged’ out of the inductive analysis of my own data, I later found that ‘emotional landscape’ was a term already in use by someone else who, like me, is also concerned with the study of pilgrimages. In his study of a Japanese pilgrimage site (on the Island of Shikoku) Ian Reader (2005) described ‘emotional landscape’ as:

…a term that incorporates not just the geographical features and structures that provide a setting for the pilgrimage, but also nonphysical matters that shape the emotional terrain in which pilgrims voyage, such as the pilgrimage’s various legends, symbolic meanings, and miraculous tales, all of which help create the mental landscape framing the pilgrimage and influencing its participants (p.6).

Because it was written before my study and because it runs very close indeed to what emerged from my data, I use Reader’s description as a general definition. This coincidence could be seen as peripheral to my overall argument, as worthy only of a footnote. There is, however, something very important to be drawn from this serendipitous incident: the fact that two different researchers developed the same description when studying two distinct pilgrimage sites, immersed in different cultural contexts and situated in opposite geographical poles of the world, shows that this movement should be thought of as a ‘glocalized’ event. It occurs despite the specific socio–cultural conditions in which these two pilgrimage sites were created, conditions that are historically specific to the cultural contexts in which these sites have emerged. Due to the opportunities offered by consumer culture, and globalization, pilgrimage becomes an elastic ritual that absorbs not only local and regional but also ‘global’ discourses. To use the pilgrimage to Shikoku as a comparative example, according to Reader, those who help to organize and promote the pilgrimage are clearly aware of what goes on in other pilgrimage sites. These agents and promoters are particularly interested in the Camino de Santiago as they see many (productive) similarities between these two otherwise distinct places.

Like Shikoku, the Camino de Santiago was born out of old traditions and an already existent infrastructure and culture of veneration. That is, they were first brought to life by already on–going socio–cultural and political movements. But we cannot compare a circular Buddhist pilgrimage on an Island in the Japanese Sea, with a linear Catholic pilgrimage in the Iberian Peninsula. Their history, geography and cultural roots are not only different but completely
unrelated. Yet there is something universal about the act of pilgrimage, so universal that these two distinct sites can in fact be compared and studied as part of ‘one’ unifying phenomenon. These places allow emotional states to take place, states that are often suppressed in otherwise ‘ordinary’ social environments: by cultural (normative) discourses and by the late–modern individual him/herself, who must think and act rationally in a world where attitudes and behaviours must be accounted for in a clear and objective manner.

The fact that we can compare places like Shikoku and the Camino re–enforces the point that the dichotomies and typologies I highlighted in chapter 3 need to be understood only as a way to illustrate the spectrum of motivations; they cannot be used to explain the impulse for pilgrimage in the first place. As we know, light is much more than what a prism can show us. The breaking down of light into basic elementary colours does not equate to the sum of its parts. The prism helps us to understand what white light is made of, breaking down its constitution into other colours, but it does not explain ‘how’ or ‘why’ light is created. The same, I suggest, applies to pilgrimages. To look at motivations in that manner can help us understand the spectrum of motives by breaking them down into their components. However it fails to explain why pilgrimage becomes so important and valuable for those who take part and those who have organized it. Why it is protected and covered in cultural layers and why it is the subject of so much attention from an increasing variety of agents are difficult questions to answer. Through an understanding of pilgrimage and heritage places as ‘emotional landscapes’ I believe we can move beyond dichotomies and categories and begin to understand the growth of religious tourism in Europe as something that surpasses the sum of its parts. I will return to this point.

*The Subjective Turn: Religious Emotion, Spiritualities of Life & Lived Religion*

The language often used by *caminantes* inferred a connection to abstract meaning–making philosophies despite the fact that participants themselves, at times, did not see the pilgrimage as a religious act in any way, shape or form. Considering the diversity of meanings that constitute motivations for pilgrimage, the Camino can only be understood if we make reference to wider ‘semantic fields’ (Coleman and Eade, 2004), which, dialectically, are the cause and the result of broader cultural changes. One of the most important of such changes is the ‘subjectification’ of life–styles and the effects this has had in our understanding and relationship to religion (Heelas & Woodhead, 2005a; Lynch, 2007; Barker, 2008). These
changes refer to ideas about individuality and choice, a turn towards the importance of biography and a need to re–discover one’s own sense of ‘self’ through narrative (see also Coleman & Ellsner, 1995). This is the so–called ‘subjective turn’, its causes pertaining to the realms of macro–social changes like ‘de–industrialization’ and ‘de–traditionalization’. Returning to a discussion I started in chapter 3, despite the logic of the ‘de–traditionalization’ argument, data from my study shows the picture is rather more complex. The stories told by those I encountered show that this movement is not evidence against the secularization thesis; it does not offer proof that people are ‘returning’ to traditional (denominational) practice. Neither can it provide evidence for the theory of a ‘spiritual revolution’ (see also Warmer, 2010). Yet it is also clear that we should think of these practices according to the contexts in which they occur. That is, attitudes and behaviours that are transformed by the meanings inherent in and symbolically representative of heritage and the traditions it implies.

The stories we have seen were often told against a background of what Riis and Woodhead (2010) have described as ‘religious emotion’. That is, sentiments were ‘framed’ by religious heritage and philosophies. Travellers I spoke to showed a longing for that ‘something bigger than themselves’, to a form of tradition or connection to those who were there before them. Some were overwhelmed when they felt part of a historical chain representing values which some felt were lacking in their daily lives. Above all, however, travellers felt part of a cause, a fixed end point, something that strung all the lose threads of modern life together into one more concise narrative. The sheer plurality of these environments, along with the affirmations and contestations within this complex emotional web, supplied them with many parallels and metaphors, such as the often–mentioned ‘life as a pilgrimage’.

Framing some of these stories was the imagining of traditions and a willingness to engage with a universalism that seemed to characterise the ethos underlying the pilgrimage. The Camino is a movement of people through an imaginary as well as physical landscape, one that is organically intertwined with daily life elsewhere and not separate from it, as the Turner’s suggested. It fits within a longer biographical sketch in which the person finds meanings by connecting him/herself to something that is durable, coherent, concise and repetitive. The physical dimension of the route – its coherent landscapes, its assured end and yet mythical and mysterious qualities, and its religious heritage – is conducive to a certain introspective and contemplative mood. This mood takes into account a range of biographical events and the position of the person within a wider context. Paul Heelas has termed this
‘spiritualities of life’ (2008), something similar, I suggest, to Meredith McGuire’s notion of ‘lived religion’ (2008). Both of these point to spirituality as performed regularly and expressed through a variety of activities such as those found in the destinations one chooses to travel to and the experiences they offer. Spirituality and religion, as well as atheism, agnosticism or even a polite indifference, slip through all modes of behaviour, informing choices, framing psychological maps and establishing preferences; in sum, setting the tone and pace of life.

However, regardless of their beliefs, travellers showed a tendency to believe in the ‘magic’ of the Camino and the supposed cosmological connections to the universe it possesses, as in the popular description of the Camino as a mirror image of the Milky Way or its connection to pre–Christian myths that, for some, are more genuine and interesting than the Christian doctrines that gave origin to the Catholic pilgrimage. Yet people were not averse to the traditional Catholic doctrines as they did engage with the rituals and places that give the pilgrimage its traditional religious quality. There was more interaction with places and rituals than an actual rejection or bypassing of important religious places and ceremonies. People regularly went to mass, lit candles, took pictures of religious works and statues of saints, visited crypts, observed local processions and celebrated meals whilst sleeping in churches, monasteries and ‘pilgrim hospitals’. The traditional aspect of the pilgrimage was never far from the romanticism informing the curious tourist who searches for that glimpse of authenticity in the old, the exotic and the different.

The romantic aspect of the walk, the middle–class calling towards the old and beaten track, went hand in hand with that sense of ‘specialness’ of the act and the transcendental qualities of the experience. It predominated as people concentrated on the esoteric and mystic ‘messages’ of the pilgrimage, or the unspoiled nature of some of the places they passed through, or even the ‘non–commercial’ aspect of the experience and how it deferred from other tourist trips they had gone on before. Some were aware of and felt closer to eastern (atheist) philosophies such as Buddhism and took comfort in being in contact with nature and the elements. Others were Protestants looking for ‘meaningful leisure’. There were also Spanish Catholic youth groups spending the summer holidays on the route: praying, playing and gaining cultural capital. They joined groups of American, Dutch, German, French and South American missionaries, who came to enjoy the liturgical messages of the walk but also to take part in ‘cultural tours’ offered by their experienced and well–versed guides. Overall,
most were intrigued and attracted by the perceived mysteries the route seemed to conceal, and its history and profound importance for European art, society and culture.

For some, the Camino had its own energy or ‘powers’. People talked about it as if it was alive, containing a divinity or sacredness of its own – even if stripped of doctrine. The nature and landscape that surrounded the architectural heritage of the route was, for many, a place where ‘God had lowered the canopy of heaven’. Indeed, on the Camino, the search for culture, entertainment or escape is never far from the religious or spiritual experience, for the former often informs the latter and vice-versa. I encountered an eclectic array of personalised forms of spiritualities that make this particular pilgrimage not one but various experiences. A magic kaleidoscope of narratives, images and discourses intersected and overlapped, engendering a whirlpool of spiritual religious and secular meanings – if they can indeed be differentiated. Pilgrims understood the experience of walking or cycling to Santiago through such an emotional and religious landscape. That means that the act of going on a pilgrimage was more often ‘felt’ than rationalized and this is why it would be difficult to draw a line between motivations as secular or religious. Hence typologies and theoretically informed dichotomies become rather unjustified in the presence of such a fluidity of meanings.

The ‘elasticity’ of the Camino, the fact it can absorb so many narratives and discourses, is exemplified by ‘producers of meaning’, the agents who come to occupy a position of influence impacting in the flows of travellers towards it (see chapter 9). In my view, their work forms part of mechanisms by which the organic sacralisation of such spaces occurs whilst a simultaneous ‘touristification’ of religious spaces takes place. These agents come to influence flows of people towards destinations by feeding the cultural field with narratives of self-discovery, hope, healing, authenticity, romanticism and the mystic (universal) ‘truths’ that this form of movement entails. I suggested that their writings help in the construction of the pilgrimage and its utopian substance. The romanticism found in this literary work and the eloquence of these actors is partly responsible for the popularity of the Camino.

The examples given also reveal the place of writing as a way of making sense of one’s own motivations: a form of reflexivity. Here the person places him/herself within a cosmology of meanings incorporating ethics and morals, which often leads to personal readjustments, perhaps even change. This utopianism is what sites like the Camino with its ‘heritage–scape’ (Di Giovine, 2009) seem to offer: an escape into an idealised time and space (a past) where conditions are imagined to have been more clear-cut, stable, spiritual, communal, romantic,
fulfilling. These spaces and places offer the romantic consumer the chance for a lived experience of such a dream–world. They are temporarily immersed in an experience that metaphorically embodies discourses filtered through socio-cultural mechanisms.

**Something Greater than Ourselves: Chains of Memory**

*Biography, Metaphors & Meaning*

There was a general sense that people, independently of their beliefs, related to the experience of walking primarily as individual seekers temporarily connected to ‘something bigger than themselves’, something that transcended the idea of individuals and groups, which filled the perceived gap between object and subject, past and present, sacred and profane. Looking at tourist experiences, those individual consumer practices became a way people found to engage with that ‘something bigger’.

The seductive power of the Camino is communicated and expressed in a variety of ways. People’s stories were often formed of a web of meanings which transformed the tourist experience into something long-lasting, deeply affecting and personal. Sometimes these stories reflected the cacophony of life and the choices we must make from time to time. For instance, some participants mentioned how they were ‘looking for something’ or were in need of ‘finding themselves’, whilst others pointed to the rather mundane aspects of their motivations and made little differentiation between pilgrimage as sacred space and other daily routines like shopping, watching television, washing clothes, eating in restaurants and so on. Others described it as a ‘spiritually rewarding’ vacation or as the materialization of a ‘calling’ sometimes triggered by the reading of a book, a personal encounter or pure coincidence. Whilst such sentiments were at times framed by the spiritual heritage of the pilgrimage (churches, monasteries and so on), it is true to say that none of these were necessarily a matter of spiritual or religious beliefs – even though these were abundant amongst even the younger travellers I interviewed.

The importance of heritage and memory becomes pronounced in such contexts because in an age where spirituality is fluid and progressively uninformed by traditional religious doctrines (Lynch, 2007), people may seek traditions and places where a material representation of such sentiments can take shape, whilst also allowing for the subjective interpretation of experience. The Camino, like other pilgrimage sites in Europe, seems to fulfil these
functions. These become attractive locations where people attempt to ‘find themselves’ by connecting to the chains of memory (Hervieu–Léger, 2000) that these places represent.

The path and the direct and assured way in which the route leads travellers to the shrine (the Camino is only way–marked in one direction) at times contrasts with the psychology of the person. Individuals often find themselves ‘lost’, ‘confused’ or at least in need of a general ‘direction’, referring perhaps to finding a new career or partner, or to becoming more ‘spiritual’. The boundaries between physical and emotional, real and imaginary, sacred and profane merge into one narrative of continuity, which placed an emphasis on biography. Hence the inner psychological constructs that form motivations are often based on the principle of a spontaneous ‘calling’. The pilgrimage often came at a particular time in an individual’s life where their biographical map was split by bifurcations; these are symbolic and frequently seem to produce times of deep reflection followed by transitional periods. Pilgrimage in such cases purposefully replaces or imitates the rite of passage of traditional cultures (Turner & Turner, 1978).

