

# The Camino Provides.

*An Ethnographic Study on Perceptions of Authenticity,  
Tourism and Commodification on the French pilgrimage  
Route El Camino de Santiago.*



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The picture on the front cover is a photo that I took of the statue at the El Perdón mountain range. The name of the range of sculptures is called 'Where the route of the wind crosses that of the stars', made by sculpture Vicente Galbete in 1996. It consists of fourteen natural-sized iron pilgrim figures that make the journey to Santiago on foot, on horseback or riding donkeys.

- This information stems from the sign next to the statue.

## **Abstract**

This thesis is the result of multi-sided fieldwork within the Netherlands and along the Camino Francés to Santiago de Compostela. The number of pilgrims that walk the Camino de Santiago rises drastically every year. Why do so many people walk the Camino and how come it is this popular? Tourists, pilgrims and their perceptions on each other and on authenticity are elaborated upon. Commodification of the Camino in light of services and facilities is outlined and discussed. The Camino can be considered as a resource for social wealth, which makes commodification a difficult process to research, which might be interesting for future research.



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## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

In March 2019, I started walking the Camino Francés from Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port to Santiago de Compostela. It took me a full day to travel by train to this small town in the south of France. Starting early in the morning from the Netherlands, travelling with high speed trains, it was a change to get on the train from Bayonne to Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port. Together with me, twelve people and two train conductors got on the train to Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port. All the passengers had backpacks and walking poles with them, wearing hiking boots or shoes. Before they started checking the train tickets, the conductors welcomed everyone on the train by saying “Welcome pilgrims, on the Camino express”. This small train, with not even fifty chairs but a lot of space for luggage, stopped nine times in one hour before arriving in St Jean. It was a beautiful train ride, following a river and later running through green valleys in the Pyrenees, passing by small villages. We, the passengers, were excited for everyone to start ‘their own Camino’. Arriving at the final train station, everyone got off the train and followed the first scallop shell signs to the pilgrims office to receive the pilgrims passport and first Camino stamp.

Many studies have been executed and published on the motivations of pilgrims to walk a pilgrimage, and specifically to walk the Camino de Santiago. The studies mainly did focus on the motivations, religious, spiritual, cultural or active/sports motivations (Feinberg 1985). Personally, other concepts of the Camino drew my attention to the topic. Online research taught me that the popularity of the Camino itself is growing, but that there is critique on the increasing number of pilgrims as well. This made me curious on the effects of the popularity on the Camino as a tourist destination.

Recently several media published a story of a traffic jam of hikers on the Mount Everest. The story and especially a photo of the traffic jam was shared worldwide. The picture shows a long queue of people standing on the mountain, waiting in line to reach the top. This picture caused worldwide reactions of disbelief. Not only are the busy circumstances on the Mount Everest surprising, they also lead to dangerous situations. The story evoked a lot of critique from the climbing tourists but also from other people worldwide. Responses to regulate the numbers of climbers in order to minimize the amount of deaths, minimize littering, and to commercialize the climb were expressed in the media. Not only Mount Everest has to deal with increasing amounts of tourists. Cities such as Amsterdam, Barcelona, Rome and Venice are, among other destinations, dealing with the consequences of attracting many tourists. In some of these popular tourist destinations, the local population has even been protesting against the

high numbers of tourists, because of the sometimes negative impact that tourism causes to local situations. In the town Logroño, the capital of the La Rioja region along the Camino Francés, the local populations has been protesting against the gentrification that is caused by the popularity of the Camino and the high number of tourists or pilgrims. These examples of the impact of growing numbers of tourists on local situations, made me question about the impact of the pilgrims that walk the Camino de Santiago.

Never before have so many pilgrims undertaken the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. The rising number of pilgrims, or tourists, along the pilgrims route lead to a different experience of the pilgrimage, but also to differences in the material sense of the Camino. The interaction between, and mutually influencing concepts of, the rising number of pilgrims and the changes or developments of the Camino, are contemporary and might be irreversible. This research contributes to scientific and specifically anthropological studies of pilgrimage, authenticity, tourism and commodification. The main objective of this study is therefor to research and analyse how the pilgrimage and pilgrims mutually influence one another in light of commodification and tourism.

The main question of this thesis is: In what ways is the pilgrimage route Camino Francés commodified, in terms of perceptions of authenticity, materiality and tourism?

I will answer this question, by addressing sub-topics in every chapter of this thesis. I have posed several questions that are helpful in addressing the topics and formulating a final conclusion. Why is the Camino getting more popular every year? Is it possible to separate the concepts of tourists and pilgrims? What kind of services and facilities do exist in regards of the Camino? What is the link between these services and authenticity? What kind of communities do exist, and what is the role of popular media? What organisations do exist, who are involved in the Camino and who owns the Camino?

The pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela is an historic trail, connecting many different places since medieval times. The pilgrimage started in the eight century when the belief that the body of Saint James the Apostle was in Galicia in Spain, became widespread. In 1962, the Camino Francés was declared Spanish national heritage, contributing to its popularity and leading to the official and most travelled route since then (González 2018). Never before was the Camino this ‘popular’, in the sense that the number of pilgrims that undertake the journey has not before been this high. According to the official Pilgrim’s Office of the Camino - *Oficina de Acogida al Peregrino* -, the number of pilgrims that undertake the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela keep on rising every year. The website of the Pilgrim’s Office holds official

statistics, which are accessible to everyone. In the year 2018, 327.378 pilgrims officially visited the official Pilgrim's Office in Santiago de Compostela. The statistics for 2019 are already showing a rise of the number of pilgrims, in comparison to the year 2018.

This thesis is the result of the multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork that I performed in the Netherlands and on the Camino Francés. In total the fieldwork period took fourteen weeks, and lasted from February up until the midst of May 2019. I have conducted ethnographic fieldwork, using several qualitative research methods. During the first part of the field work, seven weeks in the Netherlands, I have met and spoken with a lot of people who have walked a Camino, and some others who are volunteers related to the Camino de Santiago. Some of them are volunteers in the Netherlands, helping pilgrims-to-be to prepare for and provide information on the Camino, others are volunteers along the route working in pilgrim offices or/and *albergues*, which are pilgrims-hostels or pilgrim shelters. I have had a lot of in-depth interviews, both semi-structured and structured, during this period, but I also was able to join walking groups to have more informal conversations and joined Camino-related events. I have also invested in analysis of written and online material and media, such as social media, written books, movies, television series and magazines. During the second half of the ethnographic fieldwork, I walked the, approximately, 800 kilometres of the Camino Francés in seven weeks. These seven weeks included 35 days of walking, days to rest and time to interview and to transcribe and analyse data. During this second part of the research, my main research method was participant observation. As I also was a pilgrim on the Camino Francés, I was participating and able to observe the daily routine and rituals. The daily interactions and events of the research participants, were also my interactions and events through participant observation (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 1). This made it possible to study the pilgrimage from an emic perspective. Walking the Camino Francés myself, has been a challenge. Hiking over the Pyrenees, climbing the mountain to the village O'Cebreiro, walking through full days of rain, cold and even snow was not only hard in itself, it was especially difficult to find the energy necessary to invest in the fieldwork. I found out that actually during the hours of walking, rapport was built quickly and easily and deep, useful and enjoyable connections were made. I never disguised my role as anthropologist or goal of doing ethnographic fieldwork, but since I walked the Camino myself as well, I was also considered a pilgrim by others. Since the pilgrims that are walking, are not permanent residents or living at this location or route, I was in the same position of figuring things out, meeting new people and, literally, finding my way. My start and end of both 'my Camino' and my fieldwork were equal to those of fellow-pilgrims. This opportunity was a unique experience.

The Camino Francés, is one of the several pilgrimage routes that lead to Santiago de Compostela. I have chosen to walk and to study this route, since it is the one that is most well-known, and the route with the most pilgrims walking. According to the statistics of the official Pilgrim's Office of the Camino, out of the nine most travelled Caminos, the Camino Francés is by far the most travelled route. Almost 57 percent of all pilgrims on these nine routes, have walked the *Camino Francés* in 2018. In comparison: the second most popular route is the *Camino Portugués* (the Portuguese route), which has been travelled by almost 21 percent of the pilgrims in 2018. The research population for this study, exists of, former, pilgrims by foot, of the Camino Francés. Also, people along the Camino, who work, as volunteers or paid, in *albergues*, shops, bars, cafes, restaurants and other Camino related establishments. There is no specific age-group, nationality, religion or other characteristics that I have singled out. During the research I noticed how willing everyone was to participate in and contribute to the study. Since most conversations start with sharing why, when and where someone started their Camino, I could be upfront and always shared my reason of being there and purpose of the study. Most people were very interested and eager to share their experiences with me. Luckily I did not encounter any problems with me, as an anthropologist researcher, being present. Even though a lot of the research participants had no problems with me using their names in the study, I have chosen to anonymize some of the research participants, I have changed their names and some characteristic details that could give away their identity. This way I can guarantee that certain personal issues, sensitive topics and possible harmful topics that I describe in this study, cannot be traced back to any individuals and cause any harm.

In order to answer this research question, the rest of this thesis is divided in several chapters, ending with a concluding chapter. I will continue from this introduction with a conceptual or theoretical chapter. Then, the popularity of the Camino in combination with international associations and popular media will be discussed. The Camino as a material way, and the organisations are elaborated upon, followed by a comparison of tourists and pilgrims, and their perceptions upon each other and authenticity. Commodification of the Camino, and the Camino as a commons are outlined and discussed, followed by a concluding chapter.

## **Chapter 2. Conceptual Framework**

*In this chapter, several theoretical debates will be discussed and elaborated upon in light of the research topics. The historical debate of pilgrimage under an anthropological lens will be outlined through the concepts of communitas and contestation. Much of historical anthropological work on pilgrims and pilgrimage has focussed on religious and spiritual motives and rituals of pilgrims. This topic will be touched upon briefly and followed by a more recent debate, that of the differences and similarities of pilgrims and tourists and pilgrimage and tourism in theoretical sense. Since I will argue that these categories are very similar, touristic travel and commodification will be discussed as connected concepts to tourism. I will consider the Camino as route-based tourism and travel, and theorise the concept of the Way as a material and connecting path.*

### 2.1 Anthropology of Pilgrimage

The first anthropological theoretical model on the interpretation of pilgrimage stems from Victor Turner and Edith Turner's publication *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (1978). The Turners developed the notions of liminality and communitas, which are the basis for this theory of pilgrimage. Their theory was drawn from anthropological work on ritual and symbolism, and the Turners interest to Roman Catholicism (Coleman 2002).

