# Pilgrim's Progress? A Field Ethnography of Multimodal Recording, Curating, and Sharing of the Camino de Santiago Experience

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**Abstract**

**\*Design/Methodology/Approach**
A field ethnography was conducted while walking with, observing, and interviewing pilgrims along the Camino de Santiago, a popular European pilgrimage and UNESCO World Heritage route. Data collected from twenty-five semi-structured interviews and participant observations were thematically analysed within a theoretical framework combining Stebbins' contemplation and Nature Challenge Activity in serious leisure, and Hektor's model of information behaviour.

**\*Purpose**
Religious and secular pilgrimages present rich opportunities for investigating information activities in an original/intriguing context. While the Information Science community has previously shown interests in digital expressions of religion and spirituality, discussion on pilgrimage is at nascent stage. This original study adds to that body of research by investigating how pilgrims record, curate, and share their experiences.

**\*Findings**
This study expands the interpretation of pilgrimage by introducing new insights around pilgrims, different types of mobilities, spaces and objects, and social interactions. By using field ethnography and close-up observations of praxis, pilgrimage is analysed as a socio-technical process and discussed literature within and beyond Information Science. The work presents new understandings on the interplay between spirituality, embodied information practices, physical and online social interactions, analogue and digital media before, during, and after these journeys, and legacy aspirations.

**\*Originality/Value**
The study is original in its combination of theoretical models and their ethnographic *in-situ* application. It contributes to a more in-depth, in-the-field understanding of how pilgrims document their experiences via a rich palette of old and new media, the dynamics of using digital technologies during such physical and inner journeys, and pilgrims' sharing practices. Implications for serious leisure and information practices are discussed, from theoretical to practical challenges and opportunities offered by pilgrimage experiences.

**Keywords:** pilgrimage routes; ethnography; information practices; digital communications; serious leisure; Camino de Santiago

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Religious and secular pilgrimages have long been part of human history and remain very much alive today, manifesting themselves in different forms and locations in the Holy Land, the Hajj, Lhasa, Kumbh Mela, Char Dham, the Camino de Santiago, Kumano Kodo, Glastonbury Tor, Elvis's Graceland, national parks, and war memorials (Ross-Bryant 2017; Maddrell 2015; Margry 2008; Davidson and Gitlitz 2002; Janin 2002; Lloyd 1998). The ephemera associated with walking, transport and hospitality infrastructures, and other technical means and interventions have supported pilgrims for millennia; however, the contemporary use of digital technologies is also now rich with opportunities to support pilgrimages routes.

While the Information Science community has previously shown interests in digital expressions of religion and spirituality (Kari 2007; Gaston, Dorner and Johnstone 2015),  discussion on pilgrimage is at nascent stage (Caidi, Beazley, Colomer Marquez 2018; Caidi and Innocenti 2018; Caidi 2019). This paper describes and discusses ethnographic field research walking with, and interviewing, pilgrims along two Spanish trails of the Camino de Santiago, also known as Way of Saint James. The Camino is one of the most popular European pilgrimages (Sanchez y Sanchez and Hesp 2015), and a UNESCO route (UNESCO 2016), which also includes long distance trails (Waymarked Trails 2019; Roddis et al 2003).

The research considers the nature of pilgrimage in relation to how such journeys are recorded, stored, and shared in the context of Camino pilgrim's journeys. My work is grounded in emergent Information Studies in spirituality, and in long-distance walking (Innocenti et al 2022; Hyatt et al 2021; Hyatt 2017), which I expand to situate pilgrimage within a framework of serious leisure and information practices. This study is original work, not only in its combination of theoretical models, but also in their ethnographic *in-situ* application and the focus on the interactions that furnish pilgrims with ready opportunities to document and record their experiences. In exploring the technological articulations with spirituality, walking and trails, this work contributes to an understanding of how and why pilgrims document their experiences via old and new media, the dynamics of using analogue and digital means during such physical and inner journeys, and pilgrims' sharing practices.

## 2. BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Pilgrimage and the Camino de Santiago across disciplines

Pilgrimage has been an object of study across disciplines in art, architecture, and heritage, history, literature, social anthropology, religious studies and tourism amongst others. The conceptualization of pilgrimage has been changing over time. By using 'motion' as a key aspect of sacred pilgrimages, Coleman and Eade (2004) widened our understanding of pilgrimage beyond an experience confined to a holy place, toward it being a ritual dynamic space. Pilgrimages have been increasingly reconceived as lively social processes, "involving different styles of mobility in space" and as "providers of interactions between pilgrims' activities through time and the physicality of space" (Bajc, Coleman and Eade 2007, 322), within a world increasingly global and on the move (Clifford 1997; Urry 2007; Feldman 2017).

The burgeoning growth in pilgrimages in the 21st Century is largely due to faster modes of transport, leading to the phenomenon of 'religious travel' (Norman and Cusack 2015), as well as renewed interests in spirituality and religiosity (Reader 2007). Importance of the senses, bodily participation, physical stimuli and accompanying emotions have been highlighted both within religious and spiritual experiences, since Turner's pilgrims' *communitas* (Turner and Turner 1978; Turner 1969). In religious studies, a wide range of emotions and sensations can be detected for example from online diaries of Camino pilgrims (Lopez 2013). The spirituality of walking pilgrimages further echoes the spiritual dimension and sense of community of long-distance hiking trails (Luxenberg 1994, Mueser 1997).  A quest for identity, together with the idea of walking,

was identified a key driver for setting out on the Camino de Santiago by Frey (1998) in her intense ethnographic study of the varied physical and mental journeys of Camino pilgrims. Investigating ritual identity on the Camino through desk research, Van der Beek discussed a sense of pan-determinism and freedom achieved through rituals and turning towards the physical and natural world (Van der Beek 2017, 29). In his phenomenological method of descriptions Egan studied the suffering and 'walking back to happiness' that characterised many Camino pilgrims, drawing the attention to the Camino "inter-subjective experience as a potential source of existential mobility" (Egan 2010, 107).