John Eade and Michael Sallnow (2000) showed that the importance of pilgrimage lies in a combination of ‘place’, ‘text’ and ‘biography’, and this has been reflected in the findings of this research. So if this is tourism or pilgrimage, secular or religious, is secondary to the real issue. The crucial task is to understand such movement with respect to a wider context in which the space between subjective needs and the structural condition of late–modern cultural forms is represented practically and metaphorically within such spaces. Indeed, in Reader and Walter (1993), we find that

As pilgrimage is a product and manifestation of its social environment, it is liable to change with the changing preoccupations of that social environment, and since the expectations and values of society today are different from, say medieval times, it is only to be expected that pilgrimages will have altered in some respects...’ (1993: 226).

They go on to explain, however, that:

...this does not mean it has become degraded in religious terms, or become a mere touristic shadow of its former ascetic self, however, so much as it means that it has remained in step with its social environment (p. 227).

The use of texts and the surrounding spiritual landscape of pilgrimage interact with biography (life stories) to give a sense of meaning in an otherwise circumscribed yet paradoxically
aimless and unstructured life. It places people within a cosmology of continuation, connecting them to pools of meaning established long before their time. The ethos underlining the process of pilgrimage embodies such continuing tradition, translating its message into a late–modern context, where movement is crucial to our understanding of such flows. Tourism is fundamentally important for this renewed popularity and will remain so for its continuity; it seems that, in an age of low religious literacy it is through such consumer practices that people may find spirituality, as suggested by Charles Taylor (2007).

For those I interviewed, the essence of pilgrimage was to approach and to enter an experience, to touch and perform and make such experiences their own. There was a hope that if possible they would hold on to it when returning to their everyday lives. Some seemingly succeeded, whilst others were less impressed with the results. In fact some felt an even deeper need for fulfilment, which caused them to repeat the journey, to go on to other pilgrimage and heritage sites, trails or spiritual retreats, or even to change their life completely by moving homes, jobs, breaking up relationships and so on. These changes were often made as a form of healing, and indeed the idea of healing was very complex and understood in a multitude of ways, which varied from the physical to the spiritual but which often incorporated this idea of biography.

These discourses were all intertwined, and thus impossible to disassemble. Many travellers repeated the journey, sometimes again and again as an attempt perhaps to recapture and re–live those feelings of wholeness they seemed to have experienced at first, but which did not last for very long. Others did it because they felt the experience simply offered a more affordable way to spend time in nature, or as an alternative to a holiday on a beach resort, due a broad interest in culture, history or architecture. I would therefore disagree with those who see pilgrimage necessarily as an experience entailing contact with the ‘sacred’ (for instance Margry, 2008). Ideas about the sacred vary widely and people’s perception of sacred ‘spaces’ also vary from things we can do on a daily basis – small routines that for many people are ‘sacred’ – to visiting a place that is considered ‘sacred’ by a religious tradition. Having spent years studying the Camino, my view is that the ‘sacred’ is not necessarily viewed as ‘sacred’ because of any inherent ‘spiritual magnetism’ (Preston, 1981), but because the meanings framing the cult object, place or person are constantly being constructed, deconstructed or re–enforced by all kinds of producers of meaning. In other words, the fluidity of consumer cultures today means that the sacred can be found anywhere. And although it can be experienced through traditional religious heritage, there is no justification for limiting this
notion to traditional religion. It is clear that, due to its particular characteristics and its power to translate meanings through generations, religious heritage is particularly attractive to modern individuals.

Although, traditionally, pilgrimage has been defined as a physical journey in search of truth, ‘in search of what is sacred or holy’ (Vukonić, 1996:80), today people are drawn to the Camino because they feel they can make it ‘sacred’ in their own way. It is seen not only as an ‘alternative’ to secular environments, but also as a place alternative to ‘outdated’ and ‘rigid’ religious forms, and simultaneously grounded in something solid – an aspect that is particularly attractive to those who feel ‘spiritual’ but who have nowhere to ground their ‘spirituality’. This movement occurs organically and motives become difficult to qualify as ‘secular’ or ‘religious’, hence the ambiguous character of narratives and the difficulty in defining what is ‘sacred’ or ‘profane’.

If in consumer cultures, pilgrimage still entails some form of contact with the sacred, as Margry believes, it may not be understood as such by everyone involved in the ritual. It is true that, as my respondents have shown, in such spaces people do search for meaning within personalised forms of ‘spending time with god’, ‘getting healed’, ‘finding themselves’, ‘having fun’, ‘a quest’, ending or beginning new relationships, ‘finding limits’, ‘challenging myself’, celebrating their partnership and reflecting on their life more broadly. But despite the presence of symbolic elements, which may differentiate the experience into sacred or profane, holy or unholy, the experience of pilgrimage occurs within self–determined (inner) psychological constructs and parameters that may not be linked to any of those external symbols.

*Consumer Ethics & the Spiritual Heritage of Pilgrimage*

In chapter 3, I showed how a description of the ethics underlining consumer culture resembled the ethos underlining the act of walking the *Camino de Santiago*. Indeed it would be impossible to avoid a comparison between the romantic ethic described so succinctly by Campbell (1987) and the motivations that drive people to go on the Camino. That form of ‘Christian–informed deism’ seems a fitting analogy to the general mood found in the narratives I studied. However, rather than subscribing to such values unconditionally, travellers were, at times, reluctant to be affiliated with Christian doctrines or indeed instrumental (secular) rationality; in other words, they were aiming for a middle ground.
Imagining there was a choice to be made between these two theoretically induced extremes (deism and rationality), such romantic consumers were inclined to think of themselves as spiritual beings living in a world dominated by materiality, a world they felt at times disconnected from. Romanticism is often perceived as the superstitious remains of a decaying spirituality that is giving way to unprecedented secularity. Based on the stories told by Camino pilgrims I am compelled to see this issue rather differently. The meanings found in modern pilgrimage seem rather the result of dialectical processes. This involves the return or continuous influence of the necessity or desire to engage with forms of thinking and acting that take seriously notions of spirituality and religious emotion. These are alternative narratives that are not dissonant but partly a product of consumer ethics.

Consumerism, as opposed to consumption, is a whole encompassing system of meaning, behavioural tendencies and psychological frameworks, differing from the noun that indicates the act of purchasing (Fine, 2002; Bauman, 2007). One of the main themes found in my field work was that of the individual trying to ‘step out’ of material forms of social relations and engagement, an environment they found dominated by the perceived speeding up of a frenetic and uncertain world: the uncontrollable juggernaut that Giddens (1991) describes in his theory of society. I initially thought such sentiments would slowly reveal a generational, perhaps even cultural or gender bias. But in reality that was never the case. Just as young male travellers seemed to be affected by such discourses, so were much of the female and older participants and those from other (non-European) nationalities.

The symbolism of walking and entering ‘wonderland’, a place away from their own world where material appearances dominate and authentic experiences seem at times to have been ‘sequestrated’ (Giddens, 1991), had a real appeal with my respondents. For them, the pilgrimage offered the opportunity to strip down the outer layers of socially constructed divisions (labels, class, inhibitions) and enter the ‘liminoid space’ that the Turners described in their work. The perceived ‘true’ gained immediate metaphorical qualities, which participants saw as expanding and connecting to the wider perceptions and philosophies of the world that surrounded them. They often viewed the experience of walking as representing a connection to a form of ‘humanness’, a different term from the word ‘humanity’. They sought the state of ‘being’ human, using emotionality in order to connect with the ethos of pilgrimage, with that ‘something bigger than yourself’. Such humanness conceals a desire to connect to a perceived timeless element, a human core, consciously but sometimes sub–consciously. These forms of ‘performative action’ (Coleman & Eade, 2004) are a matter of Eduardo Chemin
expression of sentiments translated into metaphors that the journey gains through a process of

group identification. In turn it came to symbolise individuals’ need to ‘slow–down’, for

instance, or to live a more balanced life–style: more sport, fresh air, less dependency on

electronic forms of communication (mobile phones, internet and so on). The act of going on a

pilgrimage was used as a symbolic representation of a need to connect to a human (natural)
speed, which they saw as essential for their well–being and psychological re–balancing.

Through looking at those stories I believe that today, pilgrimage centres attract people as

much for their appeal as an alternative to the package holiday as for ideas of continuity and

religious devotion. Both are important and, as I argue, far from mundane. Heritage is often at

the centre of these experiences, for both the religious and the secular visitor. Moreover,

through engagement with the universal qualities assigned to it by ‘producers of meaning’,

religious and secular discourses become at times indistinguishable from one another. This

happens because heritage acts as a bridge between subjective forms of belief (or non–belief)

and religious structures, between a secular (structural) ethos and the spiritual (subjective) needs of individuals.

It is important to be clear, however, that I do not mean that by going on a holiday to a place

of heritage and religious importance, secular tourists will become religious seekers, as true

‘road to Damascus’ type epiphanies were rarely reported. Rather, pilgrimage is an

opportunity and an experience where an exchange often occurs between subjective forms of

spirituality and the meanings materialized in these places through heritage. Despite the

apparent secondary nature of religious texts and doctrine, for some of those I interviewed it is

clear that there was an engagement between them and the places of worship, objects,

ceremonies and people they encountered. In light of this, it would be suitable in my view to

conclude that consumer practices such as walking a pilgrimage trail as a vacation, that is,

without an initial religious motivation, can in fact stimulate curiosity and favour engagement

with traditional religion or other less dogmatic forms of spirituality.

Taking a closer look at pilgrim stories, I have reason to believe that places like the Camino

have become or remained popular because they allow this seemingly preferred form of

‘religious consumption’ to take place. Pilgrimage is one way that people living in a secular

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88 I am aware this term may seem contentious (even perhaps offensive) to some observers especially in the light of popular usage of the words ‘religious’ and ‘consumerism’ which often mean opposite sets of values and behaviours. But by ‘religious consumerism’ I am not inferring the commodification of religion and the ‘selling out’ of religious traditions and doctrines to businesses but rather an organic process where religion and
age can engage with religion and spirituality, precisely because it is a consumer practice and not in spite of that. These are places that offer not only a tourist experience or ‘spiritual products’, but an altogether differentiated emotional journey. Sometimes this emotional realm is channelled through religious narratives, sometimes through forms of subjective spirituality. But engagement with the former does not come to the detriment of the latter, and vice-versa.

I would therefore be very cautious with regards to emerging theories of ‘post–secularity’ (exposed earlier in chapter 3). In my view, it would be safer to say that modern European societies are witnessing a challenging of the hegemonic indoctrination of secular ideology at the same time that religious institutions are also adapting to the needs of consumer culture as a consequence of secularization. Pilgrimages should be approached from this ‘middle-ground’ perspective, and not from one extreme or the other. This movement is simultaneously a reaction to the perceived decline of religious traditions and the lack of ‘memory’ they produce (the functions they can no longer fulfil or their irrelevance to modern individuals) and a way to accommodate late–modern (fluid) spirituality within a ‘rooted’ source of history and continuity, especially in rapidly changing societies where existential insecurities can quickly develop and spread. Here the word ‘heritage’ once again becomes important.

Heritage is a broad concept. It encompasses small objects and artefacts, as well as buildings and entire geographical areas. In this light, what I referred to previously as the ‘spiritual landscape’ or the religious heritage surrounding pilgrim routes and shrines, is an important component in the construction of the emotional and metaphysical journey. As one pilgrim mentioned, the heritage of the pilgrimage had a visible effect on him (see interview with D. Fergus – chapter 5). He interacted with the heritage of the route in a variety of ways: sometimes he felt it was ‘closed’ to him; at other times he felt detached from the forces (ideologies and beliefs) that built it; and sometimes he felt comforted by the ambience with which the heritage provided him and the sense of connection to that ‘something’ he felt he was (sub–consciously) ‘looking for’. Due to his stressful work he was looking to reduce the speed of his life, looking for a slow (human) pace, for inner peace and silence. He eventually found this by interacting with the spiritual landscape, through churches, monasteries and convents. This man found that not only the architecture of the pilgrimage became important for his understanding of the emotions he displayed throughout the journey, but also that the consumerism (here very complex and broadly conceived terms) both benefit from wider changes in the structure of late–modern societies, changes which affect religion as much as other secular institutions, services.
geography of the Camino – its geographical ‘certainty’ and safety – also offered him a simplification of life.

This gave him space to reflect on and engage with the spiritual aspects of the journey. As with many others I encountered, he did not rationally go on the Camino in order to achieve religious epiphany, yet it seemed that he was taken aback by the feelings the landscape awakened in him, and he felt overwhelmed by the experience. It is only recently that scholars have begun to point to the power of the interaction between biography and place (for examples see McClancy, 1994; Knott, 2006; Tweed, 2006 for a ‘geographical’ or ‘spatial’ analysis of the intricacies of religion, place and movement), and this is something that needs to be developed further. This is justified in the light of stories such as that offered by Nick, a ‘convinced atheist’ (see Chapter 5), whose knowledge and admiration of Romanesque architecture and music gave him a ‘sense of the spiritual’.