The theoretical concepts of liminality and especially communitas were deemed the basis for an anthropological approach to pilgrimage. Liminality describes a position of a participant of a ritual, who has exited one social state or social space, but has not yet entered the new social state or space. These participants are, figuratively, between two social worlds or social states or spaces (Badone and Roseman 2010). The concept of liminality was drawn from metaphors of liminality within the theory of rites of passage, but has been defined by Turner and Turner as a result of voluntary removal from the everyday world, and thus not as societally enforced (Coleman 2002). According to the Turners, the most significant aspect of liminality, is the capacity to form communitas. Communitas are "a relational quality of full unmediated communication, even communion" with other individuals, or ritual participants, "which combines the qualities of loneliness, sacredness, homogeneity, and comradeship" (Turner and Turner 1978, 250). In other words, communitas are a 'looser' state of commonality or feeling with fellow visitors, which is a transition away from structures of mundane social life (Coleman 2002, 356).

The main critique on the concepts of liminality and *communitas* within pilgrimage is a critique on *communitas*, as an idealized concept, that does not take into account mundane conflicts that are inherent in pilgrimage (Coleman 2002). Eade and Sallnow (1991) have offered the most widely acknowledge critique and alternative theory to the anthropology of pilgrimage. They “argue against a global, essentialist approach that focuses on the universal characteristics and social functions of pilgrimage” (Badone and Roseman 2010, 4). Eade and Sallnow (1991, 3) state that pilgrimage, as an institution, should not be seen as a universal concept, but should be understood as historically and culturally specific situations. They emphasize the sacred as ‘contested’ at pilgrimage sites. Pilgrimage is presented as arenas capable of accommodating competing religious and secular discourses, with specific attention towards person, place and text as the three main components of pilgrimage (Badone and Roseman 2010, 5).

Although Eade and Sallnow (1991) offered their theory as opposed to the theory of Turner and Turner (1978), Coleman and Elsner (1995) combined both theories. According to the approach of Eade and Sallnow, pilgrimage holds the potential for both *communitas* and contestation, as a flexible approach, whereas both concepts are not inherent features to pilgrimage, but situational and flexible. They added a fourth element – movement – to the three elements – person, place and text – that constitute pilgrimage (Badone and Roseman 2010). This flexible approach has been used by more anthropologists recently, allowing for a study of pilgrimage, without the necessity to fit all pilgrim-related phenomena into one category or preconceived framework (Badone and Roseman 2010).

## 2.2 Religion, Spirituality and Rituals in Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage is often linked to the idea of a religious journey or quest, leading to a religious shrine. Norman (2011) however states that this from originally explicitly religious practice is now being frequented in secular ways for spiritual gain. Winkelman and Dubisch (2005) reflect on the changes in the domain of experience of pilgrimage, in light of the contemporary increasingly secular and atheistic world view. They state that the spiritual quest remains for all individuals a potent force. Spiritual traditions are reinvented, and ‘new sources of spiritual engagement’ created, through pilgrimage sites of new tradition that often borrow from the past (Winkelman and Dubisch 2005, viii).

“Thus pilgrimage is a highly flexible ritual that can be adapted to a range of needs and spiritual beliefs, thus drawing a wide spectrum of participants. This flexibility both reflects contemporary trends in spirituality and accords with anthropology’s current emphasis on the dynamic and creative dimensions of ritual practice. Thus

pilgrimage is at the same time a traditional practice within established religions and a ritual that can be melded with the eclectic activities and orientations of new contemporary forms of spirituality” (Winkelman and Dubisch 2005, ix)

Winkelman and Dubisch (2005) state that labelling non-religious pilgrimages as secular, should not obscure the fact that these pilgrimages can have significant spiritual meaning for the pilgrims. A line between secular and religious pilgrimages is difficult to draw, since they both exhibit the same characteristics, that are associated with traditional forms of pilgrimage. “These include the ritual nature of the journey, the power of the special site, the connection of the journey to powerful cultural myths, the social and spiritual connection of the journey to powerful cultural myths, the social and spiritual connections established on the journey, and the transformative nature of the undertaking” (Winkelman and Dubisch 2005, xvii). They further state that ritual itself, as an action with intentional symbolic meaning for a cultural purpose, is a creative process, that reflects and constitutes spiritual meanings and experiences. Pilgrimage, according to them, may come to be a central feature in connections between participants and community. They state that ancient, reinvented, spiritual traditions, still offer important resources, in light of reconnecting with others in times of increasing splintering of intimate social groups and anomie (Winkelman and Dubisch 2005, viii). Pilgrimage, thus, is even when a pilgrim’s motivations are not religious, a ritualistic undertaking with a transformative nature. A decline of religious motives to travel, does not change the nature of a pilgrimage in spiritual sense. Contemporary pilgrims might differ in motivations to undertake the journey, the nature of the journey in ritualistic sense is still present.

### 2.3 Pilgrimage and Tourism

The definition that is most used to describe a tourist is: “a temporarily leisured person who voluntarily visits a place away from home for the purpose of experiencing a change” (Smith 1989). Tourism can be described as a modern ritual “in which the populace ‘gets away from it all,’ the ‘it all’ being ordinary workaday, mundane life, particularly work which includes the workplace, homework, and housework” (Graburn 1979). Thus tourism is a structured break from ordinary life and entry into another kind of moral state, contrasting with the periods of ordinary life. Tourism is limited in duration, with a beginning, a period of separation – travel away from home -, a middle period of limited duration and a return to the home and to the mundane. Graburn states that the structure of tourism is very similar to the structure of ritual behaviour, such as pilgrimage, where the period between entry into and departure from the ritual is characterized as sacred (Graburn 1983). Grasping back to the theory of Turner and

Turner (1978), this transition or passage, can be considered liminality, when the tourist activity is considered a ritual, for instance a pilgrimage.

The differences between tourism and pilgrimage have been debated by scholars, because of the obvious similarities of tourism – a leisure ritual outside everyday life that involves travel – and pilgrimage. Some scholars consider tourism as ‘a frivolous inauthentic activity characteristic of pseudo-events’ while others assert that tourism is ‘a central ritual in which the search for authenticity in the Other is the central motivating force’ (Graburn 1983, 14). Both of these approaches have been critiqued which leads most of the scholars to the conclusion that a divide between the two categories – tourists and pilgrims – is impossible to make. "there is no hard and fast dividing line between pilgrimage and tourism, that even when the role of pilgrim and tourist are combined, they are necessarily different but form a continuum of inseparable elements" (Graburn 1983, 16). This continuum of inseparable elements, as Graburn suggests, can serve to identify pilgrims and tourists without fully distinguishing both, but to identify the differences between individuals. These differences can be in the type of travel, the motivations of the traveller and in perceptions about authenticity. These topics will be discussed further on in this thesis.

#### 2.4. Touristic Travel and Authenticity

Badone and Roseman (2010) highlight similarities between pilgrimage and tourism as two categories of travel, instead of conceptualising the differences. They state that the tourist is not merely a superficial hedonist opposed to the pious pilgrim motivated by faith and religious devotion. Individuals respond to their routinized daily lives by doing the opposite of it – in leisure activities. Individuals embark on journeys to search for meaning in authentic experiences, whereas authenticity is missing in their daily lives. Touristic travel in search of authenticity or self-renewal, are phenomena of the sacred, where to there is no ground for a division between secular voyaging and pilgrimage. Authenticity can be found in spaces of ‘staged authenticity’, when the quest leads to the workplaces of Others. Staged authenticity is not to be considered pseudo-authenticity or fake (Badone and Roseman 2010, 6). The concept of staged authenticity suggest that ‘real’ events and culture are hidden from tourists eyes, and artificial experiences are staged (Thorne 2006, 179).

Lozanski (2010) describes independent travel as defined by commitment to personal growth and cultural sensitivity. She opposes independent travellers to mass tourists: “independent travel is invested with meaning through its constructed difference vis-à-vis mass tourism” (Lozanski 2010, 741). Authenticity as unmediated and tourism as mediated are

seemingly opposites. Travellers define their travel experiences as authentic and unique, to differentiate themselves from tourists. Independent travellers, as Lozanski (2010) describes are travellers who travel for extended periods of travel, with small budgets and who avoid tourist attractions and ostensibly avoid formalized tourist activities and locales. Independent travellers are trying to construct authentic travel experiences. Authenticity, as she states, reproduces idealized representations of travel and constructs a unique and therefore highly valued experience. Authentic encounters and experiences are linked to ‘uncontaminated’ interactions, and thus to lack commodification. “Authenticity does require the close reiteration of inherited objects and practices, but also the reiteration for specific people in specific places for specific purposes which must be severed from market processes” Another form of uncontaminated interactions, and thus an authentic encounter, is the scarcity of other tourists, since other tourists will definitely compromise the uniqueness of the experience, and therefore the value of the experience (Lozanski 2010).

The increasing influence of the tourism industry and the greater ease of travel have given rise and increased debates on the impacts of tourism, on the authenticity of cultures. The debates centre around four main themes; (1) the ways in which tourism has impact on the authenticity of tourist experiences of places and culture, (2) on the culture of the place itself, (3) on the nature of the host-guest relationship and (4) on the production of cultural objects and events consumed by tourists (Thorne 2006, 177). Tourism is often blamed for the commodification of culture, and therefore for the destruction of authenticity of local cultural products and relationships. “The increasing influence of the tourism industry, the greater ease of travel and ever widening arena of visited places have increased the urgency of debates on the impacts of tourism on the authenticity of cultures” (MacLeod 2016, 177).

The impact of tourism on the authenticity of cultures is an increasingly discussed topic. In recent years, a new term has been used in the media, to grasp the concept of the negative effects of many tourists visiting a town, site or destination. Within the scientific debate, the topic is discussed since only a few years. Overtourism is defined as “the excessive growth of visitors leading to overcrowding in areas where residents suffer the consequences of temporary and seasonal tourism peaks, which have enforced permanent changes to their lifestyles, access to amenities and general well-being” (Milano, Cheer and Nivelli 2018, 2). Overtourism is troublesome for locals and residents in different ways; the landscape is harmed, beaches are damaged, property prices rise and price residents out of the market, tourist businesses overwhelm local businesses and the costs of living for residents therefore rise. Besides these processes, rowdy and unmanageable tourist behaviour disturbs day to day life (Milano, Cheer

and Nivelli 2018). The research on overtourism – so far – has focussed on locations that are very attractive for tourists, local authorities management to reduce and stop tourist nuisance and the tension between the rights of residents and the right to travel. (Perkumienė and Pranskūnienė 2019).

## 2.5 Commodification

Commodification, described by Gonzalez (2018), is “a function of institutions and entrepreneurs under market logics”, and thus the process of making a commodity out of something, express value in terms of money and to make it exchangeable with other goods or money – the transformation of something into an object of trade, in order to make a profit out of it (González 2018). Reader (2013) states that pilgrimages are embedded in a context of markets, consumer activity, publicity and promotion and that pilgrimages do not only operate within the marketplace, but through the marketplace. He further assesses how pilgrims often express a sense of dismay “at the encroachment of what appears to be thoughtless modernity imposing its crude development on the sacred” (Reader 2013, 11). Underlying these comments and feelings, are assumptions that “pilgrimage has a ‘sacred’, ‘true’ and ‘authentic’ nature that is despoiled and undermined by modern commercialism” (Reader 2013, 11).