Developments within sociology of religion have influenced ethnographic research on walking pilgrimages (Seebaluk 2013; Claverie 2011; Badone and Roseman 2004), including the Camino de Santiago (Zapponi 2011; Slavin 2007). However academic literature on the Camino has largely focused on religiosity, spirituality, and tourism (Sanchez y Sanchez and Hesp 2015; Conrad 2004; Frey 1998) rather than the information experiences during these journeys. The handful of studies currently addressing social media use on the Camino do so from an institutional perspective (Rodríguez-Fernández et al 2015), or have a focus on analysing online pilgrim narratives in relation to the authenticity of the experience (de Sousa and da Rosa 2017; Post and van der Beek 2016; Ogden 2015; Lopez 2013). These studies do provide an initial glimpse into information recording and sharing on this pilgrimage route. Here it is argued however that further work is needed to investigate the complex and nuanced pilgrims' information experience along the Camino de Santiago, considering socio-cultural, affective, and situational embodied aspects of information in a pilgrimage context.

**2.2 Camino de Santiago (Way of St James)**
The history of the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela goes back more than a thousand years, to the discovery of the body of St James in Spain in the early IX Century. After a relative decline in the XIX Century and in between the World Wars, the Camino pilgrimage was rebooted as a political and religious showcase (Pack 2010). In 1987, within the Council of Europe framework of sustainable cultural and religious tourism, the Camino de Santiago de Compostela was officially recognised as the first of thirty-three 'Cultural Routes' in Europe (European Institute of Cultural Routes 2018; Bambi and Barbari 2015). At an international level, UNESCO acknowledges pilgrimages routes such as Tanabe, Japan and two routes of Santiago de Compostela as World Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO 2016).

Today the Camino de Santiago is a dense web of recognized interconnected routes (cross-boundary trails) in Spain, Portugal, and throughout Europe. Since these routes are longer than 50km, they are also considered long hiking distance linear trails (Mueser 1997): for example, the *Camino Francés*, a 783 Km long-distance route, corresponds to both the GR65 long distance trail throughout Navarra (Roddis et al 2003) and part of the E3 path, one of the eleven European Long Distance Paths (Waymarked Trails 2019). Most Camino routes are normally well-signposted, both officially (by municipalities and provincial authorities, using variations of stylized scallop shells) and informally (yellow arrows hand-painted by local associations on a variety of public fixtures and fittings such as lampposts, walls, curbstones, and trees). The *Camino Francés* is one such well-signposted trail on relatively rolling terrain (the maximum elevation is just over 1500m), with a generally very good hospitality infrastructure and adequate data connectivity throughout the route. This trail is both on non-paved and paved surfaces, regularly passing through villages and cities. The climate is normally favourable, especially in spring and autumn. These features facilitate the experience of the *Camino Francés* for pilgrims of diverse ages and health conditions: the statistics of the Pilgrim Office in Santiago (Oficina de Acogida al Peregrino 2019a) routinely includes a demographics spanning from under thirty to over sixty years old travelling on foot, via bicycle, wheel chairs, and horses.

Overall the Camino de Santiago is very popular (327,378 pilgrims were recorded in total in 2018 in Spain, and growing - Oficina de Acogida al Peregrino 2019a) and characterized by a generally good hospitality infrastructures, which includes hotels, pensions, and typical public or private *albergues* (hostels). Pilgrims

completing at least 100km of the Camino on foot (or 200km by bicycle) for religious or spiritual reasons may receive a *"Compostela"*, that is the formal accreditation of the pilgrimage to the Tomb of St. James, upon presentation of stamps on the *"Credencial del Peregrino"*, a sort of passport distributed by the Office of Pilgrimages of the Diocese of Santiago and other authorized institutions and associations. The stamps are collected as evidence from various places in the stages where pilgrims pass through (Oficina de Acogida al Peregrino 2019c).

## 3. RESEARCH DESIGN

In this study pilgrimage was both the object of the research and a means of enquiry, making this a mobile ethnographic fieldwork. The research objectives were two-fold:

1. To investigate how, why and with whom pilgrims' record, curate and share their experiences before, during and after the two popular routes of *Camino Francés* and *Muxia- Finisterre*.
2. To explore the current and future roles of cultural heritage institutions as resources on, and sites for the commemoration of pilgrim's experiences.

This paper focusses on research findings related to the first research objective. A field ethnographic approach was chosen because the scope of this study is to gain insights into experiential phenomena (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007), and to understand pilgrim's cultures from an insider's perspective, through an ethnographic analysis of walking (Ingold and Vergunst 2008). Ethnography is also one of the methods of inquiry suggested by Cox, Griffin, and Hartel (2017) to better investigate bodily experiences in serious leisure, and exploring information sharing beyond spoken interactions. Ethical approval to conduct the study was granted by my university.

Recorded in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observations, informal conversations, and site visits were the data collection instruments used with pilgrims encountered along the Camino. The field ethnography was conducted on the most popular route of the Camino de Santiago, the *Camino Francés*, and on the *Muxia-Finisterre* route. The long distance trail of the *Camino Francés* starts from St Jean Pied de Port in the French Pyrenees and arrives at Santiago de Compostela across four Spanish regions and in thirty-one (or thirty-two) stages. The 89 km route of *Muxia- Finisterre* starts where the *Camino Francés* ends, at the Santiago Cathedral, and reaches the Atlantic Ocean in four stages. Pilgrims were interviewed and observed at various stages of these two routes over a period of twenty-five days; all interviews except three (done while walking) were conducted after having reached the daily destination of a Camino stage – often with the pilgrims to be interviewed. The interviews were conducted in three different languages (English, Spanish, Italian) in which I am either fluent or a native speaker. Transcribed interviews and observation notes were collated for data analysis, then inductively coded and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2019). This paper focusses on the interview data, which were triangulated using the researcher's diary entries, and secondary sources.

### 3.1  Data collection

While walking on the *Camino Francés* and *Muxia- Finisterre,* between the 9 June and 3 July 2018 I conducted twenty-five semi-structured interviews with pilgrims. Participants were provided with project information, questions, and consent forms for face to face interviews, which in many cases were accompanied by onsite observations of pilgrims recording practices, together with follow-up questions. Interviews lasted on average forty minutes and took place wherever it was convenient for the interviewee, from café and restaurants to interviews undertaken whilst walking. Questions covered demographic data, Camino experience, modes and

reasons to record, share and curate Camino experiences and memories. Upon participants' consent, the sessions were audio recorded; authorised photographs and videos were taken in some cases.