On many occasions I pondered over the language used by those who lacked any attachment to the experience with regards to the religious or spiritual meanings it infers. The often–used ‘I’m not here because I’m religious’ was quickly followed by ‘but this is not just a holiday’. One important element of this distinction was precisely the heritage, the ‘spiritual landscape’ of the pilgrimage: bridges, churches, monasteries, pilgrim hostels, hospitals, ruins of ancient sacred buildings, crosses, stone circles, the natural landscapes, cityscapes, old villages and towns that travellers came in contact with. These places and spaces gave substance to an imagination that saw in the experience of pilgrimage – even for those more sceptical – a way to ‘connect’ to the long tradition that those buildings and places often represent. Stories of princesses and kings, of knights, of pious and penitent pilgrims, of saints and hermits – in sum, of people who believed in an ideal, a sense that there was something ‘bigger’ ‘out there’ that could be reached – were tapped into through contact with these places. This romantic imagination was incited (or amplified) with the help of the authors and tales I mentioned earlier (see chapter 9). Sometimes this happened purely through people’s first-hand experience and through networks of communication that gave a ‘personal’ meaning to the journey. At other times it was a matter of belief in the doctrines of institutional religion, which increasingly see the value of pilgrimage as a religious practice. People may not have the time or disposition to go to church on a regular basis but as a vacation, pilgrimage becomes a way for modern individuals to engage with their beliefs.
Undoubtedly what we now refer to as the tourist industry is a force driving the establishment of structures that form and sustain modern pilgrimage sites. Indeed the adjective ‘touristic’ was not a word included in any dictionary until the late 1970s, when Dean MacCannell wrote his seminal work on what he called ‘The Tourist’. Only three decades later, many local and national governments invest a great proportion of their resources in the development of tourist infrastructure. Sometimes such investment can be higher than in any other industrial sector. This focused investment has seen a growth in tourist infrastructure: hotels, roads, coach lines and flight routes, airport expansion, hospitals, commercial outlets and an interminable list of primary, secondary and tertiary services that cater for modern travellers. This inevitably creates better infrastructures in and around pilgrimage sites and other associated places of (spiritual) interest. This re–enforces the fact that tourism is a positive force that facilitates rather than impairs modern pilgrimage, not only because of these structural changes but because it ‘promotes’ it. When I use the word ‘positive’, however, I am of course evading all the important debates about the morality and ethics of tourism, especially regarding the social inequalities it obscures (see Urry, 2002) and the simultaneous problems it creates to religious institutions, like overcrowding, noise and their detrimental effects to the spaces in question. However without such markets, the consumptive practices they engender, and the infrastructure it provides, some pilgrimage sites and routes would most certainly struggle to maintain their current levels of popularity. In my view, the late–modern drive for pilgrimage is at least partly fed by wider promotional literature, media mechanisms, socio–cultural and economic structures, which facilitate the opening–up of new (and alternative) itineraries into religious practice.

Describing pilgrimage purely as leisure does little to describe the meanings inherent in such journeys, because leisure, like the word ‘tourism’, has been overloaded with negative connotations linked to the assumed superficiality of consumer culture. For some pilgrims I interviewed, tourism as leisure (‘taking time off’) became at points the ideological antithesis of such a movement. This encapsulates the obvious paradox of consumers who do not want to be thought of as consumers, tourists who call themselves ‘pilgrims’; that is, people not on a physical journey towards a physical reality, a specific place or a goal, but on a quest for an ideal, whatever that ideal may be. What modern seekers are searching for, what defines such an ideal, is often too ineffable to be coherently described; motivations and ideals abound. However, as I contend, it is not totally unclear. Pilgrims’ stories revealed an almost palpable longing for meaning, with underlying motivations that varied across a broad spectrum. But it
seems that if religion or more fluid forms of spirituality can offer that meaning, they will tend to be explored through such landscapes and opportunities.

Through my study of the Camino de Santiago, which paralleled a range of other studies on the theme drawing similar conclusions, I found that it is through heritage that we come to interact with ideas about religion (even when this is an unintended consequence of the trip), and it is through the structural framework of tourism that these journeys are made possible (see Di Giovine, 2009). Hence it is only pertinent to think of ‘the return of the pilgrim’ as a dual movement comprising the ‘touristification’ of sacred spaces through consumer practices and a simultaneous ‘sacralisation’ of place through tourist experiences.

In the next (concluding) chapter I attempt a more accurate description of what I came to see as the underlining ethos of modern pilgrimage. In this light I put forward my understanding of the popularity of pilgrimage within the parameters of this mingling of religious and consumer trends and the landscapes I have described so far.
Conclusions:
The Pilgrim Ethos & the Spirit of Modern Pilgrimage

‘Without the transcendent and the transpersonal, we get sick, violent and nihilistic, or else hopeless and apathetic. We need something ‘bigger than we are’ to be awed by and to commit ourselves to in a new, naturalistic empirical, non-churchly sense...’ (Abraham Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being, p.iv)

‘The writing and telling of history is bedevilled by two human neuroses: horror at the desperate shapelessness and seeming lack of pattern in events, and regret for a lost golden age, a moment of happiness when all was well. Put these together and you have an urge to create elaborate patterns to make sense of things and to create a situation where the golden age is just waiting to spring to life again’ (Diarmaid MacCulloch, A History of Christianity, p.7).

The Pilgrim Ethos

Pilgrimage is a social fact anchored in landscapes and simultaneously influenced by movement. It lives in the memory; it is constructed by imagination and re–enforced by myth. It is an ineffable phenomenon pertaining to both real and metaphysical worlds. That is, despite an inherent elusiveness, in the world of the emotions and sentiments that form the practice of pilgrimage, it also acquires real meanings, which are forged by the consumer and religious landscapes in which it is embedded. I have argued that to understand the current popularity of pilgrimage sites, we must move beyond the divergence and convergence debate (see chapter 3), from universalisms (Turner & Turner, 1978) and from typologies based on the differentiation between sacred and profane, subjective and objective and rational or irrational. In a late–modern context, theoretically induced distinctions – like pilgrim (religious) and tourism (secular) – have been shown by my findings to become empirically unsustainable and theoretically unhelpful. This is acknowledged despite the marked tendency to impose order to that which is inherently ambiguous. For this reason, I have focused on the ambiguity rather than the certainty of theoretically constructed meanings. To put it more succinctly, I have so far advocated a focus on the relationship between current forms of travel as popular, spontaneous, expressions of individual (churched and unchurched) spirituality, as
well as those so–called secular values that re–enforce as well as contradict cultural (and also political) discourses.

It seems that the rekindled enthusiasm for pilgrimage today may not necessarily equate to a renewed religious vitality in Europe *per se*. That conclusion is easily reached due to the simple lack of solid quantitative data regarding pilgrimage and the difficulties involved in establishing motivation for travel. Pilgrimage thus cannot be referred to as evidence in the rebuking of the argument that secularization is here to stay (for instance Voas 2003, Voas and Bruce 2004, Bruce 2011). The little evidence I was able to present does, however, seem to bring into question the thesis that secular tourism is a modern substitute for religious belief and practice (MacCannell 1976, Grabburn 1978). The pilgrimage movement can also not be explained by the Rational Choice theorist who believes religions to be products ‘competing’ within a market economy ruled by consumers (see Stark and Bainbridge 1985, Stark 1999). Rather, this movement seems to embody the re–invention of traditions by means of capitalist forces. These forces make secular and religious discourses come into dialogue, albeit sometimes contentiously surely. In conjunction with popular and institutional forms of belief, pilgrimage has not merely survived, as it is now employed in new and innovative ways. So with this characteristic ambiguity and the difficulty offered by this mingling of meanings, the question is: how can we understand the return of the pilgrim in a secular age?

First of all, this question is broad and ambitious, much too ambitious perhaps. Hence whilst I do not refrain from trying to answer this question, I am cautious as to the power of the data presented in showing even a glimpse of the variety and sheer diversity of pilgrimage around the globe. Hence whilst I attempt to summarize the various themes we have uncovered so far, I present an answer that in the end can only offer further questions. In what is to follow I bring together themes which I believe are some of the most essential forces responsible for the resurgence of pilgrimage today, or at least for the underlying cultural impulses guiding the enthusiasm for it, at least as far as western European cultures are concerned. To make this clearer, I have devised a metaphor I called ‘the pilgrim ethos’.

The word 'pilgrim' makes reference to those forms of fluid spiritualities that seem, together with institutional religion, to have sustained, and indeed re–created an interest in places like Compostela. The word 'ethos' on the other hand refers to the ethics of a consumer culture which, together with a Christian inspired theodicy, make it possible for people to become aware of such spaces and to take part in rituals, festivities and ceremonies which would
perhaps otherwise be out of reach (closed) to non-believers or those with less awareness of religion. The word ‘ethos’ does not necessarily refer to ‘ethics’, although it might be understood as such. Nevertheless this would be a contentious discussion which space does not allow me to engage with here. The overall aim of the metaphor is to aid in the description of the intricacies of the relationship I perceive between consumer culture and religion. These two elements come together in the making of spaces which incorporate both the religious imagination and the emotions of those who take part, and the ethos of a consumer culture that transforms sacred into profane and profane into sacred. What is important is that this metaphor is not meant as an overarching, structural form through which to understand motives for pilgrimage. Rather, it is an ‘organic’ way to understand what goes on inside this complex form of movement. That is, the pilgrim ethos is not an essentialist metaphor used to tap into a core or essence of pilgrimage; due to the diversity of pilgrimage, searching for such an essence would be futile if not altogether irresponsible. What it does is show the cyclical and rather ambiguous way in which religion and consumerism in fact come to interact within such contexts. In the process it offers the opportunity to depict some of the ‘fields’ I believe would feed most pilgrimage systems. In that form, rather than deriving a typology of pilgrimages or of tourist experiences, this approach offers us the possibility of understanding pilgrimage from the study of what happens around each individual site rather than solely of what goes on inside it.

In the past, pilgrimage was an act of institutional conformity: a search for salvation, an escape from social constraints, and a way to fulfil vows, to pay for crimes or to gain indulgences (see chapter 1). Today, pilgrimage is an embodiment of sets of ethics that are as much a reaction to consumer culture as its product. At the same time it is also a reaction to forms of institutional religiosity and an affirmation of these (see part II). On the one hand, this movement rejects the uncertainty and displacement of an ever-shifting post–industrial milieu. On the other, it celebrates its diversity through consumerism. The implicit dynamics of this process could be seen as paradoxical, but this would be misleading, since in reality consumerism and religion form part of a dialectical continuum of change and renewal that is far from contradictory. These feed from one another in the making of an ethos symbolic of fast communication, ease of mobility, uncertainty and the continuous spiritual searching characteristic of our times. These processes were not created in the here and now of course, but they have been intensified by the cultural, political, economic and social ambiences of the present.

Eduardo Chemin
Based on the narratives I presented earlier, the 'pilgrim ethos' could then be summarized as a set of normative discourses disclosing popular, emotional, understandings of religion and spirituality (however defined) as well as other secular values. These are framed by a romantic ethic reflecting cultural complexities, which draw on imagined dichotomies. That is to say, the pilgrim ethos represents values that are in tune with utopian ideals of community, self–sacrifice, spirituality, emotionality and movement, at the same time that it contradicts these very same beliefs. Hence it also represents the prominence of the right of individuals, a preference for comfort, secularity, rationality and a search for roots or stability. This apparent contradiction reflects the essence of such ethos and the sense of alienation it metaphorically represents: from a technocratic world, from the ever–increasing complexity of socio–cultural processes and the ontological vacuum that sometimes grows between individuals and their environment, especially in times of great personal and cultural change. In this light, for some individuals and groups pilgrimage is a form of empowerment, a challenging of hierarchies and socially dominant parameters. For others it means the opposite. That is, for some, pilgrimage manifests in the need to get closer to God and to an institutional form of religion, a passive acceptance of one’s condition before social structures such as religious doctrine or political powers and socio–cultural boundaries. Both discourses, however, share some common points, namely the role of heritage, memory and movement in creating re–enchantment. They are bound together in an engagement with the land and the elements, an engagement which is, for some people, lacking at present.

Each individual narrative presented earlier, the stories of those who journeyed through the Camino, seems to find a certain resonance with this ethos and the ideals and contradictions it entails. For instance, in narratives concerning religion and spirituality (chapter 5) we observed a struggle between the secular dictums of day–to–day life and people’s personal and emotional beliefs and conditions. The processes involved and described by the word 'healing' (chapter 6) also showed the emotional dimension of existence and the external character of other non–rational psychological frameworks. The romantic and communitarian nature of the adventure holiday or play (chapter 8) also exposed a longing for immediately recognizable elements that gave context to personalities, history, symbolism, common goals, values, day–dreaming and romantic ideals. They also revealed opportunities for interaction, and for social solidarity: in other words the famous communitas concept that sociologists have explored so extensively, without necessarily naming it as such (for instance in Berger & Luckmann 1967, Sennett 1974).
We also saw how socio–cultural discourses were constructed through the medium of pilgrimage and the metaphors it offered (chapters 7 and 9). There we observed how discourses about purpose and meaning were communicated through places like the Camino. In this sense, places of pilgrimage could then be seen as end points of wider semantic fields – ranging from literature and the arts to popular and religious culture (see chart 13). Thus it is in the overall combination of such 'fields' that we find the materialization of the pilgrim ethos. But this is not simply a way to explain and resume motivations for pilgrimage, or even to attempt a definition of pilgrimage, or pilgrims.