The commodification of cultural authenticity leads to ‘staged authenticity’ and staged experiences, that are created for the consumers or to be consumed by tourists. This ‘staged authenticity’ suggests that real events and culture are hidden from tourists. Instead of real cultural practices, a staged version with artificial experiences is shown, for the tourists consumption (Thorne 2006). Thorne states that “the very act of being a tourist is to consume inauthentic and commodified products and events and to consider contemporary tourism as being deleterious to the concept of authenticity is perhaps to romanticise the notion of tourism itself and to hark back to a ‘golden age of travel’” (2006, 178). Thorne (2006) thus states that tourists, in their quest for authenticity, do consume inauthentic and especially commodified products and events, through staged experiences. Commodification is not just a small part or side issue of tourism, contemporary tourism is based on commodified products and events of a certain culture. “... the processes of commodification, rather than being a side issue, are in fact central to the whole basis of tourism and, what is more, that tourism is one aspect of the global processes of commodification rather than a separate self-contained system” (Meethan 2002, 5).

Authenticity can be, besides staged authenticity, deconstructed in various commodified ways. Wang (1999) had differentiated between ‘objective authenticity’, ‘constructive authenticity’ and ‘existential authenticity’. Objective authenticity is described as concentrated

on original objects that provide genuine experiences, based on the assumption that real and genuine touristic experiences exist. Emphasis is added on the integrity of materials and the context in which the object is made. ‘Constructive authenticity’ is an emergent form of authenticity, and said to be the result of social construction. If a tourist deems an experience or an object to be authentic, it is authentic. ‘Existential authenticity’ is not object-related, but activity-related; a state of being activated by tourist activities. The object-related, objective and constructive, authenticity can be seen as experiencing authenticity, and the activity-related, existential, authenticity as having an authentic experience (Wang 1999) (Thorne 2006).

## 2.6 The Way

Paths, trails and roads are the physical manifestation and essential structures of human movement and human landscape. They serve to connect and weave together separate elements of daily lives and connect us to each other. The complex relation between space, place and movement is explained through paths, roads and other structures. The path can be a metaphor, but also be understood through its physical features (Snead, Erickson and Clark 2011). Roads carry a powerful sense of mobility, and specific, tangible materialities of particular times and places. Roads, paths, trails etc. allow for ethnographic studies of mobility, movement and connectivity. The road is a kind of space where diverse social and cultural groups move, meet and interact and thus allow for connectivity (Dalakoglou and Harvey 2012). A path, according to Murray and Graham, serves as a space for continuous re-imaging of place and culture (1997, 544), and tourism can reinvent a path as a space for connection, meaning, interaction and mobility (Murray and Graham 1997). Salazar (2017, 6) defines mobility as “a complex assemblage of movement, social imaginaries and experience” and links mobility to modernity as a ‘key social process’. The world is lived and understood in modernity, through mobility. In pilgrimage mobility is a key-central feature, made possible through material paths, trails, roads and ways.

Literally translated, El Camino means The Road or The Way. Symbolically or figuratively, when pilgrims speak about the Camino, it has a more profound meaning. El Camino symbolizes the experiences, emotions and journey for pilgrims. Even though that for every pilgrim, the Camino may mean something different, there is consensus that everyone experiences ‘their own Camino’ by moving through the path. The Camino, the way, becomes a construct and therefore differs from others roads, paths and ways in mundane life. “The power of the ‘road’ derives from this ability to absorb a multitude of meanings that fits the personal quest of pilgrims” (Peelen and Jansen 2007, 80-81) .

### **Chapter 3. Preparations and Instigators of Walking the Camino de Santiago**

*With this chapter, I will address the international and growing popularity of the Camino de Santiago. Why is the Camino currently this popular? What are instigators to go and walk a pilgrimage in current times? And what did I myself do to prepare for this Camino. I will address the international Camino-related associations that exist, in their efforts and work. Furthermore popular culture, books and movies, and the role of social media on the popularity of the Camino will be discussed.*

The building is old, as is the church that it is built against. Above the door outside, a metal scallop shell is attached to the facade of the building. It is a Tuesday afternoon in February and I am about to enter ‘*Het huis van Sint Jacob*’, or ‘the House of Saint James’ in English. The house is a visitor centre of the NGSJ, the ‘*Nederlands Genootschap van Sint Jacob*’. I have subscribed to be a member of the NGSJ online and received a welcoming letter, my *credencial*, or pilgrims passport, and a magazine of the NGSJ by mail. Since with the welcoming letter I am invited to visit the visitors centre, I decided to so and here I am. When I enter, I am welcomed by two people inside. A man and a woman are sitting and greet me warmly. Immediately I am asked about who I am and if they can help me. I explain that I am about to leave to walk the Camino Francés in a couple of weeks, and that I am an anthropology student and plan on doing ethnographic fieldwork on the Camino. The man introduces himself as Bernard, he is in his 60’s and dressed in warm clothes for winter. He introduces the woman, Thea, who appears to be around the same age as Bernard. They ask me to sit down with them, and we end up talking for over an hour. Bernard and Thea are very interested in my research plans, but equally as enthusiastic to tell me about their Camino experiences. Since the opening hours of the ‘House’ are only a few hours for two or three days a week, we agree that I will return the following week, to continue our conversation.

#### 3.1. Dutch Camino Community

At the beginning of February 2019, my ethnographic fieldwork period started. I had chosen my subject, written my research proposal and after approval of the research, I started my ethnographic research on commodification of the Camino Francés. I had decided to split my research into two parts, the first part consisted of doing research in the Netherlands and on social media, and the second part on and around the Camino Francés itself. This meant, that I was going to walk this historic pilgrims route, and had to prepare myself in several ways. When

I immersed myself into the topic, the amount of information overwhelmed me. There are so many online blogs, YouTube clips, social media pages and groups, movies, television series, books and so on published about the Camino, that I almost did not know where to start. Perhaps I was not fully aware of the popularity of the Camino, and of the amount of stories and tips that are shared among several media.

On social media, especially Facebook, I joined several Camino related groups. There are many groups, such as ‘slow strollers on the Camino’, ‘Camigas - a buddy system for women on the Camino’, ‘Camino Portuguese’, ‘El Camino del Norte’, ‘Camino de Santiago Veg – Vegetarian and Vegan’ and many more. Most groups have several thousands to seven tens of thousands members and forth flowing, lively daily conversations and discussions. There are Facebook groups and pages that are related to the country of origin of the group members, groups that are related to the year of walking, but also groups that are aimed at specific Camino routes, or target groups, such as vegans and vegetarians, slow strollers, women, etcetera. In these groups, a lot of the conversations address how to pack a bag, bike transport from Santiago to home addresses, websites referring to blogs and YouTube clips, information and recommendations on *albergues*, socks, shoes and blisters and many more tips and tricks.

Instagram, as another social medium, has quite some hashtags such as #caminodesantiago, #caminoFrancés, #caminoasantiago, #caminolife and so on. I started following some of these hashtags, where mainly photos and other pictures that are Camino related are shared. These pictures often are pictures of pilgrims, walking gear, boots and feet, pictures of nice views along the Camino and of course pictures of Santiago de Compostela. The Instagram posts are unlike the Facebook posts, not followed by intense discussions and trips.

These social media pages, groups and hashtags gave me information for days, sometimes bedazzled me, but also gave me an idea on what to do next. Since I live in the Netherlands, I joined the Dutch Society of Saint James, *Nederlands Genootschap van Sint Jacob*, or NGSJ. Joining this organisation meant that I received my *credencial* - pilgrims passport - receive a monthly newsletter and receive four magazines of the NGSJ a year. Also included in the membership is access to a website with a lot of information such as route maps, lists of *albergues* and interesting reads and invitations to join many meetings and gatherings with other members. The NGSJ has a few locations in the country which can be visited. I have been to *Het Huis van Sint Jacob*, the House of Saint James, in Utrecht, where volunteers are present to provide information on routes, guide books, sleeping locations, practical information and some in-depth historical information. All of these volunteers have finished a Camino themselves and thus provide information and share their own experiences. The NGSJ has a

national and several regional divisions. Nationally, two meetings a year are organized. These meetings have a Camino theme, some lectures and moment for everyone to wish pilgrims that will start their Camino a *buen camino*, a good walk.

When I had visited the Utrecht-based office several times, and attended some of the meeting and informal drinks of the NGSJ, I realized that the people who are involved as volunteers or members and actively attend, do not just share a hobby or a passion, but are a true community together. They are all involved with the Camino de Santiago in one way or another. Almost every one of the members has walked the Camino, but being back home, returned from their pilgrimage, they now try to incorporate the Camino their day-to-day life – or mundane life in the words of Turner and Turner (1978). Many of the NGSJ-members try to spread their enthusiasm about the Camino, some do as volunteers, others have written a book, and others are active online.

Within the Netherlands the Camino is well known, and the popularity is growing. Within the media, more attention to and information about the Camino becomes available. “*De omweg naar Santiago*” – the detour to Santiago – was written by Cees Nooteboom and published in 1992. This book was translated into fifteen languages and thus published worldwide. Nooteboom ponders and reflects upon his travels within Spain, ending in Santiago de Compostela. The book is not as much a reflection upon a Camino pilgrimage, but more or less a historical and regional overview of Spain. Recently, in June 2019, a Dutch film was released in movie theatres. ‘Camino, a feature-length selfie’, by Martin de Vries, is a documentary-style film, where de Vries films himself on his walk to Santiago de Compostela. Within the Dutch Facebook groups, a lot of people were talking about the movie, and among pilgrims it is a hit. Before this film came out, a television series was broadcast in the Netherlands as well, in August 2018. This series, named ‘*Laat mij maar lopen*’, which translates as ‘Just let me walk’, followed seven people who were walking to Santiago de Compostela, at the Via de la Plata, with each their own reasons.

### 3.2 Worldwide Popularity of the Camino

As within the Netherlands the NGSJ is an active association for and of pilgrims of the Camino, in other countries association like these do exist as well. In Germany, France, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and many more countries do have such an association. They do work together and are informed mainly by ‘*Federación Española de Asociaciones de Amigos del Camino de Santiago*’, which is the overarching organisation for all of the Spanish local association and internationally overarching.

Not only in the Netherlands popular media publishes about the Camino. Worldwide there are a lot of guide books, novels, movies, television series and other forms of published work on the Camino. The amount of publications on the Camino, can perhaps, partially explain its popularity. Depending on the country of origin, many pilgrims are from a country in which a celebrity or someone famous has walked a Camino and shared his or her experiences.