A digital field diary was used to record research notes and observations during the twenty-five days period of this research. The entire data corpus consisted of 174 pages of transcribed interviews, 21 pages of observations and notes, 1463 photos and 3 videos. Visual notes were taken throughout the study, organized in chronological folders. Using text, photos and audio recordings, the diary provided a broad sample of direct participant observations of both interviewees and other pilgrims met along the way. To avert going native, maintain my researcher's stance and check interpretations and biases, field notes were also used to record observations about myself and the context within which I was collecting data. I am cognisant of the strengths and weaknesses associated with my positionality as researcher (Rowe, 2014): my views, values, and beliefs about the research topics and design are reflexively acknowledged, as well my hiking behaviour and interactions with other pilgrims while conducting the research. In line with Savin-Baden and Major (2013), I located myself in the study, acknowledging my several years of hiking experience and personal positions that had the potential to influence the research design and process. I recognise the insider-outsider dialectic, which is generally relevant in qualitative research and particularly in ethnographic studies (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). I was an insider to the hiking culture being studied and, at the same time, I was also an outsider to the Camino, which was not the type of hiking I normally participated in.

The interview participants encompassed fourteen females and eleven males, aged from 22 to 67 (median: 56), including individual pilgrims, couples, friends, and family members. Participants came from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, languages, and different continents (Europe, North America, Australia, and Japan – Table 1), fairly representative of the Camino demographics during the field research (Oficina de Acogida al Peregrino 2019b), and were selected following a mix of convenience, snowball and purposive sampling. For pragmatic reasons, convenience sampling was used to identify available pilgrims willing to participate in the research. Through snowball sampling, a 'gate-opener' participant (P05) introduced the researcher to several other pilgrims with whom he was connected. Purposive sampling played a role in selecting a variety of nationalities, sex, and age groups.

| No | Sex | Age | Nationality | Employment status |
|----|-----|-----|-------------|-------------------|
| P01 | M | 58 | Swiss | Civil Engineer |
| P02 | F | 49 | Spanish | Cleaning Lady |
| P03 | F | 22 | Spanish | PG Student |
| P04 | F | 64 | Spanish | Retired |
| P05 | M | 44 | German | Graphic Designer |
| P06 | F | 23 | German | PG Student |
| P07 | F | 45 | Swedish | Secondary School Teacher |
| P08 | F | 41 | Polish | Finance Controller |
| P09 | F | 52 | Canadian | Secondary School Teacher |
| P10 | M | 66 | Australian | Retired |
| P11 | F | 64 | Australian | Housewife |
| P12 | M | 67 | German | Retired |
| P13 | F | 63 | German | Retired |
| P14 | F | 43 | American | Realtor and Online Language Teacher |

| P15 | M | 65 | Japanese | Retired |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| P16 | M | 59 | American | Construction company owner |
| P17 | M | 40 | Croatian | Salesman and musician |
| P18 | F | 27 | Dutch | Associate at Private Equity Firm |
| P19 | F | 26 | German | Investment Associate |
| P20 | M | 66 | Irish | Chartered Accountant |
| P21 | F | 67 | Canadian | Primary School Teacher |
| P22 | M | 56 | British | Design Engineer |
| P23 | M | 60 | Italian | Retired |
| P24 | F | 48 | Italian | Secretary |
| P25 | M | 59 | Italian | Eye doctor |

Table 1: Demographics of research participants in order of interview.

The majority (n=19) of interviewees were doing the *Camino Francés* and *Muxia- Finisterre* for the first time. Some of them (p=7) had previously walked on another route of the Camino de Santiago (either the *Camino del Norte* or the *Camino Portuguese*); one was walking the *Camino Francés* for the second time but in a different season. Less than half (p=10) of the participants were walking the entire *Camino Francés*, from St Jean Pied de Port to Santiago, and continuing onto *Muxia- Finisterre,* while others were doing what in trail jargon is called 'section hiking', for a period between one and three weeks. All of the participants were walking, with the exception of P12 and P13 who had been cycling from Germany.

Among the participants, some (n=9) initiated and continued the Camino alone while frequently catching up with other pilgrims along the way. Others (n=5) met on the Camino and decided to continue the journey together. The remaining participants (n=11) began and continued the pilgrimage either with a partner, a friend, or relatives. Type of accommodation chosen along the way varied, depending on the financial possibility and reasons for walking the Camino. Some participants (n=8) chosen to stay always in hotels or pensions for privacy and comfort. The majority of interviewed pilgrims chose to stay always (n=8) or primarily (n=9) in official or private *albergues* because of the social dimension that this kind of lodging afforded, including sleeping in communal rooms and often sharing a communal evening meal and breakfast. This matters because the means and choices of travel and accommodation may influence the recording and sharing of information.

### 3.2 Data analysis
The data set of the interview transcripts and observations were thematically analysed using six stages to develop higher level concepts out of lower level codes thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019 and 2006). A manual analysis method allowing hands-on contact with the data set was selected. A predominantly deductive thematic analysis was chosen to summarize key features while also providing thick descriptions in line with ethnographic research, and support multidisciplinary interpretations and analysis.

This is how thematic analysis was applied in my study, following the analytic steps suggested by Brown and Clarke (2006):
1. Familiarizing with the data: All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed, and double-checked against the recordings for accuracy. Observational data were either directly annotated in digital format, or immediately transcribed from oral recordings and paper notes following up observations. Transcribed data

were read and re-read several times, noting down initial ideas of what was in the data and what was relevant about them.

2. Generating initial codes: Data from the interviews and observations were initially and systematically organised into meaningful clusters across the entire data set. Data extracts relevant to each code were collated and double-checked for thoroughness. To test the coding process, a colleague not associated with the work double-checked samples of codes and themes.

3. Searching for themes: Codes were then collated, combined and contrasted into a potential initial set of themes, gathering all data extracts relevant to each potential theme and thus beginning to interpret the data.

4. Reviewing themes: Identified themes were checked against the coded extracts and the original data set for coherency, consistency and uniqueness. Themes were considered individually and collectively, in relation to the research focus.

5. Defining and naming themes: In this phase each theme was described in its essence by looking back at the data extracts, defining the theme and creating a brief narrative around the theme's story, which were included in this paper.

6. Producing the report: In the final phase, the analysis was written up weaving selected vivid data extracts within and across themes, and an analytic narrative illustrating the story in relation to the research focus, two theoretical lenses discussed below, and literature. This analysis is presented here across the Findings and Discussion sections.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings in this study expand the interpretation of pilgrimage by introducing new insights around pilgrims, different types of mobilities, spaces and objects, and social interactions (Coleman and Eade 2004; Bajc, Coleman and Eade 2007). By using field ethnography and close-up observations of praxis, I analyse pilgrimage as a socio-technical process and discuss literature within and beyond Information Science. The work presents new understandings on the interplay between spirituality, embodied information practices, physical and online social interactions, analogue and digital media before, during, and after these journeys, and legacy aspirations.