This is an attempt to describe a more general mood that I believe pervades our times and which finds in pilgrimage and heritage sites a perfect reflection of its basic tenets. Such environments are a reflection, a mirror image of the broader social context in which they are embedded: not an opposing (anti–structural) reality, but an affirmation of pervasive cultural currents. For instance, producers of meaning used pilgrimage as an access point to a variety of discourses ranging from ‘the need for a more spiritual life’ to their importance as ‘places of healing’, or meaningful personal encounters. In environments where there is a marked decline in religious literacy (see Davie, 2007), most notably in Western Europe, it seems that producers of meaning become important points of reference, in so far as their work maps the position of these landscapes. In fact one could go as far as to say that, for many individuals who have grown up without any form of religious education, as well as those who have the knowledge but have grown distant from religious texts and teaching, producers of meaning often provide material for those who find themselves looking again (or for the first time) for spirituality at some point in their lives.
Like the late–modern world from which it emerges, the pilgrim ethos represents the movement and fluidity of social life and the simultaneous (and perhaps contradictory) desire to reduce its speed only by making full use of what it offers. For example, in attempting to escape the feeling of meaninglessness that some people feel, people still make use of the opportunities and possibilities offered by the technologies and industries which comprise modern tourism. Hence the ethos I describe is inherently reformist yet not necessarily activist. In other words, in a world misleadingly portrayed as 'post–ideological' the transformation sought is inner rather than outer. But this drive towards the self, that emotional and individual world, nevertheless uses landscapes as a reflection of inner states, or at least as spaces where it can be manifested and expressed; these become points of reference so to speak. Hence the way within that was often mentioned by my participants was projected on the way without, and vice–versa. The borders between the physical landscape and the cognitive maps of people’s personalities were at times blurred. The pilgrim ethos is thus projected not only onto the destination, but also onto the many paths taken to reach it.

Pilgrimage is often a lonely (personal) quest rather than a communitarian effort. Looking at pilgrim narratives, it is easy to find the impetus of a consumer culture that judges everything from the standpoint of individual desires. But rather than being detrimental to the spiritual meanings or doctrines underpinning pilgrimage, individualism seems to function as a drive for self–understanding, which may in fact motivate the person to think about the 'spiritual'
dimension of existence. Individuals (tourists, travellers, or consumers) on the Camino related to their environment, and, like the religious, they also engaged with the symbolism and metaphors of the journey as a way to construct the new (changed) self. This happens because in such environments we find a wide range of ready–made materials and metaphors that are either created or re–enforced by producers of meaning. These speak of entire epochs and of general moods rather than the immediate and specific social settings. It is part of an attitude that emphasizes values such as spirituality, healing, emotionality, sharing and community, in a world perceived as lacking the spaces in which these values can take shape. This emphasis occurs either through networks of support and social solidarity or as internalized meaning–making philosophies that stabilize individual psychologies; whether this is only perceived or, indeed, it is a reality is something we could question.

This supposed post–ideological world, often referred to as post–modernity, is a place that celebrates difference and distrusts grand–narratives or unconditional truths: from politics to religious theologies or even academic disciplines such as sociology. In this world we see consumerism, the cultural front of late–capitalism, as inducing individuals and institutions to position themselves as ‘in between’. This liminal state, the post–modern condition of being ‘betwixt and between’, always in a position to make choices, has had inevitable, although often unintended, consequences. Some of these have had a direct influence on the way people use pilgrimage sites today and why places like the Camino de Santiago are becoming more popular, not less.

People’s search adopts the same ideas that the wider social contexts demand of them. In this case the conditions favour movement and a constant re–appraising of ideas, philosophies and beliefs. This is the consumer way of engaging with religion. However this engagement is not always made ‘rationally’, as we have seen, but ‘emotionally’. That is, it is often made out of needs rather than wants. If tourism is to be thought of as epitomizing consumer (secular) culture, then it is also important to note that it is often within tourist settings that religion is also encountered, disputed, challenged, absorbed and negated: in sum, negotiated. Tourist industries use religious sites and philosophies in their enticing advertisement campaigns much the same way that religious institutions use advertising and tourist agencies to entice more people to visit their buildings and attend ceremonies.

Places like the Camino were once obscured, not only by political and economic downturns or armed conflicts like civil and world wars (see chapter 1), but also by economic barriers. They
were also buried under layers of secular discourses dominating the political structures of the continent. These come to suppress the emotional (expressive) needs of the cultures in which they are embedded. Yet such needs are never fully extinguished and they re–surface from time to time. Late–modern consumer cultures are not exempt from this rule. Through consumer acts, people who had never had contact with religion have a chance to experience it. Those more knowledgeable critically engage with the doctrines underpinning these practices, letting go of or, in fact, discovering a renewed interest in their own or other religion(s). Yet others will have a chance to live the ‘authentic myths’ that modern producers of meaning have constructed through tales of salvation, self–discovery, redemption, self–sacrifice and spiritual enlightenment.

**Pilgrimage & the Liminal Nature of Late–Modernity**

The ‘in betweeness’ or the continuous ambiguity found in these places, and which I believe is characteristic of modern (especially Western) contexts, reveals a sense of ontological indecisiveness represented in the narratives of people I studied. These come to the surface through the use of metaphors such as ‘being at the crossroads’ or ‘looking for myself’ (see chapter 7). Through the heritage found at pilgrimage sites, people and history formed a narrative of continuity between late–modern scenarios and what was often perceived as ‘solid’ or ‘rooted’ past epochs, places and landscapes. Thus a chain of memory was re–established, even if temporarily.

It is important to realize, however, that not all forms of development occurring around the world form part of a homogenous structure that we could call late–modernity. One argument, for instance, claims that there is no such thing as ‘globalization’ in the singular but ‘globalizations’ in the plural; hence no modernity as such but ‘modernities’ (Eisenstadt, 2002). To a certain extent, societies and cultures adapt to the complex processes of modernization as and when it suits their own conditions, beliefs and life–styles (Eisenstadt, 2006). Societies around the world therefore have different notions of progress, secularity, religion, politics, ideology, health, economy, class, gender and indeed destiny. Acting as a socio–cultural 'barometer', pilgrimage sites reflect such differences and continuities. Some are more focused on the community, others on the shrine or the road, on one specific deity, temple or church. As a result the socio–political meanings of these sites vary considerably, depending on what happens around them; their popularity follows cultural sensitivities and
needs. One interesting aspect of this is the importance of such sites for trans-national migrants, an issue I was unable to describe here but which deserves careful and further study.

Despite the universal appeal of pilgrimage, therefore, the specific elements comprising the context in which it emerges are distinct and particular to the cultures in which the pilgrimage is embedded. For example, it would be impossible to understand the appeal of the Camino de Santiago today without making reference to the post-industrial dependency on tourism and the various forms it adopts: the appreciation of rural landscapes, normative discourses such as environmentalist ethics, which favours a preference for self-sufficient (environmentally friendly) movement like walking holidays, new trends regarding 'unchurched' forms of spirituality, and economic conditions which may influence a movement towards more local destinations.

Thus, today, a pilgrim is not only the person who travels to a site that embodies exclusively religious elements. Because of the focus on destination, the pilgrim represents anyone embarking on a personal quest for something he or she is not always aware of. Sometimes this has to do with a need to escape; at other times it might be a need to find grounding, purpose or direction in life. Sometimes they seek religion, and at other times it is simply a call towards nature, solitude or the desire to meet other like-minded people. It is a conscious movement often carried out by sub-conscious drives. I find these drives all too often spoke of a need to find continuity in a world of discontinuities and humanity in a world of perceived dehumanizing processes. The self is the result of our relationships with others and our interaction with places and spaces. When either of these is consumed instrumentally without real grounding in anything but economic interests, then social ties may weaken leaving people with that feeling of alienation and helplessness (see Turner, 2008).89

In these circumstances, the ‘invention of ritual’ comes to supply a repository of meaning-making to deal with moments of crisis which, as noted by Durkheim, do not exclude joy. These are re-created or invented modern ‘traditions’ that give the individual a glimpse of holism in times of need which does not exclude celebration or entertainment (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983: 8). Of course, it would be a mistake to look at pilgrimage in its entirety as an invented ritual. Yet places like Compostela have certainly gained new meanings which were

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89 A similar point is made by Brian S. Turner in his celebrated re-appraisal of Sociology. He states that what he calls the ‘erosion of bodily metaphors in contemporary society’, which for him is ‘...an index of the alienation of our embodiment in technological society, where social life is disrupted by risk and regulation’ [on-line]: http://www.iasc–culture.org/HHR_Archives/Body/3.2CTurner.pdf – accessed 10/10/11

Eduardo Chemin 293
not always present in earlier times. In a way, such meanings are reactive to the sense of chaos characteristic of late–capitalism: to the continuous socio–cognitive ‘crossroads’ inherent in consumer culture. In John McDargh’s work we find for instance that ‘...being empty, disconnected, and somehow out of contact with...their own interiority or the world of others around them...’ is caused by ‘...precisely the lack of a capacity to live out our feelings that is linked to the haunting sense of meaninglessness’ (McDargh 1992:5–6, see also Giddens 1991).

From the outside, late–modern societies may seem stable places providing security and well–being to individuals. But this widely taken–for–granted ideal does not explain why there is a ‘gut–feeling’ that there is ‘something that is not quite right’. Societies are ever changing, but consumer capitalism renders these changes more unbalanced, unequal, unstable and unpredictable. In this light, 'late modern liminality' expands into the realms of everyday life. Places like the Camino de Santiago become important in the sense that they provide the possibility of coherence, between subjective psychological needs and the objective world 'out there'. In this sense:

...if the liminal ritual process in the pre–modern situation can revitalize the existing social structures for the participants, the late modern liminal ritual process can have the potential to help the participants bear the lack of such...polyphony and insecurity can be shared and mirrored (Stalhandske, 2005:211).

There are many consequences of this idea for our understanding of pilgrimage. One of them indicates that Edith and Victor Turner’s understanding of liminality (see chapter 3) was perhaps fitting for societies based on hierarchical and production–based economies (medieval as well as early modern). With the fluidity of late (or post–) modern living, liminality comes to mean not the temporary condition exemplified by rituals, but rather the opposite. Liminality is what characterizes our daily living, at least on this side of the world (see Chemin, forthcoming). It is in rituals that we find confirmation, presence and established routines, which counteract the daily 'in betweeness' of those who live in consumer cultures. In more traditional societies, pilgrimage fulfilled functions such as providing a rite de passage, as Arnold van Gennep suggested (1908), or an escape from structure, as the Turners contended (1978). But in post–industrial contexts, pilgrimage becomes an attempt to simplify things, to reduce the speed of normal day–to–day life, to escape the frantic routines of that
life, and the pressures and polyphony of meanings inherent in a present that, for many, feels less authentic than what has gone before.

**Place & Memory: Anchoring the Self**

To a certain extent, I am pointing to the importance of pilgrimage and heritage sites as a way people may find of ‘anchoring’ the self to a specific context, time and place. If people are seduced to go somewhere, it is often the case that they want to leave something behind – at least temporarily. The development of pilgrimages in the medieval period was a consequence of many different factors (see chapter 1). None of them, however, pointed to a longing for ancient forms of rituals symbolized or marked by what we now call ‘heritage’, an essentially modern construct. It is this that seems to be particularly ‘modern’ about modern pilgrimage sites. People going there often replicate the behaviour of people living in other epochs, buildings are preserved in their ‘original’ state – or as close to it as possible – and ceremonies, texts, costumes, ways of behaving and traditions more broadly are either seen as ‘authentic’ or as ‘inauthentic’.

I am of course broadening the scope of what pilgrimage and heritage sites signify. But we ought to imagine these places within the realms of not only local cultures but entire social systems, for they are not ‘exceptional’ (odd) phenomena in late–modern contexts but rather constitutive of it. By looking at these sites we observe a consumer culture that is not necessarily incompatible with religious traditions. Indeed a whole range of commentators have pointed to the importance of pilgrimage as a form of post–modern religious expression (see Chapter 3). Hence places of pilgrimage are examples of the sacralisation of landscapes and symbols, which occurs alongside a commercialization of religious heritage.