‘The Way’ is probably the most famous movie made about the Camino. In ‘The Way’, actor Martin Sheen plays the role of Tom. Daniel, Tom his son died during a storm walking the Camino. The movie is about Tom heading to France to retrieve his son’s body, but who decides to walk the Camino Francés. He meets other people, who are looking for greater meaning in their lives, along the way. ‘The Way’ was released in 2010 and still is a big hit. During my fieldwork I met many people, mainly from the United States of America, that did not know about the Camino until they had seen the movie. After watching it, they decided to walk a Camino themselves. Another very famous work about the Camino de Santiago is the novel ‘The Pilgrimage’ by Paulo Coelho. Coelho walked the Camino himself, and this novel is partially based on his experiences. The novel has a spiritual and philosophical undertone and tells a story about Coelho and his mentor on a quest for a sword, while walking the Camino. ‘The Pilgrimage’, published in 1987, was Coelho’s debut novel.

In April of 2019 the news that the King and Queen of Belgium, with their children and some friends, were walking a part of the Camino Francés, was published. Members of the Belgian royal family has walked several stages of the Camino de Santiago in recent years. It was not surprising that the royals were returning, but the news spread like fire among pilgrims. Many conversations about the royal family took place. Pilgrims were wondering if they would see them, if they could recognize them, where they would sleep, if they would carry their luggage themselves and if the royal guards would have to walk with them. Unfortunately, I did not hear of anyone who encountered the royals, not along the route and neither on social media.

In Germany the book ‘*Ich bin dann mal weg*’, which translates to ‘Well, I’m out of here’, was written by Hape Kerkeling and published in 2006. Kerkeling is a famous comedian in Germany, who walked the Camino Francés in 2001. The book that he wrote about his journey on the Camino Francés became a best-seller, with more than five million Germans reading it. Subsequently, a movie was made in 2015, based on the book, and thus showing Kerkeling his journey on the Camino de Santiago. Every German pilgrim that I spoke to, not only knew who Kerkeling is, they had either seen the movie, or read the book, or did both.

In South-Korea the Camino is immense popular as well. All though I heard about Koreans walking before I arrived myself, I was surprised by how many Korean pilgrims I

encountered. Two Koreans that I met along the way, two young men in their twenties named Ham and Down, explained to me that South-Korea is a Catholic country. They told me that they both are walking the Camino not only because of a religious experience, but because they can put the experience of walking the Camino on their resume. The job market in South-Korea is highly competitive and the Camino is a way to stand out positively, when applying for jobs. The book by Paulo Coelho about the Camino is very popular, but there has also been a popular reality show on Korean television about the Camino. Furthermore, in 2006 Kim Nan Hee, a journalist published her book 'The Journey of a woman alone', on her experiences on the Camino Francés. Kim Hyo Sun, a Korean writer wrote a book about the three Camino's that she walked, the Camino Francés, Portugués and the Via de Plata. This book became a bestseller, and an inspiration for many to embark on the journey themselves. In 2018, a famous Korean 'k-pop' band walked the Camino. The band, existing of five men, was followed by a camera crew. Their Camino was broadcasted as a television series in South-Korea.

### 3.3. Instigations and Expectations

People worldwide get acquainted with the Camino de Santiago through popular media. Seeing a movie or reading a book often is the start of a further investigation of the topic and an instigator for excitement to walk a Camino themselves as well. Interesting is that a religious, spiritual or philosophical base is present in all of these forms of popular media. A quest or search for something that cannot be found in mundane life, being at a turning point in life, philosophical contemplations, processing trauma, situations, milestones and other major events or an escape of normal day-to-day life. In all the television series, books, movies and other forms of popular media, one or more of these topics is present.

The popular media not only instigators for people, they are also used, seen and read as preparations for pilgrims-to-be. These media provide a framework for expectations of the Camino. The readers and viewers are provided with a framework of philosophical, religious and spiritual experiences and interpretations of 'their Camino'. The growing popularity of the Camino can thus not merely be linked to media-attention, but also to a spiritual or religious search or quest for something out of the mundane.

*Frequently spiritual books by other pilgrims, such as those of Paulo Coelho (1995), are read in preparation for the journey, and provide a framework for the expectations, observations, experiences and interpretations thereof. The increasing popularity of taking this historical and religious route therefore cannot only be*

*attributed to the interest in simply hiking, but seems also to be linked to the search for something beyond oneself and one's everyday life (Peelen and Jansen 2007, 76).*



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<sup>1</sup> Sculpture of a pilgrim along the Camino Francés.

#### **Chapter 4. Along the Way.**

*This chapter will give insight in the materialities of the Camino Francés. The signing of the path, pilgrim offices, the available types of pilgrim shelters and the organisation and qualifications of being a pilgrim and being able to use pilgrim facilities. The concept of a 'Camino Family' as *communitas* will be discussed, as will the state of liminality of pilgrims.*

Together with six other people, I follow the scallop signs that are attached to walls and to the pavement. We have just arrived by train to Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port and are trying to find our way. It is evening, already dark outside, and only about five degrees Celsius. "Are you going to your hostel or to the pilgrim's office first?" a tall man in his twenties asks another man who appears to be around fifty years old. "Well, I have booked a hotel already, so I am going to check in over there. What do we have to do in the pilgrims office?" the other man replies. The younger man, who is wearing grey zip off pants, hiking shoes, a bright blue coat and a black backpack, responds that he did not yet book anything for the night, and is going to the pilgrims office to find a place to stay. The older man, wearing brown pants, brown hiking boots, and a big backpack with walking poles attached to it, nods understandingly, "Maybe I will go there tomorrow morning, but first I will find my hotel and have dinner" The conversation between the two man goes on about where they are from and how they travelled from their home towns. Two women, both in their thirties, who are also following the scallop shell signs, and are also wearing hiking gear and backpacks, talk about where to stay the night. When we all arrive in the centre of the town, after ten minutes of walking from the train station, three out of seven people go into another direction. Together with the three others that are left, I walk to the pilgrims office. We are welcomed warmly by three volunteers, from France, England and Germany. Depending on the languages we all speak, we take a seat at a table and get a cup of coffee or tea to warm ourselves. We are assisted by the volunteers to get a *credencial* for a donation of two euro, receiving a scallop shell for a donation of one euro and we receive several paper documents with information. These papers include a map on how to get out of Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, and to find the Camino from there on. Included in the papers is another map where the two official routes from Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port to Roncesvalles, a town 27 kilometres away, are shown. Furthermore there are four papers with a list of many *albergues* along the Camino Frances, including opening hours, prices and addresses, and a document with the profiles of the altitudes of the Camino and towns along the way in 34 stages. The volunteers, after providing us with everything we think that we need to know, point us into the direction of

the municipal *albergue*, so we can find a bed and rest to start walking the following day. “*Buen Camino*”, they greet us.

#### 4.1. The Way.

From Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port there are approximately 780 kilometres to go to Santiago de Compostela via the Camino Francés. By following the yellow arrows and scallop shell signs, no guide book or GPS is necessary. The route is very well signed, and water fountains with drinking water can be found regularly. The route leads through several Spanish regions, towns, villages and nature with beautiful landscapes. Some parts of the route are physically challenging. The route passes the Pyrenees, other steep hills, mountains, and the weather conditions can be rough. I have been walking through snow for a couple of days, other days it was raining and at other times it was around 30 degrees Celsius, with no shade to hide from the sun. Blisters, knee- ankle- back- and shoulder injuries are common amongst pilgrims, walking and wearing their backpack for days or weeks in a row. Walking a Camino can be equally demanding physically as mentally. Repetitive movements for such a long time, being alone, depending on yourself, being cut off from daily life and struggling physically can lead to contemplations. The Spanish high plains – the Meseta – in between Burgos and Leon are especially known to be mentally demanding, because of the monotonous and bare landscapes.

In Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port and in Santiago de Compostela are ‘pilgrims offices’. These pilgrims offices are staffed by volunteers, that assist pilgrims with their journey. In Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, the volunteers give advice and assistance to start the pilgrimage. In Santiago de Compostela the volunteers write and give out the *compostelas* – certificates of proof of completing the pilgrimage. Pilgrims use a *credencial*, which is also known as pilgrims passport but translates as ‘letter of credence’, as proof of being a pilgrim. With a *credencial*, pilgrims can stay in special pilgrims hostels, or *albergues*, and can have a discount to visit several cathedrals and museums. Pilgrims can only receive a *credencial* if they have proof of walking at least the final 100 kilometres to Santiago de Compostela, or 200 kilometres by bike or on horseback. Proof of the distance is shown by the stamps that pilgrims have in their *credencial*. Only if for the final 100 kilometres, a pilgrim has two stamps a day in his or her *credencial*, he or she qualifies for a *compostela*. The requirements are mentioned in the *credencial* and on the website of the pilgrims office in Santiago de Compostela. Stamps for the *credencial* are widely available along the Camino. In bars, restaurants, stores, churches, museums, and hostels there

are stamps. Getting two stamps a day is not difficult, but for many it is a sport to get as many as possible, or to find stamps with special images.

#### 4.2. Albergues.

Along the route, several facilities for pilgrims are available. Pilgrim shelters or hostels, which are called *albergues*, are abundant along the Camino Francés. The shelters differ in facilities, comfort and price. Three different types of *albergues* are available along the route; private, municipal and *donativo albergues*. Of course there are other possibilities, such as hotels, etcetera, but most pilgrims stay in *albergues* along the Camino.

*Municipal albergues* are municipally or regionally owned and operated shelters. There are not private bedrooms available, only dormitories and the bathrooms and restrooms are shared as well. The prices to sleep in the municipal *albergues* vary in between 5 and 10 euro for a night. The staff of the *municipal albergues* work for the municipality, and the only people that are allowed to 'get a bed for a night' are pilgrims with a *credencial*. Some of these *albergues* have a kitchen that can be used, some have washing machines and some do not have any of these facilities. It is not possible to make a reservation in the *municipal albergues*, they work with a first come, first serve principle.

Private *albergues* are privately owned hostels. Pilgrims with a *credencial* often get a discount on the price to stay the night, but the private hostels are not solely meant for pilgrims. Sometimes it is possible to book a private room in these *albergues*, but of course the prices are higher than to stay a night in a dormitory. The staff is payed and there are no volunteers. Prices vary from 10 to 25 euro for a night. These *albergues* can best be compared to hostels that are available outside of the Camino context, in other towns and countries, too. Facilities range from washing facilities, kitchens, to restaurants. In private *albergues* it is possible to make a reservation for a bed or a room.

*Donativo albergues* are, as the name suggests, hostels where pilgrims can stay for a donation. Most times there are shared facilities and dormitories for pilgrims who have a *credencial*. Often there are signs with a suggested price, usually around 5 euro. In *donativos* it is often possible to join and share for dinner. There often is a suggested price for a donation for dinner as well. Often these *donativos* are owned by the church and staffed by volunteers. These volunteers can be locals, but also foreigners. In *donativos* it is normally not possible to make a reservation for a bed. They work first come first serve.