The main themes identified were: Camino as an intense, embodied experience; Seeking and gathering information before, during and after the Camino; Sharing information before, during, and after the Camino; Pilgrimage as socio-technical walking and storytelling process. I have chosen to report specific examples that highlight both the complexities of these relationships and suggest opportunities for contributing to existing interdisciplinary theories.

A deductive way of thematic analysis meant that coding and theme development were directed by the research focus of this pilgrimage study, which combines theoretical lenses from sociology and information science to interpret the field data:

- *Pilgrimage routes as serious leisure*, from the perspective of contemplation as leisure (Stebbins 2006) and natural challenge activities (Davidson and Stebbins 2011) in serious leisure (Stebbins 2007/2015);
- *Pilgrim's information behaviour in recording, curating, and sharing experiences*, applying Hektor's model of information behaviour (Hektor 2001) (Figure 1) to serious leisure (Hartel, Cox, Griffin, 2016).

Stebbins proposes contemplation as serious leisure, defining it as "the classificatory home of complex reflective activity engaged for its own sake" (Stebbins 2006, 17). This type of contemplation, which for Stebbins is both a process and a product, often takes place while alone, or out in nature, or in an organised

retreat; spirituality may be an important outcome of contemplation. Davidson and Stebbins (2011) define hiking as walking for pleasure in natural surroundings, offering opportunities for contemplation and connection with nature.

Some pilgrimage routes such as the Camino Francés are intense outdoor activities requiring particular knowledge and skills, perseverance, and dedication specific to pilgrimage communities. Such walking pilgrimages necessitate ongoing information seeking, access, and use prior, during, and post the pilgrimage experience. Furthermore, going on a pilgrimage provides a sense of community, identity, and values. In this sense, this paper proposes to consider pilgrimage routes as a serious leisure pursuit (Stebbins 2007/2015), which is also a useful interdisciplinary perspective for studying information behaviour in original contexts (Hartel 2005).

Walking pilgrimages involve some degree of physical skill and exertion, however they are an activity enjoyed in one's spare time and do not include a competitive element. Therefore within the serious leisure perspective (Hartel 2013), walking pilgrimages as activity participation occurring outdoor may be considered in two ways: as a serious leisure hobby characterised by non-competitive, rule-based activity participation (pilgrims walking several pilgrimage routes within the same year or over the years), or as a project-based leisure when performed as a one-off, non-competitive rule-based pursuit (for example going on pilgrimage once in a lifetime). A complementary classification for such a distinctive type of outdoor pursuits is 'Nature Challenge Activity (NCA)', proposed by Robert Stebbins in 2005 in relation to kayakers, snowboarders, and mountain climbers. A Nature Challenge Activity is further defined as 'a leisure pursuit whose core activity or activities centre on meeting a natural test posed by one or more of the six elements' (Davidson and Stebbins 2011, 2). From this perspective, the Camino Francés can be categorised as a land-based activity in terms of difficulty and route length, a sense of satisfaction when achieving endurance, being in the flow, and attaining self-reliance.

Types and dynamics of information activities in serious leisure have been elegantly discussed by Hartel, Cox, and Griffin (2016) by testing Hektor's model of information behaviour (2001) (Figure 1). According to Hektor, there are four core modalities of information behaviour (Seeking, Gathering, Communicating, Giving), which are related to eight different information activities (Search and Retrieve, Browse, Monitor, Unfold, Exchange, Dress, Instruct, and Publish). While appreciating how such model could support comparative and more precise research insights in serious leisure, the authors also noted some shortcomings, including but not limited to the need to further examine embodied information, and the blurring of boundaries brought by social media in relation to communicating and giving information. This study further tests Hektor's model, combining it with the dimensions of contemplation and Nature Challenge Activity to investigate pilgrimage routes as serious leisure.
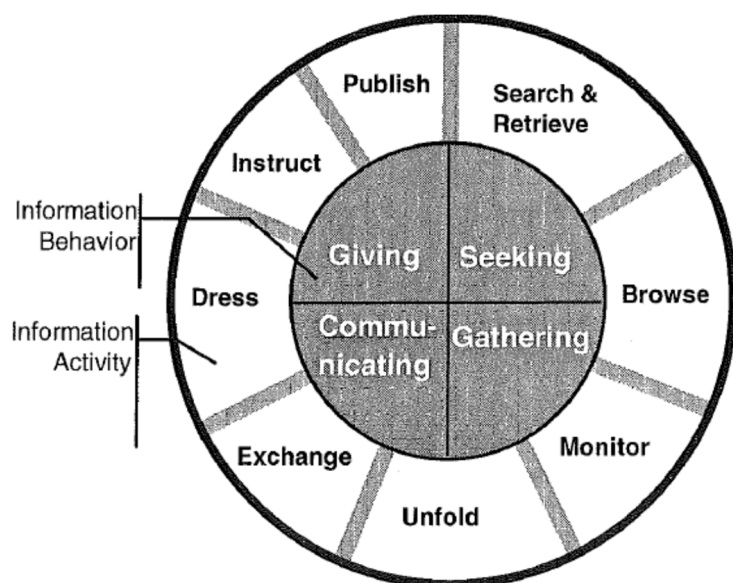
**Figure 1** Hektor's information behaviour model (2001, 81).

This investigation on the Camino proposes to add two further dimensions as metalayers to Hektor's model, encompassing the behaviour of pilgrims before, during, and after their journeys (Table 2): contemplation as leisure (Stebbins 2006) and Nature Challenge Activity (Davidson and Stebbins 2011) in serious leisure (Stebbins 2015). These six categories are applied to this Camino research and illustrated through the description of numerous noteworthy examples in the following sections.