As with any other instance of consumer culture, the identity of these sites is constantly re–worked so it is difficult to provide fixed points and certainties. It incorporates a variety of motivations expressed by a multitude of different visitors (see typologies offered by Cohen and Morinis in chapter 3). Yet because these spaces are embedded within differentiated socio–cultural, economic and socio–psychological norms, we must understand them as forming a movement towards the basic, core, elements these places represent. As British historian Jonathan Sumption acknowledges, besides a call towards places of high spiritual power, pilgrimages in the past offered escape. What this tells us is that pilgrimage needs to be incorporated as one facet of a wider movement of cultural forms that see in such places a

Eduardo Chemin
reflection of particular social and cultural conditions. Thus whereas pilgrimage once provided escape from social constraints, it seems to now be sought as a way to engage with structures and, through this process, to find meaning. Today the idea that one can escape life by coming into contact with places where the past is not just an idea but a material (if rather idealized) reality, has been noted as crucial in the marketing of these places (see chapter 9). Again, heritage (broadly defined), becomes central to such romantic notions of a simpler, more authentic, existence. Even supra-national institutions like the European Union are keen to use heritage to create a cultural membrane of ‘shared’ values, origins, ideals and destiny. Since the Lisbon Treaty, the E.U has become an officially secular institution. Yet it makes extensive use of Christian heritage to promote unification and political expansion through the supposed shared values this heritage represent (see Smith et al, 2010 for a discussion on the value of heritage). It is, however, difficult to talk about such ideals and values without entering a discussion on ethics.

Movement as 'Heterotopia': Mirroring Society

Perhaps it is better to think of modern pilgrims as those who move towards not a subjective utopia as such but rather a ‘heterotopia’ (Foucault 1998). Viewing them as such allows these spaces to be mythic and real, whilst simultaneously re-enforcing and contesting the rules of the broader space in which people live. Through the act of self-sufficient movement, people contradict some aspects of modern living, for instance speed and efficiency. That said, the tourist also uses late-modern structures, embracing economic opportunities, technology and all that comes with it without questioning. If we consider the many different types of tourist experiences and travellers, any suggestion of a distinction between the two become irrelevant, as such theoretically constructed boundaries become indeed blurred. This occurs as a result of the overlapping motivations that both tourists and pilgrims display. This overlapping of fields is common also in other international pilgrimage and tourist sites (for examples see MacCannell 1976, Kaelber 2002, Digance 2006, 2006a, 2006b, Rocha 2006, Rountree 2006, Schutt 2006, Timothy and Olsen 2006).

So if in late-modernity everyone is a tourist, as Bauman (1993) would have us believe, then where is home? If we are displaced beings immune to crises of conscience, consumers in an incessant quest for fulfilment and if every new destination seems to be a replica of the last, then what happens to our ideals of dwelling? Do we need one? ‘Life’, says Bauman, ‘...is the
tourist’s ‘haunt’” (1993:244). What he is conveying, with some hyperbole, is a post–modern ethic based on fragmentation of identities, a ‘liquid’ world in which everything is up for grabs. The very concept of community is just that: a concept. In this landscape the figure of the pilgrim, the wanderer who never settles down for long enough to build ties, is distinctive. As opposed to the tourist, the pilgrim has a destination, an ideological project. Whilst the Turners saw pilgrimages as spaces on the ‘fringes’ of society, the idealization of such movement and the metaphorical value of the vagabond pilgrim – and consequently the tourist – becomes central for our understanding of religious and consumer patterns in late-modernity, not peripheral. As Bauman states:

In the postmodern world, the vagabond and the tourist are no more marginal people or marginal conditions. They turn into moulds destined to engross and shape the totality of life and the whole of a quotidianity; patterns by which all practices are measured (1993: 242).

Bauman equals the pilgrim with the post–modern being who walks through social spaces without engaging with anything or anyone. He uses this metaphor to describe the shifting nature of personalities and identities within landscapes that reflect such personalities. Like the aimless wanderer walking on the shifting sands of a desert, his footprints quickly disappear with the action of the wind: nothing is left behind and there is no lasting point of reference. But despite the importance of these metaphors, I believe Bauman misses an important point. In this structural conformity there is much room for non–conformity. That is, the pilgrim is not simply a reflection of such apocryphal times; he or she is an individual seeking a way out of these perceived currents of uncertainty.

Anthropologist Arnold van Gennep has described ‘rites of passage’ as ‘all the ceremonial patterns which accompany a passage from one situation to another or from one cosmic or social world to another’ (1960:10). I would like to suggest that in a time of acute and very rapid transformation, the increasing movement towards ancient sites perhaps reflects an awareness of sentiments lying under the surface. One of the most important themes to emerge from this study was the willingness people showed to understand the walk as a metaphor. In this sense, the pilgrimage is in many ways the symbolic representation of the wider trends I have discussed in previous chapters. Pilgrimage sites and those who visit them should not, therefore, be kept on the fringes of sociological understandings of religion, as they are part of more central dialogues occurring within socio–scientific circles. The pilgrim ethos cannot be considered in isolation, confined to sets of ethics framing one particular
tourist or religious experience. If Bauman is correct in his assumption and we are all tourists in a rapidly shifting world – a world in which people are now in search of their own individual paths – then such an ethos becomes the ethos of our epoch. Its ambiguity reflects our ambiguity, its search our search and its spaces reflect the ambiguity of our secular rationality and spiritual longing. In that case pilgrimage is the opposite from what the Turner’s called 'anti-structure'. Pilgrimage is a mirror of society and not a utopia that builds on its opposite characteristics.

It is within this context that the experience of walking the Camino gains currency. It becomes a ritualistic way people find to engage with existential questioning, but also to find sources of ontological security whilst escaping reality only by replicating it elsewhere. To understand the motivation for pilgrimage in a late–modern context and to get to the heart of every pilgrimage, one must therefore acknowledge that at the end point of such a journey there often lies a door that can lead the person through to an imaginary world. This world is a ‘heterotopia’ where past and present conflate, where people connect to ‘something bigger than themselves’ and yet remain as individuals, where the contradictions and ambiguity of late–modern contexts are mirrored through contestation, selfless communitarian acts, consumption, religion, movement, crossing boundaries and dwellings. Thus the simultaneously imagined and real landscapes, and the sense of wholeness implied by them, do not equate simply to a feeling of community or connection to other fellow travellers or even a simple (romantic) feeling of nostalgia. It is a sense of connection to those who were there before them and those who are yet to come. It is a connection to an organic form of life that is perceived to be far removed from the artificial cultural systems created in consumer contexts, but which in reality is just as dependent on it as any other form of tourism.

The question remains, however: why pilgrimage sites and not elsewhere? And there is no one answer or ‘Holy Grail’ to be found here. On a macro–structural level, the best argument I can present is that such sites are not antagonistic to late–modernity but, in fact, constitutive of it. Consumer trends advocating ‘healthy living’, improvements in tourist infrastructure and the marketing and framing of heritage by commercial and political agencies, are just some of the structural changes facilitating the growth of visitors to pilgrimage sites in Europe. But there is another and important dimension to this. The impulse to go on pilgrimages often occurs in the conflation of personal meanings referring to text, biography, place and time. To go on a pilgrimage is to engage with those forces which guide us through our daily lives, but which we often ignore or put aside in order to establish ‘normality’. The impulse for

Eduardo Chemin

298
pilgrimage occurs in that space between the rational and the irrational, the conscious and the sub-conscious, the sacred and profane. So the impulse for pilgrimage has, sometimes, more to do with the place of departure than the destination: that is, a place often becomes seductive when it speaks of things we lack or would like to improve at home.

**The Road Walked & the Way Ahead**

There is, of course, much more that could be said about our relationship with these places and the impulse to visit them. I have been guilty of using a range of metaphors to enhance the meaning of pilgrimage. I have done this consciously, however, for my intention was to grasp the ineffable qualities of pilgrimage, those emotional dimensions of experience which are rarely tapped into by quantitative studies. To a certain extent, one of my aims was to describe and interpret the imagination that sustains the experience of going on a pilgrimage. This I think was accomplished only with a certain degree of success. Tapping into the symbolic – yet real – value of metaphors was a good resource. However, many are the situations and circumstances that drive people to go to places like Compostela and metaphors, as fitting as they might be, cannot represent the variety of human emotions found in pilgrimage. Indeed motives are at times so difficult to judge and to understand that one would be making vague speculations rather than producing proper social scientific analysis if trying to describe them. There are so many stories, and so many ways one could tell these stories, that the whole process of researching and writing about pilgrimage can be indeed overwhelming.

In the remainder of this chapter I point to some of the issues which I believe have escaped my analysis. This occurred either due to questions regarding space and time, or because I felt the issue was located outside the boundaries of this research. However, I believe these are important issues which need more thorough investigation, some of which are already being (or will soon be) addressed by specialist and multi-disciplinary academic networks (see chapter 4), which now form the bourgeoning field of pilgrimage studies.

*Gender:* undoubtedly one of the most important and interesting aspects of modern pilgrimage is the importance of women for the vitality of these sites. Not only has the presence of female participants in these sites increased (the Camino being a good example), but also attention has been given to the role of women in the organization and running of these places and events. There is therefore room for a better conceptualization of the important relationship between gender, religion and pilgrimage. There are a variety of studies in the field that point
to the importance of women, not only in the making of these spaces, but also as the true guardians of religious traditions (see Woodhead 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, Sointu & Woodhead 2008, Aune et al 2008, Hermkens et al 2009). This is nothing new, for it seems to mirror women’s equally important role in the maintenance and progressive nature of traditional and new forms of religious activity in Europe and beyond (see Heelas & Woodhead 2005a, 2005b). But it would require a whole new approach, for it is a complex subject requiring an altogether different set of tools than the ones I used in the making of the present study.

*The Institutionalization of Place*: it is also clear that I have given a considerable amount of attention to the emotional aspect of religious expression and the intricacies of spaces which are at once, sacred and profane. But another study using the same material could consider the more political aspect of modern pilgrimage, from the institutions responsible for its advertisement and religious, commercial, ethnic and cultural meanings to the global forces acting to make it a popular and well–attended event. In chapter 9 I was only able to scratch the surface by pointing to some popular cultural currents that seem to influence the popularization of the Camino de Santiago. But there is a lot more that could be said, for instance with regards to the European Union’s incorporation of Christian heritage as part of a (secular) European Culture. Again, in my view, this issue deserves a more dedicated space in order to be fully developed. There is also much that could be said with regards to the competing discourses inherent in such spaces, such as between tourist agencies and the religious authorities, between pilgrims and ‘tourists’, global trends and needs of those who live in or around these sites, to cite but a few.

Throughout this work I have been sympathetic to these issues but unfortunately I could only give them a marginal place in my analysis as my main concern was the motivations of pilgrims, so such issues do not always feature prominently on that micro level. My search for the essence of pilgrimage and hence a more integrated and polished view of this phenomenon in the end excluded some other important and related issues. My intention, however, was not to obscure such problems, but rather to focus on one aspect of social theory which I believe is very important as a starting point for understanding the re–kindled enthusiasm for such forms of experience in late–modern contexts: that is, the blurring of boundaries between sacred and profane, the religious and the secular, movement and place and so on by what we come to understand as consumer culture. This focus has inevitably narrowed my view and restricted me from engaging with these other issues.

Eduardo Chemin
Pilgrimage, Migration & the Spatiality of Religion: new research in the field is progressively uncovering a wealth of places in inner city and rural areas, where a range of religious ‘events’ are performed and adapted to the new lives of transnational migrants. These places and spaces are often considered ‘shrines’ by those who visit them. As such they comply with many of the elements used for the categorization or typologization of more traditional pilgrimage sites that I presented in chapter 3. Pilgrimage and migration, in my view, is a field which will grow in importance and which deserves appropriate (focused) attention. Regrettably here I can also only make a passing mention of shrines that are attended by a variety of faiths who co–exist in the sprawling ‘global cities’ like London, Paris or Amsterdam, for example. In these places it seems there is an apparent coexistence of beliefs and practices – places such as Glastonbury exemplify the case well. A multitude of people visit these places, people often belonging to different religious traditions or having no religious belief at all. These people transform such places into hybrid (open) spaces, which are scattered all over the European continent, a phenomenon that is today partly powered by a return of New–Age informed pre–Christian (pagan) faiths and consumer trends (including marketing campaigns), which bring such places to the public eye. This movement includes Eastern European societies, where [re–]engagement with old and new traditions is taking place (see Radisavljević–Ćiparizović, 2010). These practices often take the shape of pilgrimages to holy wells, stone formations, forests, rivers, mountains, hills and lakes: in sum, a variety of natural and man–made landscapes and spaces, which have kept traditions and habits alive and well before, during and after Communism. The very opening up of European (eastern) borders and the movement of people from former communist countries into the western part of Europe is conversely also having an effect on Western European societies by re–shaping the religious landscape of places like Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Spain. This has had an effect on the number of pilgrimage sites (traditional or those newly created) springing (back) to life and others being newly established.

Mapping the Terrain: despite my attempt to survey places of pilgrimage and heritage or spiritual importance in Europe more broadly (chapter 2), this was a simple attempt to describe a much broader phenomena I believe is taking place in Europe and which relates to two main points: 1) the re–gained centrality of heritage for individuals, communities, governments and supra–national institutions, and 2) the importance of religious tourism for the economic vitality of local and global economies. In my view there is a growing need to map this territory by updating the work of those who have conducted research in this field.
(Nolan & Nolan, 1989 for example). In Western Europe, as well as the former communist Eastern Europe, there are hundreds of thousands of sites which are yet to be studied. Here I have only given a small indication as to the magnitude and importance of this movement. A longitudinal study (or a multiplicity of studies) focusing on cataloguing and detailed analysis of these sites and the number of people who visit them, in my opinion, would be vital for a better sociological understanding of modern-day pilgrimage. This of course would require a much broader (collaborative) multi-disciplinary work and a variety of regional and supra-national research funding opportunities – none of which is easy to achieve.