Sometimes *albergues* are 'adopted' by foreign associations. The NGSJ, for instances, adopted the *albergue* in Roncesvalles. This *albergue* is owned by the church, but staffed by

Dutch volunteers, that travel to Roncesvalles and stay for two weeks to staff the *albergue* and assist the pilgrims that come and go. I have been at a few *albergues* that were staffed by German, Swiss, Irish and British volunteers. Not only in the Netherlands there is an association for pilgrims, or linked to the Camino, but many countries do. The NGSJ staffs the *albergue* in Roncesvalles during the entire year. People who have completed a Camino, can apply to be a volunteer. They have to attend a training for *hospitaleros* – staff working at an *albergue* – and have to travel to the *albergue* at their own expenses. The stay, and the food and beverages that they consume is all provided by the church that owns the *albergue*.



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In the past years, many new *albergues* were started along the route. These new *albergues* are mostly private *albergues*. Complete new buildings were build, or old *albergues* have been renovated. The municipal *albergue* in Burgos, ‘*Casa de los Cubos*’, has been renovated, and is clean, new and has 150 bed available for pilgrims. These are bunkbeds in rooms with at least 20 beds in them. The amount of beds in this *albergue* is not unique. Some *albergues* have over 200 beds available for pilgrims. I heard one pilgrim speak a ‘pilgrim factory’ because of the organization and the clean and factory-like interior of the *albergue*.

Many pilgrims use specific apps on their mobile phones to pick an *albergue* in the town that they want to stay the night. Many towns have a couple or even many *albergues*, and pilgrims weigh their options by comparing prices and facilities that are available. Some pilgrims make reservations in private hostels, or hotels, to be sure to have a bed to sleep in during the night. Many *albergues* work with a first come first serve principle. If there are no more beds

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<sup>2</sup> Albergue in Roncesvalles, adopted and staffed by the NGSJ.

available, the pilgrim has to try at another place. I was walking the Camino in March, April and May of 2019, which is very early in the season, since it can be very cold. I never had a problem to find a bed, but I heard that in summertime, in July and August, there truly is a race to find the cheapest beds. People leave as early as 4 o'clock and apparently rush through the trail. Both pilgrims and *hospitaleros* shared stories with me about their experiences at the Camino in summertime, and the bed-races as they called it.

#### 4.3. Why Are You Walking?

As discussed in the previous chapter, a lot of people have a specific reason to walk this pilgrimage. There are many studies done already on motivations to walk a pilgrimage, so this will only be discussed briefly. One of the very first things that people ask each other when they meet, is “Why are you walking?” Responses vary from not knowing, but being drawn to the Camino and hoping to find out why, to just being divorced after a marriage of 35 year, and wanting time and space to focus on oneself. A lot of people appear to be in some sort of personal crisis, a divorce, getting retired, having a midlife crisis, losing a job and more of these. Other people say they like hiking, have always been dreaming of walking the famous Camino, want to focus on themselves instead of others, or find out who they are, what their dreams are and what they want to do with their lives. Almost all pilgrims are voluntarily walking this pilgrimage for spiritual reasons, guidance, having time to think and to focus on themselves. Liminality is, as Turner and Turner (1978) describe, a voluntarily removal from the everyday world, and a position of a participant of a ritual - the pilgrimage - who has exited one social state, but not yet entered a new social state. These quests for guidance and spiritual searches thus do happen within liminality.

#### 4.4. Camino Family

Before I went to walk the Camino myself, I heard a lot about the social contacts between pilgrims. Pilgrims often speak of their Camino family and afterwards about lifelong friendships that were formed at the Camino. Of course within the Netherlands at the NGSJ meetings, I already saw a glimpse of the community that the members form together. People speak of friendships with pilgrims that they would have never met in their normal life, because their lives differ drastically. During my fieldwork, I have experienced this as well. Of course I cannot speak of a lifelong friendship now, since I have returned home only a couple of months now. The people that I have met, and the friendships that arose during ‘my’ Camino, seem special. During walking, rest-stops and afternoons and evenings in the *albergues*, it makes sense to meet

other pilgrims. People share struggles and hardships, but also fun times and profound conversations. Since people often walk approximately the same distances, pilgrims do meet each other every couple of days, or even every day. Pilgrims have conversations about experiencing and sharing something special and intense, such as the Camino.

The concept of *communitas* that Turner and Turner (1987) introduced is very appropriate in the context of Camino families. *Communitas*, as most significant aspect of liminality, “combines loneliness, sacredness, homogeneity and comradeship”. These aspects apply to the pilgrims at the Camino, and lead to communion. Being away from ‘normal’ mundane life, and social relations, and the new commonality with fellow pilgrims, are *communitas*. This concept of Camino family, that I consider as *communitas*, does not take away that mundane conflicts also take place at the Camino. The race for the cheap beds during the summer months, or high season, are an example of contestation. Coleman and Elsner (1995), state that both *communitas* and contestation can appear within pilgrimage, since pilgrimage is not solid and both contestation and *communitas* are situational and flexible features, that both can appear, depending on the context.

## Chapter 5. The Pilgrim-Tourist Continuum

*As there is not a clear boundary to divide pilgrims and tourists, both of these concepts and perceptions of each other will be conceptualised for the Camino Francés. Perceptions of authenticity differ for every person, but do shape ideas of who qualifies as a ‘real pilgrim’ and who is perceived as a tourist. Perceptions of local inhabitants on the Camino and on authenticity, pilgrims and tourist will be elaborated upon.*

We are walking out of Portomarín, which means that we have 93 kilometres to go to Santiago de Compostela, only a few more days. I am walking with nine other pilgrims to Barbadelo, a town eight kilometres away. In Barbadelo we will stay the night. The nine other pilgrims are part of the Camino family that I have become part of. Partially it truly is a family, since a married couple – he is British and she is Spanish - and their daughter are part of the group. The other members are two German pilgrims who have met along the way, a Spanish woman, an Italian man and my two friends that I have been meeting on and off and walking with for a few weeks, an Australian and a French man. We are heading to Barbadelo, since this is an unusual stop, so we think that there will be enough beds available. Since one day, the Camino has become a lot more busy, because of the pilgrims that start walking in Sarria, 114 kilometres before Santiago de Compostela. The Italian pilgrim from my Camino Family also started his walk in Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port. He makes jokes about the scent of flowers and soap that the ‘fresh pilgrims’ spread at the Camino. We all laugh, until the German man looks at Anna, the Spanish woman. “We don’t mean you Anna, you are a real pilgrim and not a fake one”. Anna also started her Camino in Sarria. She has told all of us already a few times, but does so again. “I don’t know if I can do more dan five days, it is difficult. If I make it, maybe I will go further with my next Camino”. The Italian man says that he was only joking, and that Anna should not worry, after all she is part of the family. “But Anna, on your next Camino you must carry your backpack, and not send it with transport!” the German pilgrims laughs.

### 5.1. Camino Spirit

Both during my fieldwork in the Netherlands and along the Camino Francés, there has been a lot of talking on the ‘true Camino spirit’. Of course, I became very curious on what this Camino spirit entails for pilgrims, and I have been in a lot of conversations about the topic. Many different concepts of the Camino spirit were discussed, being a good person, not littering the Camino, helping fellow-pilgrims in need and not sleeping in *donativo albergues* without

giving a donation. Overall it seems that the Camino spirit is something slightly different for everyone, but has to do with good intentions. Mattias, a German pilgrim in his twenties, told me “To me, it [Camino spirit] means that you act with the best intentions for everyone. So I want to listen to people’s stories without judgement. I think that not judging and accepting and learning from each other’s differences is the true Camino spirit”.

## 5.2. Pilgrim Terminology.

Amongst pilgrims terminology is used to classify and describe themselves and other pilgrims. This terminology is based on how the pilgrims make their way to Santiago de Compostela, and depending on how many kilometres this journey is. There are many different Camino routes leading towards Santiago (Appendix 2.), but the routes themselves did not matter in the classification of pilgrims.

Approximately ten percent of the pilgrims on all of the Camino routes, start at Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, almost 800 km away from the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, in France, is the town from where I started walking the route as well. The only place where more pilgrims start their Camino is Sarria. Almost a quarter of all of the Camino pilgrims start walking from Sarria, which is a town in Spain on the route of the Camino Francés, 114 km away from Santiago de Compostela. It is of course possible to walk to Santiago, starting a location of choice, with intentions of the journey being a pilgrimage. It is interesting to note though that pilgrims do seem to attach a certain weight, to the starting point of theirs and other peoples pilgrimage. The terminology that is used amongst pilgrims is partially based on the number of kilometres they walk to Santiago, and thus on the place where their Camino embarks. Contrary to the Camino spirit, I found that the nicknames and especially the meanings of these nicknames were normative in a sense. Sayings such as “These fake pilgrims steal the cheap beds away from us, real pilgrims” are not uncommon.

### Peregrinos

The Spanish word for pilgrim is *peregrino*, and for female pilgrims *peregrina*. Along the Camino, *peregrino* is a common name for pilgrims to call each other, but also the local population will talk about *peregrinos*. Often heard when a pilgrim passes locals is the saying “*Buen Camino, Peregrino*”. Locals and pilgrims can recognize *peregrinos* because of their outfits and their gear. Pilgrims often wear a backpack, use one or two hiking poles and hiking shoes or boots. The pilgrims walk the Camino and follow the yellow arrows, or scallop shell signs along the route.

### Bicigrinos

Besides pilgrims that are walking, there are also people who ride their bike to Santiago de Compostela. These pilgrims are called *bicigrinos*. The word *bicigrino* is a contraction of the words *bicicleta* (Spanish for bicycle) and *peregrino*. *Bicigrinos* are often spotted in groups and ride distances that are much longer than pilgrims by foot. There of course are encounters between walkers and bikers, but these are only once. Pilgrims that walk, often walk the same stages or distances. So pilgrims that start walking on the same day, often meet each other over and over again. Along the way, but also in the afternoons and evenings in the town where they will sleep during the night. *Bicigrinos* have similar experiences among each other. Because of the differences in daily average distances, when *bicigrinos* and *peregrinos* meet, this is often only once during their *Caminos*.

### Turigrinos

A third name that some pilgrims are called is '*Turigrino*'. This word is a merge of *turista* (tourist) and *peregrino*. As the word already implies, these pilgrims are often considered to be tourists at the Camino, by other pilgrims. I encountered two different explanations of the word *turigrino*, so there is no consensus, even though the word is used very frequently. One meaning of the word *turigrino* is literally someone who is a tourist and not a pilgrim, though he or she is walking the Camino. *Turigrinos* in this sense are walking the Camino, but are regarded, mostly by other pilgrims, to not be a 'real pilgrim'. Often this concept of a *turigrino* is linked with a pilgrim that does not operate with the Camino spirit in mind, according to other pilgrims.