| Contemplation as leisure (Stebbins 2006) | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Nature Challenge Activity (Davidson and Stebbins 2011) in serious leisure (Stebbins 2015) | | | | | | | |
| Seeking (Hektor 2001) | | Gathering (Hektor 2001) | | Communicating (Hektor 2001) | | Giving (Hektor 2001) | |
| Search & Retrieve | Browse | Monitor | Unfold | Exchange | Dress | Instruct | Publish |
| Before, during, and after the Camino: searching for books, magazines, movies, people, and the Internet for information on pilgrimage stories, routes, guides, | Before, during, and after the Camino: perusing for relevant and timely information in printed and online guides, apps, forums, blogs, videos, magazines, for the | Before, during, and after the Camino: intentionally and regularly checking familiar sources and services (pilgrims, popular Camino guides, latest posts on a forum, blog, videos, or other social media | Before, during, and after the Camino: reading a magazine, book or website, watching a pilgrimage in person or via videos and movies. Continually directed attention | Before, during, and after the Camino: Sharing communication that is reciprocal and around a single topic, in person or online (in forums and social media), through writing and emails: exchanging tips on pilgrimage routes, | During and after the Camino, giving physical expression to thoughts and ideas. Recording pilgrimage experiences using analogue and digital media; utilising wearable | Before and during the Camino: instrumental and emotionally disengaged activity related to pilgrimage: any information activity on the Web; shopping; making reservations. | During and after the Camino: posting information for other to take parts (more personal than instructing); publishing on personal websites; contributing to forums, online communities, |

| accommo-dation, gear. | topics listed at left. | channel, meetings of pilgrims associations). Also incidentally gathering information. | towards information in order to take part in the content. | accommodation, events with fellow pilgrims; sharing stories with fellow pilgrims via email and social media. | devices to capture and analyse one's journey. | | blogs, social media; sharing information from wearable devices. |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |

**Table 2** Overview of Hektor's model categories contextualized within this pilgrimage research, and framed by Contemplation as leisure (Stebbins 2006) and Nature Challenge Activity (NAC) in serious leisure (Davidson and Stebbins 2011).

**4.1 Walking pilgrimages as an intense, embodied experience**

To understand the significance of walking pilgrimages as serious leisure through the lens of contemplation (Stebbins 2006) and Nature Challenge Activity (Davidson and Stebbins 20110, and the information dynamics in recording, curating, and sharing the Camino de Santiago experience, it is useful to look at the reasons why pilgrims decide to initiate this intense journey, and what it is important for them before, during, and after the Camino.

Out of twenty-five participants, only one explicitly mentioned a religious motif (P16). The others were walking the Camino for a variety of often combined social, cultural, physical, and spiritual reasons, which P21 compared to *"a diamond with many carats, many facets. And one is not more shiny than the others"*. One participant (P01) described it as *"a whole package",* part of *"a tourist project that's a thousand years old"* where *"it's interesting to get into a flow"*. For some the journey was perceived as a physical challenge, sometimes against all odds (*"Three years ago I was diagnosed with MS […] and I started to think about walking the Camino"*, P08). For P15 it was *"a way to review my life, to look back at my life so far"* after tragedies at work began to haunt him; for P05 it was an act of love towards his dying father, who had been twice an eager Camino pilgrim; for P09 it was an occasion to reflect and find new directions amid major changes in her life. These sentiments echo with the notion of serious leisure pursuits as opportunities for profoundly positive experiences that can offset negative experiences in other areas of life (Stebbins 2009).

For many the focus was on the natural and social dimension of the Camino in what has been described as a *"very egalitarian sort of walk"* (P10). Pilgrims remarked on *"experiencing the beauty of the landscape and the people"* (P09), "*to be with Mother Earth, to feel like the people live here"* (P08), and to meet and talk with people; the three family generations of P02, P03, P04 added that *"the Camino brings out the best in people".* The international dimension of the route and meeting interesting people from all over the world was also appreciated, as were the importance of the cultural and historical dimension of the Camino. This uniqueness and sense of belonging to a special community led for many to become 'Camino friends' and 'Camino family', which *"stays with you, I mean, to this day"* (P14).

One of the key dimensions of a pilgrimage route is the embodied experience; this is also a relevant aspect for digital mobile technologies involved in walking, which were largely involved in the experiences of research participants, as illustrated in the following sections. The *Camino Francés* attracts a wide range of pilgrims because of its variety, well-signposted trail on relatively rolling terrain, a generally very good hospitality infrastructure and adequate data connectivity throughout the route. However, walking on this long route day after day, even for a couple weeks (let alone months) through varying conditions can also be a demanding physical experience for experienced walkers - as I soon discovered. An interviewee aptly summarised that

*"it's like hiking multiple paths at the same time, only in one day, and then for long stretches"* (P14). Following the stages indicated in various printed guidebooks, online resources, and apps, can prove a sobering experience for many sedentary bodies, with resulting daily aches and pains: *"so here we are, blistering along"*, says P01. Sometimes goals need to be revisited when injuries occurred, as in the case of P06 who decided not to reach Santiago. Still, by metronomically walking the Camino a pilgrim may increasingly gain more than just blisters: *"the terms I would say is 'bubbling up' through my consciousness. I don't plan to think about this. I don't plan it at all. But as I walk, as I walk it's coming"* (P21). The 'flow' mentioned by P01 is echoed by P15 as a cathartic, meditative experience: *"through walking this route, concentrating on the walking, maybe everything in my brain evaporates"*.

The "movement of walking is itself a way of knowing" (Ingold and Vergunst 2008, 5), and walking is a multisensory embodied practice playing a central role in the sense-making of Camino. Davidson and Stebbins (2011) note that Nature Challenge Activities, including hiking, can bring personal and social rewards, and a psychological flow. Secondly, the pilgrimage keeps alive a ritual, momentarily tuning into a unified sense of belonging (a *communitas* or so called 'Camino family') the otherwise divergent life trajectories of individual Camino pilgrims.

## 4.2 Seeking and gathering information before, during and after the Camino

Information seeking in Hektor's model involves two activities: Search & Retrieve, and Browse. Findings from this fieldwork suggests that Camino pilgrims search and retrieve both books, magazines, movies, and people, and also increasingly the Internet for information on pilgrimage stories, routes, guides, accommodation, and gear. Pilgrims peruse for relevant and timely information on these topics, browsing printed and online guides, forums, blogs, videos, magazines. Participants' motivations for walking the Camino, and their planning, were largely shaped by information shared by previous Camino pilgrims in person, in online social media and forums, in books and magazines, and by movies on the Camino or long distance trails. P05 was the most organized of all participants, having meticulously planned his journey on the Camino for a whole year beforehand. Once on their way, as discussed in the next section most participants became actively engaged with a wider variety of activities to capture and share their pilgrimage experiences.