Finally, here I have only pointed to some possible links between theory and reality and to what I perceive to be a growing interest in pilgrimage and heritage sites. The purpose of this study has been to capture a ‘mood’: a feeling that pilgrimage today embodies the contradictions of our time by mirroring it and absorbing a variety of discourses, which are not dissonant with what is happening elsewhere in the broader spheres of the daily life of those who take part in such rituals. I have done this by looking at one site (the Camino de Santiago) specifically, and by focusing my gaze even further at one specific group of people (British participants). Issues raised here may therefore seem, at best, only pertinent to the study of that site alone. In my view, however, this movement has wider consequences, implications and applications, as it is evident that it cannot be conceptualized without a better understanding of the new ways in which religion, spirituality and all associated terms conditions and contexts relate to ideas of community, sacredness, dwelling, movement and consumer cultures. The crucial factors to be addressed for this are the spatial dimensions of religion, the geography of religious emotion, those places where the secular is intrinsically constitutive of the religious and vice-versa, and the many fields which feed into this: migration, faith, consumerism, health, tourism, heritage and politics, to mention but a few. It remains to be seen whether this approach could be applied to the study of other locations and other cultures. Hence the issues I raised here require altogether new and more encompassing studies, but this would necessitate a much longer and challenging journey, and my trail ends at this point.
Appendix A: List of Participants According to Order of Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Code</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Participant Chosen Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Place of Residence</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Civil Status</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Religious Affiliation (if any)</th>
<th>Mode of Transport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>001</td>
<td>Zubiri, Navarra – Spain (22/05/09)</td>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>Reading, United Kingdom</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Retired Teacher/ English Teacher</td>
<td>Church of England (not–practising)</td>
<td>Walking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>002</td>
<td>San Juan de Ortega, León – Spain (03/06/2009)</td>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>Lewis, United Kingdom</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>None (Atheist)</td>
<td>Bicycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>003</td>
<td>Burgos, León – Spain (04/06/2009)</td>
<td>David</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>Cambridge, United Kingdom</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>University Administrator</td>
<td>None (Agnostic)</td>
<td>Walking</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### Interview Code: 004 – conducted at El Burgo Ranero, León – Spain (10/06/2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Chosen Pseudonym:</th>
<th>Rosa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Age:</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender:</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality:</td>
<td>British</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of Residence:</td>
<td>Liverpool, United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnicity:</td>
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<td>Civil Status:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occupation:</td>
<td>Retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Affiliation (if any):</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode of Transport:</td>
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### Interview Code: 005 – conducted at Hospital de Orbigo, León – Spain (19/06/2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Chosen Pseudonym:</th>
<th>Tony B.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age:</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender:</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality:</td>
<td>British</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of Residence:</td>
<td>Cornwall, United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnicity:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Civil Status:</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation:</td>
<td>Businessmen (ex–hotel business executive)</td>
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<td>Religious Affiliation (if any):</td>
<td>Roman Catholic (not practising)</td>
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<td>Mode of Transport:</td>
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### Interview Code: 006 – conducted at Hospital de Orbigo, León – Spain (19/06/2009)

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<tr>
<th>Participant Chosen Pseudonym:</th>
<th>Julie Connaway</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Gender:</td>
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<td>Nationality:</td>
<td>British</td>
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<tr>
<td>Place of Residence:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnicity:</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Civil Status:</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation:</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Affiliation (if any):</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode of Transport:</td>
<td>Walking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Code</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>007</td>
<td>Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>008</td>
<td>Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>009</td>
<td>Balsa /Triacastella, Galicia – Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>010</td>
<td>Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Participant Chosen Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Place of Residence</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Civil Status</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Religious Affiliation (if any)</th>
<th>Mode of Transport</th>
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<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>Brussels, Belgium</td>
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<td>Consultant (Aviation)</td>
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<td>Walking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>Leicester, United Kingdom</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>In between careers</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Walking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Right</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>London, United Kingdom / Triacastella, Spain</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Ex– Police Officer (Now Full–Time Artist/Painter)</td>
<td>Christian – Baptist</td>
<td>Walking (But is now settled on the Camino de Santiago)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>Madrid, Spain</td>
<td>White</td>
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Eduardo Chemin
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Mode of Transport:</td>
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**Interview Code: 011** – conducted at Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain (05/08/2009)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Participant Chosen Pseudonym:</th>
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<td>Gender:</td>
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<td>Nationality:</td>
<td>British</td>
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<td>Place of Residence:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occupation:</td>
<td>Bartender</td>
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<td>Religious Affiliation (if any):</td>
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<td>Mode of Transport:</td>
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**Interview Code: 012** – conducted at Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain (06/08/2009)

<table>
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<th>Participant Chosen Pseudonym:</th>
<th>Pete</th>
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<tr>
<td>Gender:</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>Nationality:</td>
<td>British</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of Residence:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnicity:</td>
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<td>Civil Status:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occupation:</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
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<td>Religious Affiliation (if any):</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
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<td>Mode of Transport:</td>
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**Interview Code: 013** – conducted at Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain (07/08/2009)

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<th>Participant Chosen Pseudonym:</th>
<th>Nick B.</th>
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<td>Age:</td>
<td>29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nationality:</td>
<td>British</td>
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<tr>
<td>Place of Residence:</td>
<td>Madrid, Spain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnicity:</td>
<td>White</td>
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<td>Civil Status:</td>
<td>Single</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occupation:</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious Affiliation (if any):</td>
<td>Christian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mode of Transport:</td>
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**Interview Code: 014** – conducted at Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain (08/08/2009)

Participant Chosen Pseudonym: El Peregrino  
Age: 59  
Gender: Male  
Nationality: Irish  
Place of Residence: Madrid, Spain  
Ethnicity: Celtic/White  
Civil Status: Single  
Occupation: Writer/Teacher/Storyteller  
Religious Affiliation (if any): Catholic  
Mode of Transport: Walking

**Interview Code: 015** – conducted at Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain (08/08/2009)

Participant Chosen Pseudonym: John  
Age: 58  
Gender: Male  
Nationality: British  
Place of Residence: Bridge North; United Kingdom  
Ethnicity: White  
Civil Status: Married  
Occupation: Head Teacher  
Religious Affiliation (if any): Catholic  
Mode of Transport: Walking

**Interview Code: 016** – conducted at Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain (09/08/2009)

Participant Chosen Pseudonym: Thomas  
Age: 21  
Gender: Male  
Nationality: British  
Place of Residence: York, United Kingdom  
Ethnicity: White  
Civil Status: Single  
Occupation: Student  
Religious Affiliation (if any): Catholic  
Mode of Transport: Walking

**Interview Code: 017** – conducted at Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain (09/08/2009)

Participant Chosen Pseudonym: Neil Cattel  
Age: 30  
Gender: Male  
Nationality: British/Bermuda  
Place of Residence: York, United Kingdom  
Ethnicity: White
Civil Status: Single
Occupation: Student
Religious Affiliation (if any): None
Mode of Transport: Walking

**Interview Code: 018** – conducted at Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain (09/08/2009)

Participant Chosen Pseudonym: Simon
Age: 21
Gender: Male
Nationality: British
Place of Residence: York/Taunton, United Kingdom
Ethnicity: White
Civil Status: Single
Occupation: Student
Religious Affiliation (if any): Agnostic/Christian, Church of England
Mode of Transport: Walking

**Interview Code: 019** – conducted at Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain (12/08/2009)

Participant Chosen Pseudonym: Pablo
Age: 30
Gender: Male
Nationality: British
Place of Residence: Swindon, United Kingdom
Ethnicity: White
Civil Status: Single
Occupation: Journalist
Religious Affiliation (if any): None
Mode of Transport: Walking

**Interview Code: 020** – conducted at Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain (13/08/2009)

Participant Chosen Pseudonym: Shizuoka
Age: 28
Gender: Female
Nationality: British
Place of Residence: Croydon, United Kingdom
Ethnicity: White
Civil Status: Single
Occupation: Teacher
Religious Affiliation (if any): Christian (But not practising)
Mode of Transport: Walking
Interview Code: 021 – conducted at Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain (13/08/2009)

Participant Chosen Pseudonym: Brian
Age: 36
Gender: Male
Nationality: British
Place of Residence: Belfast, United Kingdom
Ethnicity: White
Civil Status: Single
Occupation: Transitions Officer
Religious Affiliation (if any): Catholic
Mode of Transport: Cycling

Interview Code: 022 – conducted at Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain (14/08/2009)

Participant Chosen Pseudonym: Dorothy Robertson
Age: 23
Gender: Female
Nationality: British
Place of Residence: Derby, United Kingdom
Ethnicity: White
Civil Status: Single
Occupation: Student
Religious Affiliation (if any): None
Mode of Transport: Cycling

Interview Code: 023 – conducted at Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain (14/08/2009)

Participant Chosen Pseudonym: Rob in
Age: 23
Gender: Male
Nationality: British
Place of Residence: Bath, United Kingdom
Ethnicity: White
Civil Status: Single
Occupation: Student.
Religious Affiliation (if any): None
Mode of Transport: Cycling

Interview Code: 024 – conducted at Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain (16/08/2009)

Participant Chosen Pseudonym: Bob Marley
Age: 29
Gender: Female
Nationality: British
Place of Residence: Paris, France
Ethnicity: White
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<td>Mode of Transport:</td>
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**Interview Code: 025** – conducted at Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain (18/08/2009)

| Participant Chosen Pseudonym: | Patrick Masters |
| Age:                           | 49            |
| Gender:                        | Male          |
| Nationality:                   | British       |
| Place of Residence:            | Norfolk, United Kingdom |
| Ethnicity:                     | White         |
| Civil Status:                  | Single        |
| Occupation:                    | Builder       |
| Religious Affiliation (if any): | Catholic |
| Mode of Transport:             | Walking       |

| Civil Status:       | Single       |
| Occupation:        | Builder      |
| Religious Affiliation (if any): | None |
| Mode of Transport: | Walking |

**Interview Code: 026** – conducted at Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain (18/08/2009)

| Participant Chosen Pseudonym: | Melanie |
| Age:                           | 43      |
| Gender:                        | Female  |
| Nationality:                   | British |
| Place of Residence:            | Darlington, United Kingdom |
| Ethnicity:                     | White   |
| Civil Status:                  | Single  |
| Occupation:                    | Teacher |
| Religious Affiliation (if any): | None |
| Mode of Transport:             | Cycling |

**Interview Code: 027** – conducted at Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain (18/08/2009)

| Participant Chosen Pseudonym: | Peter |
| Age:                           | 62    |
| Gender:                        | Male  |
| Nationality:                   | British |
| Place of Residence:            | Montpellier, France |
| Ethnicity:                     | White |
| Civil Status:                  | Married |
| Occupation:                    | Tour Guide |
| Religious Affiliation (if any): | None |
| Mode of Transport:             | Cycling |
Interview Code: 028 – conducted at Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain (19/08/2009)

Participant Chosen Pseudonym: Lynsey
Age: 26
Gender: Female
Nationality: British
Place of Residence: Coatbridge, United Kingdom
Ethnicity: White
Civil Status: Single
Occupation: Bank Clerk
Religious Affiliation (if any): Catholic
Mode of Transport: Walking

Interview Code: 029 – conducted at Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain (19/08/2009)

Participant Chosen Pseudonym: Laura Coutts
Age: 27
Gender: Female
Nationality: British
Place of Residence: Glasgow, United Kingdom
Ethnicity: White
Civil Status: Single
Occupation: Finance
Religious Affiliation (if any): Protestant
Mode of Transport: Walking

Interview Code: 030 – conducted at Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain (21/08/2009)

Participant Chosen Pseudonym: John Beattle/ Gill Beatlle
Age: 57/58
Gender: Male/Female
Nationality: British/Canadian
Place of Residence: Toronto
Ethnicity: White
Civil Status: Married
Occupation: Engineer/Teacher (Both retired now).
Religious Affiliation (if any): Christian non–denominational
Mode of Transport: Walking

Interview Code: 031 – conducted at Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain (22/08/2009)

Participant Chosen Pseudonym: D. Fergus
Age: 48
Gender: Male
Nationality: British
Place of Residence: Edinburgh, United Kingdom
Ethnicity: White
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<td>Mode of Transport:</td>
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**Interview Code: 032** – conducted at Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain (23/08/2009)

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<td>Occupation:</td>
<td>Actor</td>
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<td>Religious Affiliation (if any):</td>
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<td>Mode of Transport:</td>
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**Interview Code: 033** – conducted at Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain (27/08/2009)

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Age:</td>
<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occupation:</td>
<td>Nurse/Conference Organizer/Events.</td>
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<td>Mode of Transport:</td>
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**Interview Code: 034** – conducted at Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain (27/08/2009)

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<tr>
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<td>Gender:</td>
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<td>Nationality:</td>
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<td>Civil Status:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occupation:</td>
<td>Artist</td>
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<td>Religious Affiliation (if any):</td>
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<td>Interview Code</td>
<td>Place of Interview</td>
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<tr>
<td>035</td>
<td>Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain (28/08/09)</td>
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<tr>
<td>036</td>
<td>Exeter – England (19/10/09)</td>
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<td>-----------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occupation:</td>
<td>Chartered engineer/entrepreneur</td>
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<td>Religious Affiliation (if any):</td>
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<td>Mode of Transport:</td>
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**Interview Code: 039** – conducted at Shrewsbury, England (25/10/09)

<table>
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<th>Participant Chosen Pseudonym:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Gender:</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Occupation:</td>
<td>Builder/Audiologist</td>
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**Interview Code: 040** – conducted at Leamington Spa – England (11/11/09)

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<td>Place of Residence:</td>
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<td>Religious Affiliation (if any):</td>
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<td>Mode of Transport:</td>
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**Interview Code: 041** – Conducted on–line (22/08/2009)

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<th>David</th>
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<td>Gender:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occupation:</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
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<td>Religious Affiliation (if any):</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mode of Transport:</td>
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Interview Code: 042 – conducted at Villafranca del Bierzo, León – Spain (22/08/2009);
Brackley, Oxfordshire – U.K.; and On–line.