The second description of *turigrinos* that was explained to me is that *turigrinos* are tour groups that have a Camino holiday. So they visit and experience the Camino, without walking it fully. Twice I have seen this type of *turigrinos* on the Camino myself. A tour bus drops tourists somewhere on the route, the tourists walk a few kilometres to see a highlight and then to get picked up by the bus again. These *turigrinos* do not wear any hiking gear, no backpacks or walking poles, but they have big photo cameras with them, which is why they probably are viewed more like tourists than pilgrims. If they do, they bus the Camino and only walk parts at highlights along the route.

### 5.3. Perspectives on Authenticity

The perspectives of authenticity that pilgrims do have are important in their ideas about other pilgrims. Despite the idea of the Camino Spirit, normative judgements about each other,

terminology such as fake pilgrims, fresh pilgrims etcetera are present every day at the Camino, but also online there are many discussions. There are several topics that are ground for lively discussions. The ideas of what a real pilgrim is, ideas about authenticity, can be divided into four main topics, distances, hardship, being in control and motivations of the pilgrims.

Distances that pilgrims walk, are ground for many discussions. Pilgrims that walk more than 100 kilometres do receive a *compostela* in Santiago de Compostela. Therefore Sarria, with a distance of 114 kilometres to Santiago de Compostela is a very busy starting point. People that start their Camino in Sarria are often called ‘fresh’ or ‘fake’ pilgrims. They still have clean gear and clothes, and look and smell fresh. Pilgrims that start further along the route, or even start from home, often walk for weeks or even months. A Camino from Sarria, which often is finished in five or six days, is not considered a ‘real’ or authentic Camino by these pilgrims. Some people, when they are injured or sick, and they do not want to, or cannot stay behind, take a bus or a taxi to another town, instead of walking. In the eyes of certain pilgrims, the full Camino has to be done by foot, because other modes of transportation are considered ‘cheating’. Some pilgrims even go a step further, and state that to be a ‘real pilgrim’, you have to walk one stage of more than 40 kilometres in one day during a Camino. This idea though, is not shared by many pilgrims.

Hardship along the route, is the most contested of the three topics of discussion. There are several facilities along the route, that can be used if desired, that provide comfort to the pilgrims. It is possible to have luggage transported daily, from one town to another, so that pilgrims do not have to carry their luggage themselves. This luggage transport makes the hike for a pilgrim a lot easier. Another topic is the shelters. Sleeping in *albergues* along the entire route, is considered something a ‘real pilgrim’ does. Booking a private room, or a hotel room is not considered authentic.

The third topic that is discussed a lot, is that some pilgrims believe that being a ‘real pilgrim’ has to do with giving up control of the situation. In their eyes, a true pilgrim does not plan ahead. A pilgrim should start walking in the morning, and stop when he or she feels like that. Planning to get to a certain town, or definitely booking or making a reservation ahead, is not done, in their eyes. Giving up control, and seeing what the day will bring, is what they believe is authentic to a pilgrimage.

Walking because of religious or spiritual reasons, is the final topic of discussion. Some pilgrims believe that people that walk the Camino, because of non-religious reasons, is not just. Others think that walking because of religious and spiritual motivations is right, and defines a ‘real pilgrim’.

Pilgrims all have a different idea about what is authentic in the context of pilgrimage and pilgrims. It is clear though, that whatever they do consider as authentic, is also valued more by these individuals. Measuring up to one's own ideas of authenticity, gives the experience of the Camino a higher value for these individuals (Lozanski 2010).

Since the ideas of who is a tourist and who is an authentic pilgrim, do differ greatly from individual to individual, and there thus no consensus is in regards of a division between an tourist and pilgrim, attempting to separate the two is useless and not possible. The idea of distinguishing these both categories of travellers, is not clear cut. Graburn (1983) proposed the concept of 'a continuum of inseparable elements' which fits better in this case. Overlap between the categories of pilgrim and tourist is unavoidable. Depending on the situation, one can be viewed as a pilgrim or tourist, by someone else, depending on perceptions of authenticity of the Camino. Using the concept of a continuum ranging from pilgrim, to tourist, can be used to define, but allowing and taking into consideration overlapping features.

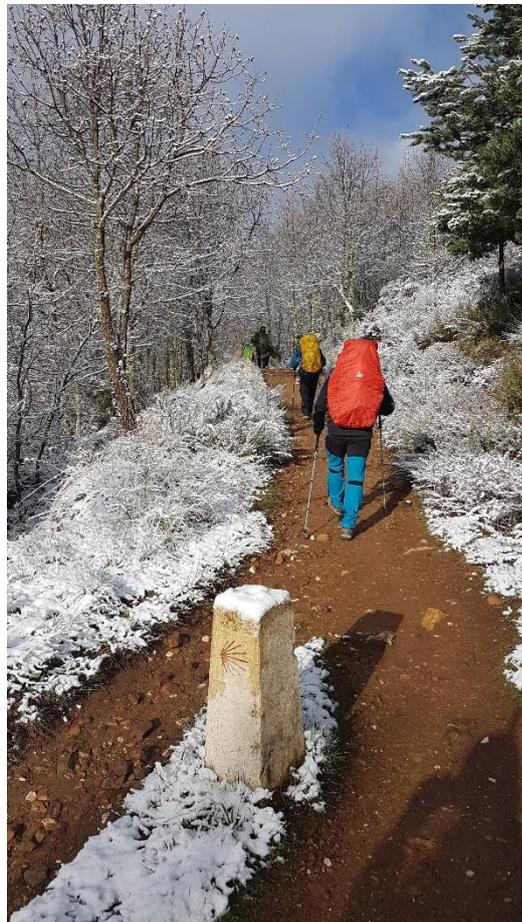
#### 5.4. Perceptions of Inhabitants.

During my fieldwork I have had conversations with locals in towns and villages, about pilgrims and the Camino. Just like pilgrims do have ideas and opinions about authenticity and each other, the Spaniards who live alongside the Camino distinct pilgrims and tourists. I have asked the locals about the four concepts that pilgrims define a 'real pilgrim' by; distance, hardship, motivations to walk and planning and being in control. The locals did not really appear to be bothered by most of these categorisations. They did not often call people tourists, but almost always pilgrims. Carlos, a pensioned man living in Carrion de los Condes on the Camino Francés, told me how he enjoys seeing pilgrims from all over the world. He told me that he likes meeting people from everywhere, and that he especially meets a lot of people from South America. Carlos told me that he believes that catholic pilgrims are 'true pilgrims' in his eyes, but that everybody is welcome to walk this catholic pilgrimage, and that maybe they will convert.

From Sarria onwards, the Camino is remarkably busier, with walking pilgrims. The opportunities to talk to local people, are less, perhaps because of the many pilgrims. The local people and inhabitants of the people that I spoke to on this final stage of the Camino Francés, did not make any divisions in types of pilgrims. They expressed to be thankful for all of the pilgrims, because most villages and towns make quite some money out of the pilgrims and without the Camino, these places would look rather different.

El Pais published an article in July 2017 about protests in Logroño, the capital town of the La Rioja region, against the Camino. In the article the pilgrims are called ‘smelly hipsters’ and blamed of gentrification of the city centre. The protesters want the route to be changed, so that the Camino does not pass through the city centre anymore. In the article two quotes of protesters are mentioned, about authentic ideas of pilgrims “What’s more, the pilgrims look terrible, they are dirty and smelly. In the middle ages, they brought culture, today they just have black feet,” and “One of the most serious aspects of the Camino de Santiago is that it is a Christian tradition, but many pilgrims are non-believers and they engage in sexual relations along the way, undermining the essence of Catholic morality,” (El Pais, July 31, 2017).

Besides these happenings in July 2017, there was no follow-up, or comparable event or protest against pilgrims or the Camino. The influence of the Camino and especially of pilgrims and tourists, does seem to be within boundaries. Only in Logroño, it appears, did people seem to suffer from the amounts of tourists or pilgrims. When I was in Logroño myself, people did not seem to bother the pilgrims at all. I have not met any inhabitant who wanted the Camino route to be redirected out of the town. It appears that in the eyes of the inhabitants, so far there is not (yet) any case of overtourism in this part of Spain.



## Chapter 6. Commodification on the Way and Arriving in Santiago de Compostela

*This chapter will outline the several types of highlights, facilities, services and goods that are Camino-related or fully depended on pilgrims. Commodification is discussed in light of stores, shops, restaurants, bars, services, business models and goods.*

“Can you cut the bread, please?” John, a British pilgrim asks me. John has just told me that he is walking his fourth Camino now. He is sending messages with his mobile phone to his teenage children at home. We are in the kitchen of an *albergue* in Los Arcos, preparing dinner with five pilgrims together. John shows me a few pictures that he took with his mobile phone during the past few days. He explains me how he has walked three Caminos before, but never walked the part from Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port to Logroño. The past days of walking, were new terrain for him. John and I are looking at his pictures, when Guadalupe, a Mexican pilgrim of 35, joins us. She does not speak English, so I translate a few things that are said. John shows a picture of the statues at the Alto del Perdón. He says that it has been a dream of him to see the statues and feel the wind on top of the mountain, after a rough climb up. I translate this to Guadalupe, when John says that it has been on his bucket list to see the Alto del Perdón. Guadalupe responds to this herself, as she understood him. “Bucketlist! She repeats, and she takes out her phone to show pictures that she posted on Instagram. The Alto del Perdón has been her highlight on the Camino so far too.

### 6.1. Camino Highlights

Online there are so many blogs, articles and YouTube films about the Camino Francés. Travel stories, pictures and tips and tricks are shared by many. Several blogs elaborate on highlights along the Camino. The statue is called “Where the path of the wind, crosses the path of the stars” and dates back to 1996. The statue is placed on the top of the mountain that is known as the ‘Alto del Perdón’, which is a tough climb out of the city Pamplona. On top of the mountain, next to the statue, there is a foodtruck, and a road. Pilgrims are not the only ones visiting the statue. On tripadvisor, people mention how ‘autogrinós’ can visit the place as well, and someone mentions in September 2018: “Tip: bring along a few chocolate bars to offer to the pilgrims who have just slogged up the hill and are continuing on down the hill. They'll thank you!”. The Alto del Perdón is not only popular among pilgrims.

In Irache, Bodegas Irache built a wine fountain, where wine can be tapped for free by pilgrims. The wine fountain is located right next to the path of the Camino, and is not to be

missed. The fountain was built in 1991, more recently a webcam that broadcasts live is built in, to watch the pilgrims that are tapping wine live online. Another highlight is the Cruz the Ferro, which is an iron cross, that indicates the highest point of the Camino Francés. Many people bring a stone from their hometown, that they place at the Cruz the Ferro location, as a symbol to leave behind their burdens. There are more ‘highlights’ along the route, all of them mentioned in blogs and guidebooks. On social media, pictures of these highlights are posted and shared abundantly.