Hektor conceptualises Information Gathering in two ways: Monitor, and Unfold. In this study Monitor spans from intentionally and regularly checking familiar sources and services (pilgrims, popular Camino guides, the latest posts on a forum, blog, videos, or other social media channel, meetings of pilgrims associations), to incidentally gather information relevant for the Camino. Some pilgrims (P05, P20, P22) monitored information by talking with people that had done the Camino, or reading the popular John Brierly's guide (2003). Through observations, Brierly turned out to be the most popular printed guide of the Camino in English language, although not the most accurate in terms of distance. This popularity meant that significant flows of pilgrims were stopping in the same stages, and sometimes gaining extra blisters. Other participants such as P01, P05, P12 and P13 used guides in German, while at least other five pilgrims were using free online Camino apps. Prior to his Camino journey, for P07 the fortuitous encounter with a person interested in trails opened up a new horizon, first with a local walk and then, after extensive reading on blogs, watching movies, and forums, with the Camino. The Unfold mode involves a continually directed attention towards information in order to take part in content, such as reading a magazine, book or website, watching a pilgrimage in person or via videos and movies. For example P14 recalled spending *"literally, weeks, doing, watching other people's YouTube videos of the Camino"*, becoming enthralled by these commentaries. An Irish blogger posting daily videos that she *"was, literally, waiting for him to post"*. P14 was influenced by a book of Ken Follett[1] in

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[1] Follett, K. (1990). *Pillars of the Earth*. New York, N.Y.: Signet.

which the Camino was mentioned, then decided to watch *The Way* movie[2], and become interested in walking this pilgrimage.

## 4.3 Communicating and giving information before, during, and after the Camino

Before, during, and after their journey, pilgrims were exchanging and sharing tips on pilgrimage routes, accommodations, events with fellow pilgrims, in person, via social media, and email. Pilgrims were also noticeably 'dressing' information in the sense defined by Hektor (2001), giving physical expression to their thoughts and ideas.

The contemporary Camino pilgrim is a walker, carrying hiking and navigation equipment or materials through these journeys, interacting with communities of fellow pilgrims, and living an embodied experience that is often seen as spiritual while maintaining a *"connected presence"* (Licoppe & Smoreda 2005), similarly to those hikers studied by Mary Harmon (2015). At the heart of the Camino there are pilgrims' stories, both individual and collective, privately recorded or publicly shared with different audiences, and a diverse level of detail, often simultaneously mixing and matching a wide, multimodal palette of analogue methods, digital media, and online channels, as displayed by the research participants in this study. Storytelling on the Camino can be considered a type of ritual often performed daily, with emotional and practical implications connected to diverse modalities of seeing, feeling, and recording while walking and resting. From handwritten diaries, postcards and physical mementos to digital photos, videos, audio, SMS, emails, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Strava, the reasons pilgrims may have for recording and sharing their journeys are often related to the reasons for walking the Camino in the first place, personal reservedness, and various emotions emerged during the journey.

Mixing and alternating so many diverse media also point to the tension between the pervasiveness of digital technologies and social media in everyday life, and an intentional desire for a lower pace and more disconnected mode on the Camino. For example, P09 clarifies that *"I do have a Facebook account, and I decided before I came here that I would not [use] that…. It is really an inner journey and… I would share with someone in person who is interested, but not just putting it out there on social media"*. Other pilgrims experimented with new media, as in the case of P18: in addition to her Instagram profile, following a friends' suggestion she began using the GPS based mobile app Strava[3] instead of WhatsApp to share photos. Findings from this work confirm and expand the influence of these technologies highlighted in previous rare studies (de Sousa and da Rosa 2017; Post and van der Beek 2016; Rodríguez-Fernández et al 2015; Lopez 2013) by noting the co-presence of a rich range of media and technologies, both analogue and digital, supporting Camino pilgrims in walking, dwelling, experiencing, recording, sharing, and curating their journeys. Eade and Sallnow (1991) had challenged the Turners' notion of liminality and total separation of pilgrims from their daily lives (1969, 1978); today the increased availability of mobile computing, ubiquity of the Internet infrastructure, and popularity of social media makes it easier than ever to not get away from one's daily social structures.

The co-presence and interplay of analogue and digital media investigated in this study was intriguing. All participants in this study were carrying their pilgrims' passport with stamps, and a typical pilgrims' shell (*concha*) on their packs. Other than this, the majority was avoiding getting objects that could add extra weight, focusing on light small things (P01, P14, P14) and eventual souvenirs at the end of the journey; P14 also had a tattoo from her first Camino – not an uncommon *memento* among pilgrims on this route. Furthermore, pilgrims were ritually leaving items in specific, meaningful locations (for examples stones or shells at the Cruz

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[2] *The Way*. Dir. Emilio Estevez. Producers Distribution Agency (United States) and Alta Films (Spain), 2010 (Spain) – 2011 (US).
[3] https://www.strava.com/

de Ferro, or clothes at Finisterre), making crosses and arrows out of various materials and leaving them along the way, and adding their names, words, or symbols to way markings. Hence in addition to experiencing physical and mental embodiment during their journey, pilgrims were both inscribing the territory of the Camino, and inscribing the pilgrimage onto their own body.

Several participants (n = 11) were using analogue methods to keep a daily record of their journeys with personal notes on places, people and experiences – not always an easy task after having walked thirty kilometers per day and tending to oneself. Writing was motivated by the desire to recollect discrete time and places which can slowly erode, thin, and fuse together: *"because if you walk for two weeks, you tend to mix everything up"* (P01). The diary could be a detailed record of pilgrims' journey (*"we put everything in a diary [...] the things we saw that day, special things, special towns, special people. What we ate, what we had for dinner, and where we sit if it was nice or not, and if we slept well",* P12), or a simple list of walking data because *"when I do my certificate at the end, I want it to be accurate"* (P14). In some cases a relative has been walking the Camino before the interviewee did, and shared inspiring records of this experience, as in the case of P05 or P12 and P13. Although in this study pilgrims journaling on paper were all over forty years old, both myself and some of the participants noticed several young people on the side of the road using a paper diary; P18 was recording her journey on Strava and Instagram, but wished she used a diary from the start.

In an age of social media, not only handwritten diaries but also handwritten postcards were still a thing for seven of the participants. Postcards were used in particular for grandchildren, pupils, and older generations. As P11 puts it, *"We always send postcards to [my husband'] mother, because no matter where we go she likes a postcard, so she can put it up on the refrigerator [...]. She doesn't do internet or any of those sorts of things. Her phone is still a phone"*. This was echoed by P15, who noted *"postcards because my mother, because my aunt, my small nice, cannot use* [a smartphone]*"* and by P01, who mentioned sending postcards as a tradition to older relatives *"who don't have SMS or an email account or don't use it"*, but also to his sons, *"so they learn something different than just SMS and the interesting thing is, if you send a postcard, it's still there. Because the SMS, it's gone in two seconds"* (P01). Postcards are also sent to special categories of friends.