Participant Chosen Pseudonym: John Knight.
Age: 73
Gender: Male
Nationality: British
Place of Residence: Brackley, United Kingdom
Ethnicity: White
Civil Status: Married
Occupation: Anglican Minister
Religious Affiliation (if any): Anglican
Mode of Transport: Walking

Interview Code: 043 – conducted at Birmingham – United Kingdom (10/10/2009)

Participant Chosen Pseudonym: Michael
Age: 26
Gender: Male
Nationality: British
Place of Residence: Birmingham, United Kingdom
Ethnicity: White
Civil Status: Single
Occupation: Student
Religious Affiliation (if any): Protestant
Mode of Transport: Walking

Interview Code: 44 – conducted at Stella – Spain in (April 2010)

Participant Chosen Pseudonym: Wendy
Age: 50
Gender: Female
Nationality: British
Place of Residence: London, United Kingdom
Ethnicity: White
Civil Status: Single
Occupation: Psychotherapist
Religious Affiliation (if any): Church of England
Mode of Transport: Walking

Interview Code: 45 – conducted at Logroño – Spain (April 2010)

Participant Chosen Pseudonym: Peter
Age: 25
Gender: Male
Nationality: British
Place of Residence: Liverpool, United Kingdom
Ethnicity: White
Civil Status: Single
Occupation: Unemployed
Religious Affiliation (if any): None
Mode of Transport: Walking

Interview 46 – conducted at Viloria De La Rioja – Spain (April 2010)

Participant Chosen Pseudonym: Lucy
Age: 56
Gender: Female
Nationality: British
Place of Residence: Salisbury, United Kingdom
Ethnicity: White
Civil Status: Single
Occupation: Educator
Religious Affiliation (if any): Church of England
Mode of Transport: Walking

Interview 47 – conducted at St. Juan D’ Ortega – Spain in (April 2010)

Participant Chosen Pseudonym: John
Age: 24
Gender: Male
Nationality: British
Place of Residence: London, United Kingdom
Ethnicity: White
Civil Status: Single
Occupation: Environmental Sciences Student / English Language Teacher
Religious Affiliation (if any): None
Mode of Transport: Walking

Interview 48 – conducted at León– Spain in (April 2010)

Participant Chosen Pseudonym: Michelle
Age: 59
Gender: Female
Nationality: British
Place of Residence: Edinburgh, United Kingdom
Ethnicity: White
Civil Status: Single
Occupation: Religious Sister, volunteer, educator
Religious Affiliation (if any): Catholic
Mode of Transport: Walking
**Interview 49** – conducted at Villar De Mazarife– Spain in (April 2010)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Participant Chosen Pseudonym</th>
<th>Jimmy</th>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td>Nationality</td>
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<td>Occupation</td>
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<td>Mode of Transport</td>
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**Interview 50** – conducted at Villar De Mazarife– Spain in (April 2010)

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<tr>
<th>Participant Chosen Pseudonym</th>
<th>Edward</th>
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<td>Nationality</td>
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<td>Occupation</td>
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<td>Mode of Transport</td>
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**Interview 51** – conducted at Villar De Mazarife– Spain in (April 2010)

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<th>Participant Chosen Pseudonym</th>
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<td>Place of Residence</td>
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<td>Civil Status</td>
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<td>Religious Affiliation (if any)</td>
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<td>Mode of Transport</td>
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**Interview 52** – conducted at Astorga – Spain in (April 2010)

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<tr>
<th>Participant Chosen Pseudonym</th>
<th>Jenny</th>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>61</td>
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<td>Female</td>
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<td>Nationality</td>
<td>British</td>
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</table>
Place of Residence: Salisbury, United Kingdom
Ethnicity: White
Civil Status: Single
Occupation: Nurse, Psychologist and councillor
Religious Affiliation (if any): Church of England
Mode of Transport: Walking

**Interview 53** – conducted at Ponferrada – Spain (April 2010)

Participant Chosen Pseudonym: Jackie
Age: 19
Gender: Female
Nationality: British
Place of Residence: London, United Kingdom
Ethnicity: White
Civil Status: Single
Occupation: Student
Religious Affiliation (if any): None
Mode of Transport: Walking

**Interview 54** – conducted at Ponferrada – Spain (April 2010)

Participant Chosen Pseudonym: Lisa
Age: 19
Gender: Female
Nationality: British
Place of Residence: Leeds, United Kingdom
Ethnicity: White
Civil Status: Single
Occupation: Student
Religious Affiliation (if any): Not Known
Mode of Transport: Walking

**Interview 55** – conducted at Ponferrada – Spain (April 2010)

Participant Chosen Pseudonym: Sarah
Age: 19
Gender: Female
Nationality: British
Place of Residence: Huddersfield, United Kingdom
Ethnicity: White
Civil Status: Single
Occupation: Student
Religious Affiliation (if any): Not Known
Mode of Transport: Walking
Participant Chosen Pseudonym: Helen
Age: 21
Gender: Female
Nationality: British
Place of birth: Leeds, United Kingdom
Ethnicity: White
Civil Status: Single
Occupation: Student (Santiago)
Religious Affiliation (if any): Not Known
Mode of Transport: Walking
Appendix B: Consent Form for Participants

A Sociological Study of British Pilgrims on the Way to Santiago de Compostela

This research aims to understand the motivations of those who join the pilgrimage to Compostela in an attempt to identify relationships between traditional and new forms of religiosity, spiritualism, mysticism, and other philosophies and traditions being affected by secularising forces. In this I intend to conduct qualitative research amongst pilgrims hoping to capture some of the implicit themes and discourses inherent within the structure of a Catholic pilgrimage.

Confidentiality

Interview tapes and transcripts will be held in confidence. They will not be used other than for the purposes described on this form and in the accompanying letter. Third parties will not be allowed to access them (except in the case of legal subpoena). If you request it (below), you will be sent a copy of your interview transcript so that you can comment on and edit it as you see fit.

Anonymity

I will be interviewing you in your public role as a writer and speaker, so I should very much like to use your name and the name of your organisation in my final report. However, if you would prefer to remain anonymous then you can give a pseudonym and an organisational description of your own choosing in Section 2 below. Otherwise please sign Section 1.

Consent with anonymity: I voluntarily agree to participate in the research specified above and to allow the anonymous use of my data for the specified purposes. I am aware that I can contact the interviewer to withdraw my consent at any time.

PLEASE TICK HERE: YES □ NO □ DATE: 

CHOSEN PSEUDONYM: _____________________________________________

Eduardo Chemin xxx
I would like the opportunity to review a transcript of my interview □
I would like to receive a short final summary of the research □

**Contact details**
For further information about the research or your interview data please contact:

Eduardo Chemin, Department of Sociology, University of Exeter, Devon, EX4 4EH –
Tel. 01392 263 281, jed209@ex.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about the research which you would like to discuss with my supervisor contact:

Prof Grace Davie, Department of Sociology, University of Exeter, Devon, EX4 4EH
Tel. 01392 263302, g.r.c.davie@ex.ac.uk
Appendix C: Letter of Explanation to Participants

Dear Participant

This is a request to interview you as part of my Ph.D. research.

To tell you a little of my background; I have spent the last 8 years living, working and studying social sciences in the United Kingdom. My interest on the study of pilgrimages began in 2004 when I walked from St Jean to Santiago de Compostela during the summer. The journey to Compostela became the theme for my undergraduate dissertation project and I subsequently repeated the same journey as an undergraduate researcher. Following this I am expanding my research by writing a Ph.D. thesis on the same subject.

In October 08 I started my Ph.D. research funded by Exeter University under the supervision of Prof. Grace Davie. The research, provisionally entitled 'A sociological analysis of the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Northern Spain' utilizes the Camino as a case study in the elaboration of a sociological discussion. This attempts to understand the rise in popularity of pilgrimages in West Europe against the backdrop of theories of secularization. Thus, I am concerned with the motivations of those who take part on the pilgrimage to Santiago and the impact that this experience may have in their lives, not only during but also after the Camino.

There are four distinct parts to my research. 1) I will be reviewing academic and non–academic literature in the form of books, magazine articles, newspaper interviews, websites and other materials regarding pilgrimages in Western Europe. 2) I will be interviewing pilgrims as well as those who look after them (i.e. hospitaleros) on the way to Santiago. 3) I would like to interview pilgrims sometime after their return home. 4) I will collect written pilgrim accounts such as those registered in the book of guests (existent in most pilgrim albergues or refugios) and other related media such as photographs, maps, promotional materials etc.
My main aim in these interviews will be to look at motivational factors amongst British pilgrims and their relationship with religious/spiritual philosophies and the practice of pilgrimage. I therefore would like to stress my impartiality towards any belief or philosophy participants may hold as well as my desire to be respectful of participants’ views and opinions. Thus, through this research I aim to answer the question: Why do modern Europeans go on pilgrimages? Therefore the interview topic areas will be as follows:

- Personal history and religious background
- Relevant history of interest/interaction with religious and/or spiritual practices
- First contact with the idea of Pilgrimage (i.e. via religious tradition, literature, media, tourist agency, networking, etc.)
- Motivation for coming to Santiago (i.e. healing, vacation and relaxation, religious/spiritual, a multiplicity of reasons, etc...)
- The existence or non–existence of any link between their religious/spiritual beliefs and the practice of pilgrimage.

The interview will be recorded and stored digitally before being transcribed. I enclose a copy of the necessary consent form which describes the conditions placed on the use of this data by the Ethics Committee at the University of Exeter. Data from the interview may be included in my final thesis which will be held by the University of Exeter Library and may also be used in any subsequent publications, however, interviewees will remain anonymous. If you would like to review a copy of the transcript and make any changes prior to the writing of the final report, and/or you would like to receive a short final summary of the research then please indicate this on the consent form attached to this document.

Thank you for taking part in this project.

Eduardo Chemin
University of Exeter
Glossary

**Apóstol (Spanish):** Apostle

**Botafumeiro (Galician):** a giant incense burner found in the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. It is one of the largest incense burners in the world, weighing 80 kg and measuring 1.60 m in height. It hangs from the ceiling of the Cathedral, suspended by a mechanism of pulleys first installed in 1604. Along the years different burners were installed, the current dates back to 1851. More recently it has become an attraction of its own. In special occasions or particularly well-attended masses it is swung across the nave of the Cathedral carrying some 40kg of charcoal and incense that smoke the entire building to the amusement of those who watch. Originally it was used to clear the air of the Cathedral after pilgrims attended mass. Now it has lost that function however it remains part of the tradition of the modern tradition of the pilgrimage. It costs about 250€ for each time the ritual of the Botafumeiro is performed. The Botafumeiro is carried and swung by eight *tiraboleiros* – men dressed in red robes. The term ‘tiraboleiro’ is a Galician word that borrows from the Latin word "turifer", meaning ‘incense carrier’.

**Buen Camino:** In Spanish it translates, literally, as ‘Good Way’. It is a form of greeting those travelling to Compostela often employ as a way to say good luck and good fortune on the pilgrimage.

**Caminante (Spanish):** Walker

**Camino Aragonés (Spanish):** in reality this route is part of the French Way for it is a simple link between the town of Somport the favoured mountain pass for pilgrims coming from Toulouse and other southern French destinations. Originally this route cut through the Puerto del Palo, in the Valley of the river Echo. Once in Spain pilgrim travel through the Navarra region joining pilgrims coming from Roncesvalles at the town of Puente La Reina then joining the French Way.

**Camino del Nord or Ruta de La Costa (Spanish):** refers to an average 825 km long route set between the coastal line of the Iberian Peninsula and the French Way in the South. It runs
along the northern part of Spain in parallel to the *Camino Francés*. The route was used by Christian pilgrims when Islamic forces dominated the territory making it difficult for pilgrims to travel the *Camino Francés* due to the political instability of the region. Some sections were also used by those who arrived by sea at one of the northern Spanish ports. Like many of the other pilgrim routes described, this route follows an old Roman road called *Via Agrippa*. This route passes through the towns of San Sebastián/Donastia, Bilbao, Castro Urdiales, Santander, Ribadesella, Gijón, Avilés, Luarca, Ribadeo, Mondoñedo, and Sobrado dos Monxes eventually moving south and joining the *Camino Francés* at Arzua.