## 6.2. Camino Businesses and Facilities

Along the Camino Francés, one never has to go far without a store, bar, restaurant or other place to eat and drink. The amount of facilities along the route, is something that attracts people to walk. The Camino is a safe place to start hiking, since every few kilometres there is a place to have something to eat or drink and even to sleep. Many of these places were especially started for pilgrims, and carry Camino- and pilgrim-related names, such as “Buen Camino Bar”. Locals sometimes sell drinks and snacks to pilgrims from the side of the road, outside of their gardens and even from their cars. The locals often offer coffee and tea, fruits and canned drinks to pilgrims, during mornings. Sometimes these are offered for a donation, sometimes for a fixed price. Besides places to eat, drink and sleep, there are many souvenir shops as well. Along the route there are vending machines, selling food and beverages, but also blister patches, sun cream, souvenirs, hats and other products that pilgrims might need or want. In *albergues*, bars and restaurants souvenirs are often sold, but also in supermarkets, pharmacies and other stores, souvenirs and a product range for pilgrims are available. From blister patches, to hiking socks and Camino-branded items are sold. Special pilgrims shops are available along the route, selling all the hiking gear one could need or even think off. New backpacks, clothes and walking poles and souvenirs are sold here. These stores really only aim for pilgrims to be their customers.

Special pilgrim-related businesses are present at the Camino as well. One of the facilities offered is the transportation of luggage and backpacks for pilgrims. The costs of luggage transport are around 4 to 5 euro a day, where the suitcases, backpacks or other forms of luggage are brought to the shelter where the pilgrim is planning on staying the night. The pilgrims themselves thus walk the stage, and the luggage will be present upon arrival. Not carrying luggage during the walks, makes it lighter and easier for pilgrims to walk and finish the Camino. The luggage transportation along the Camino Francés is very popular. Four competing companies are active offering this service. In *albergues*, small paper bags with a piece of rope or paperclip, are available. All a pilgrim has to do is choosing one of these companies, put

money in the bag and write down where the luggage is supposed to go, and attach the bag to the luggage.



### 6.3. Authenticity

Along the Camino, the concept and ideas of authenticity are used in products and facilities that are offered. A lot of pilgrims use modern hiking poles during their walks. These are made out of metals and plastics, have solid and soft handles, and other features to make them light, foldable and safe to use. Some pilgrims, however, do not want to walk with modern walking poles. A fellow pilgrim that I met a couple of times, found a stick alongside the path that he was walking. He did not bring any walking poles, but with a couple of days on the path, he was struggling. His knees and feet hurt and he was walking slowly because of this. When he

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<sup>3</sup> Pilgrim's store in Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port

found the stick, he used it when he walked and his pains were relieved. After two weeks, his stick was stolen out of the *albergue*, Roger said that it was fine and the person who stole his stick, probably needed it more than he did. On that day it started snowing, and walking the mountains with snow, is slippery and dangerous. Roger absolutely did not want to buy modern walking poles. He expressed that after walking like a true pilgrim, with a stick that the Camino provided, he could not become a ‘modern pilgrim’. When I met Roger during a coffee break in a bar, he bought a walking stick in that bar. He found that walking without a stick was difficult and dangerous, so he needed one. The stick that he bought, was one made from a stick of a tree, with a special metal ending attached for grip. The stick was more expensive than a foldable walking pole with suspension and handlebars. Roger however wanted a stick to look more like ‘a real pilgrim’, as he expressed.

In most towns along the Camino, there are church masses with pilgrim blessings daily. These masses are often catholic eucharist masses and many pilgrims visit. Non-religious pilgrims, also do attend the masses, because of the pilgrims blessings that are part. During the blessings, pilgrims are asked to step forward, they are asked where they are from and the pastor and priests will pray and sing for them. Everyone together prays for a safe journey on their Camino. During the masses there is an offertory, and pilgrims are asked for a donation for the church. Many non-religious pilgrims expressed never going to church at home, but going to pilgrims blessings, because they believed it to be an authentic aspect of the Camino.

The locals did not attend these pilgrim masses, but went to, for instance, a regular church service later on during the evening. The pilgrim masses and pilgrim blessings are a form of staged authenticity by the church. These masses and blessings are not fake, but the ‘real’ masses for the inhabitants and locals are hidden from pilgrims and thus kept away from tourists (Badone and Roseman 2010). The pilgrims masses and blessings are staged to offer them a unique and authentic experience, that is valued by pilgrims, and to maintain the local culture without interference of tourists.

#### 6.4. Camino Business Models

Several types of businesses use the Camino as their territorial field of operation. These businesses can also operate outside of the Camino, but have adapted specific features of the Camino in their businesses. In Villafranca del Bierzo, I met a Dutch woman, who started walking from Ponferrada, and was resting from her first day on the Camino. Janneke, as she is called, was on her way to Sarria, to meet a group of people that she was going to walk to Santiago de Compostela with. This group existed of three coaches and three participants, who

together as a group, were going to walk this part of the Camino as a coaching holiday or five-day coaching session. Janneke wants to organize the same type of coaching for Dutch teenagers at the Camino and therefore was going to participate in this coaching group.

Several forms of tourism are present at the Camino as well. Tours and tour groups for elderly, for people with a disability, bikers, horseback pilgrims, international veterans and so on, are all organized by different, international, organizations. These tours are organized to walk, ride a back or horseback or visit the Camino by buss. Beggars or homeless people are present at the Camino as well. One homeless man that I met five times on the Camino, called himself a professional pilgrim. He tried to sleep in *donativo albergues* as much as possible, asked for food and drinks at pilgrims and *hospitaleros* and was making his way to Santiago de Compostela. When I saw the professional pilgrim in Santiago de Compostela, we congratulated one another and he told me that he was going on a pilgrimage to Rome now.

On 25 July 2019, El País published a news article about a group of thieves that was arrested for thievery in *albergues* and from pilgrims. When I was walking the Camino myself, a lot of stories and rumours about a group of thieves, pretending to be pilgrims, already was told and shared. The story was that a group of men, was walking the Camino and during the night robbed pilgrims from money, mobile phones, cameras and other valuables. A lot of people therefore kept their valuable items in their sleeping bag during the night. The new article explains that twelve men from Bilbao are suspected of, in total, 108 cases of thievery. These men have found a way to make money out of the Camino.

#### 6.5. Arriving in Santiago de Compostela.

When arriving in Santiago, pilgrims go to the Cathedral, where the shrine of Saint James is. When pilgrims see the cathedral, this often is a highlight of their journey, and many emotions are displayed. People hug, cry, laugh, or just stare at the cathedral, reminiscing their journey. In the cathedral, the shrine is visited. There is a statue of Santiago, that can be hugged by pilgrims in the cathedral. Pilgrims can visit the pilgrims office to, if they qualify, receive their Compostela. Next to the cathedral stands a historical building, 'Hostal dos Reis Católicos', that used to be a pilgrims hospital and shelter. The building now hosts one of the most luxurious and expensive hotels of the city, the Parador of Santiago de Compostela.

Santiago de Compostela is well-known because of the Camino, and a very touristy city. A tourist train runs through the town, many tourist shops and facilities are present as well. For pilgrims that undertake a Camino by bike, there is a transportation service that delivers bikes

home and thus operates internationally. In the city a pilgrims mass and blessing is held twice a day, for pilgrims that have arrived, finished their Camino and for a safe return home.



## Chapter 7.

### Who owns the Camino de Santiago?

*A frequently asked question by many pilgrims along the Camino is 'Who owns the Camino?' In this chapter the several actors that are involved in maintaining the Camino, assisting pilgrims and providing services are discussed. The idea that the Camino is a commons, a resource for all is discussed. Commodification of a commons, the Camino, is elaborated upon.*

Together with four other pilgrims and a *hospitalero*, I am sitting in the garden of the *albergue* where I will spend the night. The weather is good, it is sunny and about 24 degrees Celsius. The other pilgrims and I have all met each other before in albergues along the camino. Now we are relaxing after walking a tough day at the *Meseta*, the high plains of Spain, in between Burgos and Leon. Thomas, a fellow pilgrim from Sweden, bought a bottle of wine that we are all sharing. After arriving at the *albergue*, I took a shower and washed the clothes that I wore today. Since almost every pilgrim washes their clothes almost daily, the lines in the garden are filled with colourful hiking clothes, socks, underwear and quick drying towels. Everybody is talking about the day, the scenery, the weather, feet and injuries and about what and where to eat for dinner. Ezequiel, a 20-something year old pilgrim from Argentina, asks Anna, the *hospitalero* of the *albergue*, about her job as *hospitalero*. Anna explains that she works for the municipal *albergue* in this town and thus is not a volunteer, but working for the municipality and indirectly for the Castilla y Leon regional government. She works nine months a year, seven days a week. Her days are long and consist of taking care of pilgrims, keeping the albergues clean, providing food and doing administrative work. The conversation continues to a question that has popped up in many conversations with fellow pilgrims along the Camino– Who owns the Camino? Who makes sure that the yellow arrows are visible and point in the right direction, who takes care of signs that point the way and warn for dangerous situations, who maintains the roads and who keeps the Camino clean from littering? Jessica, a pilgrim from the United States of America, shares a story on how she met a Spanish man who was repainting a yellow arrow in a small town in the La Rioja region. He is the responsible person for the yellow arrows in his village, and repaints the arrows every year. Jessica tells us how proud he was explaining her that he has been painting the arrows for almost twenty years now, voluntarily. The other pilgrims and I respond to the story by wondering out loud how all the 800 Camino Francés kilometres are organized, if all of the – more than one hundred – towns along the Camino have a voluntarily responsible inhabitant.

### 7.1. El Camino as World Heritage.

The Camino Francés stretches through the four Spanish regions Navarra, La Rioja, Castilla y Leon and Galicia. Starting the pilgrimage in the French town Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, it is not even one day of walking through the French Pyrenees before reaching Spain. The route passes through hundreds of towns and villages, before reaching Santiago de Compostela.

The Camino Francés is, together with several other northern Camino-routes part of the UNESCO World Heritage List. UNESCO mentions not only the route as a World Heritage Site, but includes “cathedrals, churches, hospitals, hostels and even bridges” (UNESCO, n.d.). In 1993 the Camino was first included in the list and in 2015 the site ‘the Route of Santiago de Compostela’ was extended with more routes, including some of the earliest pilgrimage routes to Santiago de Compostela. The website of the UNESCO World Heritage Site furthermore describes the shared responsibilities for the ‘serial property’. In 1985 the Camino de Santiago was registered as a ‘Property of Cultural Interest’, or *Bien de Interés Cultural* in Spanish. This registration means that the Camino de Santiago falls under the highest form of cultural heritage protection in Spain, according to the Spanish Historical Heritage Act Law from 1985.