Some of these analogue media were meant to be shared with friends and dear ones in an asynchronous way, allowing some reflective distance between the immediate pilgrimage experience and the information shared with others. However, while analogue recording was chosen by some of the participants, all the interviewees digitally recorded visual mementos of their journeys, generally with the intention of sharing them in real time. All twenty-five participants took photographs using their smartphones; in three cases pilgrims also used an additional professional camera. Photo taken during the Camino often reached the thousands, were normally considered important, and used both as a personal reminder and for sharing with friends and family. The subjects of these photos varied, though generally included landscapes, buildings, food. Selfies for family and friends were mentioned or showed by nine participants. Some remarked the challenge of recording the complexity and richness of the Camino experience through bidimensional images. Two walking friends (P18, P19) agreed that *"it's hard sometimes to document really what it's like because pictures half of the times don't do it justice"* (P18); eventually the conclusion was that *"I like to see the picture to remind myself how beautiful that moment was, as opposed to necessarily have the picture that shows the beautiful landscape"* (P19). Five participants explicitly mentioned recording videos, though I noticed a few more video-recording during specific events at the end of a walking day (e.g. an *impromptu* guitar concert, a surprise birthday celebration, a street festival).

In addition to analogue media, a variety of social media – often by the same pilgrim but for diverse audiences - were used by interviewed and observed pilgrims during the *Camino Francés* (Figure 3). The majority of participants (n=18) used WhatsApp to share information, photos and videos; P15 was using a Korean application (Line) very similar to WhatsApp, and installed WhatsApp during the Camino to communicate

with fellow pilgrims. Facebook was another preferred channel (n =10), followed by Instagram (n = 4), Strava (n =2) and YouTube (n =1).

Some pilgrims were using social media channels as online diaries. For example P16 recalled ditching his analogue diary after walking across the Pyrenees, and using WhatsApp instead to document and share his daily activities with his congregation in the United States, adding photos and videos to his reports. While walking the last 100km to Santiago, P22 was actively using Facebook every night, and felt that she was *"getting lots of support from [friends and family]"*.

In addition to using WhatsApp to communicate with family members, friends, and other pilgrims, since the start in St Jean Pied de Port P05 was using a diary but *"not on paper, it's not my thing [...] I have a digital diary on Instagram every day"*. While P03, P18, and P19 had private and occasionally used Instagram accounts (with P19 posting milestones photos of the Camino), P05 Instagram profile was public and dedicated to his dying father (*"I think we walk the Camino together. I am here and there at home, he sees the pictures"*). Messenger in Facebook was similarly being used by P07: *"I have eight people there who are really interested in what I am doing. On Facebook I just wrote the start day... In my group I tend to write every day, just short messages. What we are doing, what we are seeing, who we are meeting…It's like a diary but with pictures. It's to keep them informed'*. Such wish for more private conversations with selected friends and family members was also shared by other participants, for example P08 and P17.

P18, the pilgrim who regretted not having taken *"a little notebook"* with her, experimented with the fitness app Strava using it as a sort of Facebook: "*It's fun because people can share… That way, with my friends I don't need to send the pictures through WhatsApp or anything. They just follow me on Strava. They find it easier [...]. We record the distance, the speed. All the walking related things."*

WhatsApp groups were used both between pilgrims walking together and to share experiences with remote groups, for example to inform family and friends of the current location, record emotions and sceneries, share pictures with some comments, and make calls. The frequency in sharing texts and media on WhatsApp was also remarked; for example P19 noted that *"in terms of what I share, there is the kind of closer, intimate circle and then there's the more public circle. So to the more intimate circle, I send probably like every couple of hours sometimes. Like a selfie on WhatsApp to my boyfriend or my family"*. A number of participants were also using emails to write stories for diverse audiences. For example P21 had *"different group of friends at home that I write to. Two of them are writers, one is a minister, one is a hiker, one is a teacher. With each one there are different kinds of memories that I would like to share [in] specific emails"*. P01 was not using emails but instead sending SMS or MMS to family and friends, and P22 was texting to his wife twice or thrice a day with at times long, elaborate reflections.

A number of participants were planning to curate and share their experiences after the pilgrimage, and were purposefully gathering information relevant to their Camino journeys with the intention of adding value to them. The uniqueness of the Camino experience was remarked by some participants both during and outside the interview, together with the difficulty of explaining it and being understood by non-Camino pilgrims: P14 felt that *"nobody understood what we had done, nobody understood the pain of it, nobody understood any of it"*. P11 remarked that *"when we told people this is what we were going to do [...] You've got 'Oh gee, that's really good. I'd really like to do that' or 'You idiot'. There never seems to be anything in between"*.

The final interview questions for participants were exploring the desire to leave a legacy of their Camino experience to their children and grandchildren, to further share the memories of their journey to Santiago, and ways to do so.  After the Camino, interviewed participants were planning to engage in a different sort of communicating activities. The most common declared approach (n=9) was to create a printed photo album or photo book using both the photographs and notes taken along the way, followed by scrapbooks (n=3) and

presentations (n=3). Photo albums requires active curation, selective and appraisal of memories and experiences of the pilgrimage, often sorting through thousands of pictures, handwritten notes, guidebooks and other sources. Creating a photo album is a discreet, painstaking and costly activity which does not provide the same editing flexibility or storage capacity offered by digital photo collections. Yet it was also perceived as a way to continue at home the walking reflections of the Camino, to connect with loved ones through a medium felt to be more easily and readily accessible than digital photos, and lasting longer. Although a photo book is not the equivalent of a photo album, as it can be reproduced to order, its creation too requires selecting and appraising memories. Among the sought methods to record and share experiences of the Camino, some pilgrims planned to deliver face to face presentations. For somebody like P01, who declaredly did not use social media, presentations were the preferred choice to communicate his experience while going through his photos, because "*then you have to arrange the pictures a little bit and give them a little bit of sense".* A similar sentiment was echoed by P06: "ma*ybe I will do an evening with my parents and my brother and just do a little dia show of the photos. One evening with some friends".* In the case of P03, some of the photos from previous Caminos were used in university assignments, *"because they ask me some projects about something that I really liked and I enjoyed".*

In terms of Hektor's framework for information behavior, the boundaries between communicating and giving were partially blurred because of the widespread use and development of social media. All interviewed pilgrims made instrumental online and offline reservations and purchases for accommodations, meals, and transport. Several pilgrims also published on social media information for public access, and some contributed to forums and online communities. The most prolific public producer was P14, who switched to videos because in her first Camino she did not feel *"like anybody cared or read"* her blog with photos. So, in her second journey, inspired by other Camino videobloggers, and using a mix of self-videos, voice over and slideshows, P14 uploaded daily, public short videos on Youtube as a way to both record her experience and showing in real time to family and friends *"what I see, the views, the nice people on the way".* Selected WhatsApp and Facebook groups were an alternative conduit to her YouTube public channel.