**Camino Francés (Spanish):** is the most popular of the routes of the Way of St. James, the ancient pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. It runs from Saint–Jean–Pied–de–Port on the French side of the Pyrenees to Roncesvalles on the Spanish side and then another 780km on to Santiago through the major cities of Pamplona, Logroño, Burgos and Léon. A typical walk on the *Camino Francés* takes at least four weeks, allowing for one or two rest days. Paths from the cities of Tours, Vézelay, and Le Puy–en–Velay meet at Saint–Jean–Pied–de–Port. A fourth French route originates in Arles, in Provence, and crosses the French/Spanish frontier at a different point, between the Pyrenees towns of Somport and Canfranc. This fourth route follows the Aragonese Way and joins the main Way of St. James at Puente la Reina, south of Pamplona, in Navarre, about seven hundred kilometres from Santiago de Compostela.

**Camino Inglés (Spanish):** or ‘English Way’ is traditionally a route taken by pilgrims who come mainly from the British Isles to visit Santiago de Compostela by sea and who disembark at, or walk to, Ferrol or A Coruña (both Galician ports). From those locations pilgrims then make their way to Santiago overland through a path that is on average 100km long.

**Camino Primitivo (Spanish):** also known as the ‘Interior route’ this pilgrim way is a 320 km long path leading from Valleviciosa through to Oviedo and Lugo before joining the *Camino Francés* at Melide, which is 50 km away from Santiago de Compostela. This route is fairly arduous as it crosses the mountain ranges typical of Galicia and is rarely used by pilgrims who prefer the less incline terrain of the French Way or the Northern Way (*La Ruta de La Costa*, also known as *Camino del Nord*).

**Camino Portugués (Spanish):** or the Portuguese Way begins at city of Oporto in north–west Portugal moving north to Santiago de Compostela. It crosses the Lima and Miño rivers before entering Spain and then on to the fishing village of Padrón before arriving at Santiago de
Compostela. It is in average 227 km long and is the main route taken by Portuguese pilgrims. More recently incentives have been given to an extension from Lisbon to Oporto and an increasing number of pilgrims now start their pilgrimage from there.

**Cena Comunitária (Spanish):** communal dinner. This is a common way to organize dinners for pilgrims where a volunteer cooks together with pilgrims a communal meal where everyone contributes by helping to prepare the meal and to clean-up afterwards. It is an important part of the idea of hospitality of the Camino de Santiago one that is much cherished by both visitors and hosts.

**Ciclista (Spanish):** Cyclist

**Codex Calixtinus (Latin):** the *Codex Calixtinus* (as it became known – since it is prefaced by a letter attributed to Calixtus II, Pope from 1119 to 1124) is a famous medieval text directly related to the pilgrimage to Compostela in the Middle Ages. Possibly edited by one clergyman named Aymeric Picaud ca. 1139 this is a collection of five books telling the story of St. James’ mission, martyrdom and translation from Jerusalem back to Spain. It includes songs, description of artefacts and religious buildings, including a plant of the Cathedral at Compostela, a book of chants and prayers, and what became known, in modern terms, as a prototype for future travel guides: The pilgrim’s guide to Compostela. In this work the author describes the different routes across France culminating in the *Camino Francés*. He also described the customs of the peoples that inhabited the regions through which the pilgrim would travel, as well as useful information about the rivers that offered drinking water and those who could be harmful to both human and animals. The author also divided the pilgrimage into thirteen stages mapping the most important places on the route as well as the important places of veneration that the penitent pilgrim ought to visit in order to be redeemed.

**Compostelana (Spanish):** a certificate issue by the ‘pilgrim office’ at Santiago de Compostela for those who walk at least the last 100km of the Jacobean routes or the last 200km for those on bicycle, horseback or on other non–motorized transport. The certificate is written in Latin and only given to travellers who can express their motivations as either ‘religious’, ‘spiritual’ or ‘personal’. There is another certificate (written in modern Spanish) for those who have taken part in the pilgrimage with explicit non–religious motivations.

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90 For more details see the volume published by the Confraternity of St. James (London).
**Confraternity of St. James (London):** Confraternity of volunteers (mainly pilgrims) based in London (Southwark). It was created by volunteers and is still run by them. It is a non-governmental organization which is not affiliated to any religious institution but which is a proud sponsor of the pilgrim ethos. Its chief mission is to inform prospective pilgrims, providing practical information about the many routes which lead to Compostela. The Confraternity ‘system’ has been borrowed by other volunteer groups around the world, who bear the same name, in countries as far away as South Africa, the United States and New Zealand. The Confraternity in London also hosts many events including visits by academics, film makers and authors who advertise or showcase their work through the Confraternity. It also has restored and now administers and supports two pilgrim hostels: one in Rabanal del Camino (*Camino Francés*) and another in Miraz (*Camino del Norte*).

**Donativo (Spanish/Galician):** donation. Usually charged at pilgrim hostels, is a small amount correspondent to the minimum costs of running the hostel. Sometimes the amount is left to the discretion of the traveller with a minimum charge of 5€ – although this varies according to each hostel.

**El Camino de Santiago de Compostela (Spanish):** Network of routes leading to Santiago de Compostela. However the name ‘Camino’ is usually associated with the French Route or *Camino Francés* the most popular pilgrim route in Europe.

**Federación Española de Asociaciones de Amigos del Camino de Santiago:** Spanish Federation of Associations of Friends of the Way of St. James. This is a Federation created for the organization of all agents and agencies involved in maintaining the routes to Compostela. It offers training for hospitaleros and general information of the cultural, religious and socio-economic aspects of the routes.

**Finisterrana (Spanish):** not unlike the Compostelana, the Finisterrana is a certificate given to pilgrims who complete the 3–4 days walk (or 1 day trip by bicycle) from Santiago de Compostela to Cape Finisterre. This route is not officially recognized by the church, who emphasizes the end of the pilgrimage is at the tomb of St. James at Santiago de Compostela. However the Church is by no means opposed to people walking to Cape Finisterre. The certificate, shows four images of the four Tetramorph evangelists Mark (the lion), Luke (the ox), John (the eagle) and Matthew (the winged man) is a reference to Christian beliefs and symbolism whilst the serpent–like shapes that adorn the document make reference to the supposed pre–Christian Pagan and Celtic origins of Finisterra.

Eduardo Chemin
**Finisterre or Cape Finisterre (Spanish):** Cape Finisterre (Galician: *Cabo Fisterra*) is a peninsula on the west coast of Galicia, Spain. It is sometimes said to be the westernmost point of Europe, however, this is rather unlikely since Cabo da Roca, in Portugal is about 16 km farther west. The name ‘Finisterre’, like that of ‘Finistère’ in France, derives from the Latin name *Finisterrae*, meaning ‘Land's End’. Monte Facho is the name of the mountain on Cape Finisterre which is said to have been sacred to the Romans who, according to legend, founded a town in that locality. Finisterre is often linked to Pagan myths of Sun–God worshipping and with other pre–Roman legends. Due to its geography, pilgrims come to Finisterre to observe the ‘death of the sun’ at sunset. The idyllic location of Finisterre, its mythical coats of meaning and its physical and metaphorical ‘end of the road’, is often used by travellers as a place for the performance of (often personal) rituals like swimming in the cold waters of the north Atlantic sea, burning their worn–out garments, shoes and so on or to leave offerings on the many beaches which form part of the peninsula.

**Hospitalero (Spanish/Galician):** Volunteer, keeper or ‘host’ working in pilgrim hostels. These are usually unpaid volunteers, although there is a growing number of hosts who are now either paid or who own the hostel, which they run as a bed and breakfast.

**Iglesia (Spanish/Galician):** Church.

**Jesus Cristo (Spanish/Galician):** Jesus Christ.

**La Credencial del Peregrino (Spanish):** the ‘Pilgrim Credential’ is a form of passport where pilgrims collect stamps of places they come across.

**La Cruz de Ferro (Spanish):** *La Cruz de Ferro* (The Iron Cross) has become one particularly important point on the *Camino Francés*. Marked by a tall wooden pole with an iron cross attached to its high end, it has become a monument to memory and the pilgrim’s mission. Surrounded by large pile of pebbles and other objects left there by those who visit the site on their way to Compostela the *Cruz* is a testimony of all those who left their mark by placing a stone as a sign of a wish conceded or made then. Stones and other *ex–voto* may also be understood as something the person wants to leave behind (emotionally), like a thought or memory that causes them particular pain for example.

**La Via de La Plata:** the *Vía de La Plata* (the Silver Way) or *Ruta de la Plata* (Silver Route) is an ancient commercial and pilgrimage path that crosses Spain from north to south, connecting Seville to Astorga via Caceres, Salamanca and Zamora. There are various theories
as to the origin of the term *Vía de la Plata*, some believing it derives from the modern Spanish word for silver (*plata*) others believing it came from the Arabic word *balata*, meaning ‘paved’ as the road was, like many other Roman roads, paved. With approximately 900 km between Seville and Santiago de Compostela. It is the longest of the recognized Jacobean routes and due to this factor and the lower number of pilgrim hostels as well as a warmer climate; it is also a less used route.

**La Vía Lactea:** The Milky Way. Legend says the Camino de Santiago is a reflection of the Milky Way on earth, a mirror image of the stars. As such, a common belief amongst modern travellers is that the Camino derives its inherent powers from being in alignment with the universe and its parallel form, the Milky Way, pointing the way to Santiago de Compostela.

**La Virgen María** *(Spanish):* The Virgin Mary.

**Monastério** *(Spanish):* Monastery.

**Peregrino** *(Spanish/Galician):* Pilgrim

**Refúgios or Albergues** *(Spanish/Galician):* Pilgrim accommodation usually run by unpaid volunteers and set up by charities, local government or religious organizations. There is however a diversity of pilgrim hostels today and they vary widely in the services they provide and what they charge travellers. More recently albergues run by private and/or local authorities began to replace volunteers by paid employees.

**Santiago Apóstol** *(Spanish):* The Apostle James.

**Santiago de Compostela** *(Spanish/Galician):* Capital city of the province of Galicia (Spain).

**Santiago El Mayor** *(Spanish):* St. James ‘The Great’, brother of John and son of Zebedee. According to the Bible, he was one of the twelve Apostles of Christ.

**Santiago Matamoros** *(Spanish/Galician):* St. James ‘the Moor Slayer’

**Tapas** *(Spanish):* Famous Spanish way of serving food where small terracotta dishes containing taste portions of a variety of fish, sea–food, meats, poultry or vegetables is served according to local receipts. Tapas can also be called ‘pinchos’ depending on the locality and its traditions.

**Turista** *(Spanish):* Tourist

Eduardo Chemin
Ultreia y Suseia (Latin): an expression used by medieval pilgrims. It is found in the Codex Calixtinus as words for a song written in the 12th century. There are many accounts attempting to describe what it meant at the time. For instance, one of these refers to the words ‘ultra’ (more) and ‘eia’ (there) as meaning something like ‘further ahead’ or ‘further on’. The same happening with ‘Sus’ (high) and ‘eia’ (there) meaning ‘aiming higher’ probably a reference to God or heaven. Although a precise meaning would be difficult to articulate in English, today many of those who take part in the pilgrimage use these words much in the same way to mean ‘good luck’, ‘full steam ahead’ or ‘always ahead’.

Vieira (Spanish/Galician): The name given in Spain to scallop shells. An important symbol of the pilgrimage, it has acquired a universal (metaphorical) quality as a representation of the act of pilgrimage. Pilgrims attach the shell to their backpacks, clothes, wear them around their necks or bring them back home as a memento of the pilgrimage. It is found everywhere on the routes to Santiago: as a way marker, to advertise establishments related to the pilgrimage (hostels for instance) or even to advertise food products like wine, cheese and Iberian ham. Scallops are found in abundance along the Galician Coast but it was in France that it first became an internationally recognizable dish on the menu of fine restaurants where it is commonly known as Le Coquille de St. Jacques (Scallop of St. James).
References


Eduardo Chemin


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This is the story of a tradition. One adorned by landscapes, sculpted by men and nature, and lived by people – real and imagined. This tradition links today with yesterday, the modern and the ancient, heaven and earth. In sum, this is the story of a pilgrimage route and its heritage. Such place is not just a point on a map however. It is a symbol, a code for culture more broadly, inseparable from religion, old or new. Yet still, it is dependent on and enhanced by the secular rhythms of our modern world. Its roots go deep and reach back to the beginnings of Europe.

In Europe and beyond places of heritage, often pilgrimage centres, attract millions of visitors each year. Although in the last three decades some attention has been paid to this significant movement, the study of pilgrimage remains on the fringes of mainstream social theory. In order to redress this issue this work explores the popularity of pilgrimage and heritage sites in Europe today by looking at one specific pilgrimage route as a case study: the Camino de Santiago in northern Spain. Through a range of methodologies and a diversity of examples, the author shows the growing importance of what he calls the ‘touristification’ of religious sites and the ‘sacralisation’ of secular spaces.