The Camino routes are Crown property, whereas the local components are under private, public and institutional ownership. The Autonomous Communities, through which the several Camino routes pass, have the local responsibility for the protection of the serial property that runs through the autonomous territories. This serial property thus means not only the paths and roads, but also the churches, shelters, bridges, hospitals and other buildings and statues marked as part of the heritage. The serial property is managed by *Consejo Jacobeo*, or the Jacobean Council, which is part of the Ministry of Culture and Sports of the Spanish Government. The Jacobean Council was created for the specific purpose to protect and conserve the Camino routes through collaborating on programmes and actions of the several local actors. The Jacobean Council was also erected to promote the Camino de Santiago as cultural routes, to conserve and restore the historical heritage, to regulate and promote tourism and to assist pilgrims (UNESCO, n.d.). The *Guardia Civil*, the Spanish civil police, is officially involved in protecting and assisting pilgrims along the route. This involvement is promoted through posters and banners in Spanish and English language.

### 7.2. Involvement of Locals, Pilgrims and Volunteers.

Walking the Camino Francés myself, I have seen many different signs pointing in the right direction. Yellow arrows and Scallop Shell symbols are present almost everywhere, but local and regional signs do differ. In some regions the number of kilometres to Santiago de

Compostela is mentioned on the sign, in other regions there is nothing but a scallop shell symbol on a sign pointing the right direction. In some towns there are welcoming signs with information about pilgrim facilities in the town, while in other towns there is nothing Camino-related except for yellow painted arrows that lead the way.

Local inhabitants of the villages and towns often are very proud of living next to the Camino, and the Camino often is big part of their lives. During many rest-stops along the route I have been talking with locals. More than a once I was asked to pray for them and for their sick family members and loved ones in the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. The inhabitants were glad that I spoke Spanish so that we could have a conversation. Antonio, around 60 years of age and local farmer herding cows in a village in the region of Galicia, told me that he is proud of the village he lives in. Antonio was born in the same village where he got married, had 2 children and still lives with his wife. He explained that he sees pilgrims come and go every day, and that he considers the Camino to be like a path of life. He likes to provide pilgrims with drinks and food, to assist them, since like life, the path is not easy. He feels great to help someone out who is struggling, and hopes that he will be remembered by the pilgrims he assisted. Antonio told me that both his children have walked the Camino Francés, and that he was in Santiago de Compostela when they arrived. He expressed this to be “the proudest days of his life”. Antonio explained me how he is not the only proud inhabitant of his village, but that together with others, they keep the town clean and tidy for pilgrims to enjoy. Antonio said that the Camino belongs to the pilgrims. In his view, without the pilgrims, the Camino is just a connection of path, nothing else than any other. Without the pilgrims there is no pilgrimage. But, as he said, the pilgrims could not do it, without the people who assist the pilgrims, and thus the locals and *hospitaleros* are just as crucial for the Camino as the pilgrims are. Since, if the pilgrims cannot eat, or sleep anywhere, they will not come to walk.

Both during my fieldwork period within the Netherlands and on the Camino Francés, I have spoken to many people who work or have been working as a Camino-related volunteer. All of the volunteers that I spoke with, were passionate about the Camino, about hiking and about being a volunteer. When I asked why they were volunteering, what they liked about it and why they wanted to invest so much time and energy, and invest emotionally in the pilgrims, every single one of the volunteers told me that they ‘wanted to give something back to the Camino’. Giving back implies that something was received or retrieved before, and so I mentioned this in the conversations. Remarkably, to this the responses were not at all consentient. Responses varied from receiving so much assistance themselves along the way to get to their goal, to gaining self-confidence because of successfully walking the Camino, getting

to know themselves better, learning lessons and living minimalistic and meeting many international pilgrims, now friends, their Camino family. All of the volunteers expressed that they had found or were given something important in their lives, but these gifts varied.

### 7.3. The Camino as a Commons.

The government, local authorities, local communities and international organisations and associations all work together to maintain the Camino and its heritage, provide assistance to pilgrims and promote the Camino internationally. In this light, the Camino can be viewed as a resource of which several different actors make use. The Camino is a commonly shared good, or “heritage assemblage” as González (2018) calls it, where different social actors with overlapping aims operate. Pilgrims, tourists, *hospitaleros*, the Church, municipal, regional, national authorities and international or supranational organisations – EU – all are involved and give and take from the resource that is the Camino de Santiago.

When the Camino is considered a shared resource for several social actors, leads to the idea of the Camino being a commons. “Today, a commons is understood as any natural or manmade resource that is or could be held and used in common” (Berge and van Laerhoven 2011, 161). Most of the studies about the commons are about exploitation and enclosure of natural resources, and about (shared) management of the commons. The Camino should not and cannot be considered as a natural resource, such as fisheries. “Understanding the Camino as a common form of heritage implies that it is not a tangible, consumable, appropriable or exchangeable resource; that is, a non-rivalrous resource to which the logic of scarcity does or need not apply” (Gonzalez 2018, 971). Heritage assemblages, such as the Camino, can thus be considered a cultural heritage trail commons, but operating under different market logistics than, enclosed or privatized, natural resources do.

### 7.4. Commodification of a Commons – El Camino.

Considering the Camino as a Commons, a shared resource for different actors, leads to conceptual problems with the processes of commodification. Commodification of a heritage assemblage, as discussed is a difficult concept. The Camino is, as discussed before, an intangible concept. Gozalez (2010) states “But commodification is most effective when tangible resources are exploited. Intangible “resources” such as the Camino —non-perishable, not exhausted by consumption, and impossible to quantify — pose significant problems for commodification because they make it difficult to estimate how much value can be extracted and how long this will take”.

To understand the processes of commodification of the Camino, the separate features of the Camino should be considered. The Camino is a route, a connection of paths and roads. Furthermore the Camino is a pilgrimage, a ritualistic undertaking that can be considered in concepts of liminality and communion. The Camino is a metaphorical situation, a space for spiritual, philosophical and religious quests and searches. The route, or the infrastructure of the Camino offer space for commodification. The numbers of people all walking this same route, with the same destination, offers space for commodification of the symbolical meaning through marketing purposes and as a marketable theme. Understanding the needs of pilgrims and tourists offers possibilities to commodify goods that answer to these needs.

“The essence of a cultural tourism product such as the Camino de Santiago is that the route itself, combining all or part of an itinerary with arrival at a destination, can function as a regional definition, a theme that transcends geographical diversity and distance to provide a spatially expansive but integrative marketable theme”  
(Murray and Graham 1997)

Another intrinsic feature of the Camino is the social wealth of the pilgrimage. The state of liminality, the space for communion, and the spiritual motivations. These concepts are unique for a pilgrimage such as the Camino, and these concepts do tell apart the Camino from any other way. The social contacts between pilgrims, bonding, comradeship, formations of Camino Families, ‘giving back’ to the Camino as a volunteer, the Camino communities in other countries and other forms of social interactions; these forms of social wealth cannot be commodified in terms of monetary value. This social wealth is not provided by the Camino, but by the people involved in the Camino.

## Chapter 8. Conclusion

Along the Camino, many people use the saying ‘the Camino provides’. Herewith, people mean that you need not worry, but if you need anything, you will encounter this at your Camino. The saying is used frequently. When someone is thirsty and there is a water fountain, when someone is in pain, and there is a nurse present, or when someone is struggling and a person offers a helping hand. I find that it is not strange for people to find what they need at the Camino, since there are so many people and facilities involved and connected with the Camino de Santiago.

The main question that was posed in this thesis is “In what ways is the pilgrimage route Camino Francés commodified, in terms of perceptions of authenticity, materiality and tourism?”

As has been discussed in the previous chapters of this thesis, the Camino de Santiago is a connection of paths, ways and roads all leading to the shrine of the apostle Saint James, in the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. The Camino however is not only a connection of paths and roads, but there is an entire infrastructure around the Camino. The French route, or Camino Francés is a way that has an infrastructure of facilities and services on top of it. The roads are well signed, there are many shelters and hostels – *albergues* – for pilgrims, there are services as luggage transport, horse and bike rentals, massages, and facilities such as pilgrim offices, places to eat and drink, pilgrims stores and churches with special pilgrim masses and pilgrim blessings. Many of the services and facilities at the Camino, are especially meant for pilgrims.

Not all of these services and facilities are, however, founded or invented to make a profit. Volunteers are working in all types of facilities, pilgrim offices, associations and *albergues*, to provide pilgrims with assistance and information. These associations even operate internationally, so that a worldwide network of pilgrim and Camino associations exists. Also online there is a large community with (former-) pilgrims that not only share their experiences and enthusiasm about the Camino, but also assist future pilgrims and provide information.

There is tension between pilgrims in their perceptions of one another. The concepts and perceptions of who is pilgrim and who is tourist, overlap. Pilgrims use their own perceptions of authenticity of pilgrimage and authenticity of the Camino to define who are ‘real pilgrims’ and who are tourists in their perception. Since there is neither consensus on the definitions and qualifications of pilgrims and tourists nor is their consensus on authenticity of pilgrimage and the Camino. Conceptualising all the pilgrims and tourist on a continuum, makes it possible to not conceptualise a clear cut division or distinguish the two concepts theoretically.

The ideas of authenticity, however, are important in the goods, souvenirs, facilities and services that are offered. Pilgrims masses and blessings, organized by the Church, are a form of staged authenticity for pilgrims to a unique, traditional and therefore valuable experience. For the church these events are a way to generate income.

Social wealth, the spiritual motivations and searches that are connected to the Camino, the Camino Family that are formed, the state and space of liminality that allows for these processes and all the social interactions, *communitas*, by pilgrims and volunteers give the Camino an intrinsic feature, that cannot be expressed in terms of value.

“The pilgrimage's space itself is a source of dissent, but at the same time it crystallizes the expectations, hopes and doubts of thousands of individuals in Western society. Pilgrimage is indeed a complex, ambiguous and shifting phenomenon, a practice that has always managed to perfectly correspond to the expectations of its epoch, responding at the same time to the economic, political, religious and social needs” (Cazaux 2011, 354).

The timeframe for the research and writing of the thesis was tight and only gave space for a small research. I have only walked the Camino Francés once myself, but for a more extended fieldwork period, more resources such as time and money would have led to more in depth research. I would advice to walk the Camino more than once, become involved as a volunteer and *hospitalero* to have a broader perspective on the topics.

In my opinion, the conceptualisation of the social wealth of the Camino and the actors, allow for future research. These unique and valuable features of the Camino are interesting. The concept of ‘overtourism’ as a new topic in the scientific literature, might give possibilities for future research. What happens if the numbers of pilgrims keep rising?

Personally, I have enjoyed the fieldwork period greatly. I have gotten the chance to walk the Camino myself and I will forever value this experience. At the moment of submitting this thesis, unfortunately, one of my toenails still is not fully grown, as it fell off my toe during the Camino.

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## Appendix 1.

Map of the routes of the Camino Francés.



## Appendix 2.

Map of the different routes of the Camino de Santiago in Europe.