The importance of online information sharing as evidence of being there and as a *memento* to document one's Camino journey has been noted in previous religious studies (van der Beerk 2015; Ogden 2015). Yet the hybrid fragmentation of such records across multiple analogue and digital media, and related implications for personal digital archiving, has not been yet addressed. Through a rich and mixed multimodal palette of analogue and digital technologies, pilgrims co-create communal yet fragmented multiple accounts of the Camino, contributing to Camino narratives and histories. Findings from my interviews and onsite visits to local pilgrimage museums and art exhibitions point to both a general lack of awareness and proactivity in digital archiving practices, and the absence of digitally mediated personal pilgrim stories within institutional heritage and art collections, to be further explored.

## 4.4 Pilgrimage as a socio-technical walking and storytelling process
The "*choreographies of walking and digital technology*" (Eslambolchilar, Bodker, and Chamberlain 2016), and the way in which we share stories of our movement on foot suggests further considerations for this study. It has been argued that diary writing is at the heart of the Camino culture, both on the actual Camino and in its representations, and that communal forms and content are so frequently recurring that the diary-form contributes to creating diverse, horizontally imagined pilgrim communities (Hesp 2013). This paper suggests the co-presence of a richer palette of diverse media, both analogue and digital, fluidly mixed and weaved into Camino stories intersecting both imagined pilgrims' communities and their peripheries. Such  multimodality (Kress & Van Leeuwen 2001) calls for further investigation of information practices in pilgrimage routes, including but not limited to how digital media can bring together distinct levels of communication Findings

highlight how pilgrim stories distinguish the intensity of the Camino journey from other types of trips (so much so that at times it was felt an experience that "*nobody understood*" (P14) or "*very difficult to explain to others*" (P18). Such journeys encompass individual and collective accounts, those told orally *in situ*, annotated in private diaries, sent through postcards, curated through photo albums, and the shared online mixing and matching of a wide range of digital technologies and social media channels, including digital photos, videos, audio, SMS, emails, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Strava. The social context of the records varied in relation to audiences for photos, videos and diary entries. In some cases records were considered personal and private for the pilgrim, in other cases they were shared with a specific group of people, often involving family, friends, colleagues or community members. In a few instances these records were shared in online public websites. Stories were created to make sense of the experience, to update dear ones back home, as a legacy for present and future generations, and to interact with other pilgrims in ways that may result in new activities (for example changing route, choosing a different *albergue* or eatery, meeting up with other pilgrims).

My three clusters of pilgrims' activities prior, during, and after the Camino echoes Alan Dix's findings on technology in his long-distance Wales Coast Path (Dix 2018) and the resulting theoretical framework, in particular in relation to "*tribocentric group/people of the way*" (Asimakopoulos and Dix 2017, 838). Marginal differences noted during observations indicated that some participants in this study were sometimes observed using social media *while* walking, and some pilgrims were charging their phones while walking, using solar panels attached to their packs or bicycles. Further lines of enquiry may be developed, as mobilities and storytelling are shared not only by pilgrims and hikers in a world increasingly global and on the move (Feldman 2017; Liebelt, Shenar, and Werbner 2016; Urry 2007).

I suggest the expansion of current theoretical frameworks on pilgrimage as a dynamic ritual (Bajc, Coleman and Eade 2007; Coleman and Eade 2004) by conceptualising such journeys as socio-technical walking and storytelling processes. This richer interpretation allows promising connections to be made with Information Science and HCI considering digital and analogue expressions of religion and spirituality (Gaston 2015; Kari 2007; Kari and Hartel 2007; Buie and Blythe, 2013; Odom et al 2009; Wyche and Grinte 2009; Bell 2006), together with embodied information practices (Olsson and Lloyd 2017), the emergent focus on information and contemplation (Latham, Hartel, Gorichanaz 2020), and works focusing on the technological articulations with walking and trails (Hyatt et al 2020; Dix 2018; Asimakopoulos and Dix 2017; Hyatt 2017; Eslambolchilar, Bodker, and Chamberlain 2016; Harmon 2015). Findings also point to various similarities between the experience of the Camino pilgrimage and other long-distance hiking routes, both well serviced ones such as those of the Alps and Pyrenees in Europe, mixed terrain such as the Wales Coast Path (Dix 2018) the West Highland Way in Scotland (Munro, Innocenti and Dunlop, 2022), and wilder routes such as the TGO in Scotland (Innocenti et al 2022; Hyatt et al 2021) or Pacific Crest Trail in the United States (Hyatt 2017).

## 5. CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

In this paper I have discussed the findings and implications from a field ethnography conducted while walking with, observing, and interviewing pilgrims along the *Camino Francés* and *Muxia- Finisterre* of the Camino de Santiago, which is both a popular European pilgrimage, a UNESCO World Heritage route, and a long-distance hiking trail. The study contributes to understanding how pilgrims document their experiences via old and new media, the dynamics of using digital technologies during such physical and inner journeys, and pilgrims' sharing practices. Pilgrimage routes have been investigated through the combined theoretical lenses of serious leisure and information behaviour, and conceptualized as rich embodied information practices, characterised by socio-technical walking, and story-telling processes.

Next steps in my research includes looking at the implications for personal digital archiving and heritage curation on the *Camino Francés*, and discussing the results of my field ethnography on the Camino Le Puy Pilgrimage Route. I am also expanding the field ethnography to new pilgrimage and hiking routes beyond the Camino, and exploring further articulations of technology use and information behaviour theories and practices for documenting physical and inner journeys while walking.

This paper suggested connections with relevant theories and frameworks in Information Science, Sociology, Anthropology, Religious Studies, and Human Computer Interaction. Further ethnographic investigations are needed to better understand *in situ* information practices of secular and religious pilgrims undertaking walking pilgrimages, their multimodality, and related technological articulations.

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