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## How Long Does the Pilgrimage Tourism Experience to Santiago de Compostela Last?

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# How Long Does the Pilgrimage Tourism Experience to Santiago de Compostela Last?

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Tourism and pilgrimage are different social phenomena (Cohen, 1992; Collins-Kreiner, 2010a); tourism is more secular than pilgrimage, which is mainly a sacred journey (Barber, 2001). In spite of this, both indicate a 'movement'; so that tourists and pilgrims are 'foreigners, travellers and strangers' (Smith, 1992) who look for authentic experiences (Collins-Kreiner, 2010a). The question: '*What kind of Experience Pilgrimage is?*' has many answers. From a social point of view, pilgrims are free from social obligations; they share the same destination and the same social status. Because of this, the anthropologists Turner and Turner (1978) defined pilgrimage as an *anti-structural experience* that subverts the established order of things. Furthermore, pilgrimages are both *liminal* and *inclusive experiences*, as the sense of *communitas* (Turner and Turner, 1978) facilitates social relations and produces social safety (Bauman, 2001). Finally, the emotional dimension of pilgrimage experiences changes according to behavioural patterns. Based on these assumptions, pilgrimages are *unique* experiences.

Because of contemporary transformations and the increasing use of the term 'pilgrimage' in secular contexts (Collins-Kreiner, 2010a), the geography of pilgrimages must investigate how pilgrimage experiences change. This contribution analyses pilgrimage experiences according to a key aspect: human cognition; for this reason, the essay presents a phenomenological methodological approach (Lopez, 2013). The chief sources are records of pilgrims who went to one of the most representative sites for Christian religion: Santiago de Compostela. The examination regards the above-mentioned dimensions and the way in which pilgrims 'live the space'. It aims to reveal that the 'essence' of pilgrimage tourism experiences does not disappear when the pilgrim returns to his or her everyday life. As a matter of fact, his or her everyday life is marked by the pilgrimage experience and, thus, by a different worldview (Frey, 1997, 1998; Coleman, 2004).

**Key Words:** religious tourism, pilgrimages, experience, Way of St. James, ICT.

## Introduction

Sacred spaces are undergoing a change; thus the geography of pilgrimage is reconsidering its research interests. First of all, pilgrimages are related to the study of mobility, as they are movements towards sacred sites and, at the same time, contribute to space never-ending creation (Coleman and Eade, 2004). As pilgrimage movements produce spatial relations (Stoddard and Morinis, 1997), geographical researches have been dealing with the distribution and localization of sacred places (Bhardwaj, 1997; Preston, 1992), their

evolution and spatial organization, traditions and journeys (Stoddard and Morinis, 1997), distance and behaviour (Collins-Kreiner, 2010b). Since spaces are social constructions that participate in human life (Evers Rosander, 2004) and 'are both material and metaphorical, physical and imagined' (Knott, 2005: 13), they can be investigated from a phenomenological point of view (Digance, 2003; Andriotis, 2009). Because of this, the human dimension is highly relevant to grasp the dynamic of sacred spaces and places. They differ from other spatial entities because of their nature, value and history; they are sacred because they were scenery of divine happenings

(Eliade, 1958; Breneman, 1993; Gesler, 1996; Stoddard and Morinis, 1997; Prorok, 1997).

Present geographical researchers claim that pilgrimage is not just a spatial issue, but it involves human behaviour (Wagner, 1997), thus shifting from the spatial to the subjective field – devoting its attention to religious and secular pilgrims. Following these assumptions, this essay proposes to examine pilgrimage experiences according to human cognition. For this reason, it adopts a qualitative methodology based on a phenomenological perspective in order to interpret online travel diaries of Italian pilgrims who have travelled to Santiago de Compostela (Lopez, 2013). Their analysis aims to scrutinise pilgrims' tourism experiences and worldviews (Frey, 1997, 1998; Coleman, 2004).

### **The Research Dilemma: pilgrim or tourist?**

In the current frenetic world 'mobile individuals' (pilgrims, religious tourists, and so on) proliferate; they share the same desire to live an authentic experience (Collins-Kreiner, 2010a), so where is the difference? It is difficult to distinguish them because secularization has profoundly changed the structural issues of symbolic and mystical power, thus transforming several religious centres into tourist destinations.

Mircea Eliade introduced the notion of sacred space in his work *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (1958). According to him, it originates from a hierophany (manifestation of the Sacred) and it is shaped by the human being who has to find out and interpret its sacred value. As a matter of fact, pilgrims are responsible for the creation of the sacred place, for keeping the memory of its religious symbolic system and for reiterating rites and practices. Their behaviours give meaning to their experiences and nourish the sacredness of the place (McKevitt, 1991), whose perception depends on subjectivity and values (Stoddard and Morinis, 1997). Because of this, places are important for religions and the related place attachment (Mazumdar and Mazumdar, 2004).

Concerning the symbolic religious set, it produces motivations and moods. Motivations determine behaviours and their successes. Moods derive from general concepts regarding existence and are essential to explain and interpret new situations (Geertz, 1987). In religious terms, behaviours are influenced by rites, which are performative and repetitive acts (Croatto, 2002; Coleman and Eade, 2004) and are often part of the experience of the Sacred. From the point of view of

Severino Croatto (2002), the rite is a social act for the community, because it is a communication act that goes beyond the word and the speech, shaping community identity.

The early geographical research on the topic saw pilgrimage as a sacred journey. Since the 1980s, geographers have explored other aspects related to the spatial dimension (Collins-Kreiner, 2010a). They have taken into consideration possible relations between pilgrimage and tourism (Cohen, 1992; Rinschede, 1992; Gil de Arriba, 2006) or have carried out detailed studies of pilgrimage places (McKevitt, 1991; Prorok, 1997). Contemporary pilgrimages celebrate memories or tombs of national martyrs and commemorate the diaspora (root-pilgrimage or diaspora tourism) (Wagner, 1997; Basu, 2004). These new secular and civil religions are based on nationalist feelings that legitimize new places of worship (Mazumdar and Mazumdar, 2004).

Current tendencies generate a new definition of pilgrimage and its contextualization in sceneries where the human being decides to move in order to satisfy his or her inner anxiety. Regarding pilgrim, he or she is the emblem of the post-modern human being, who is searching for his or her spiritual goal (Digance, 2003). In this sense, Colin Turnbull (1992) states that pilgrims and tourists share the same desire for personal satisfaction, which pilgrims find in the sacred, while tourists find in the secular. Considering this, the geography of pilgrimage has to study how the experience of pilgrimage changes, in part due to a wide use of the term pilgrimage in secular contexts (Collins-Kreiner, 2010a). In other words, today, geographers are interested in sacred and secular places and, inevitably, in two types of mobile individuals: pilgrims and tourists.

Tourism and pilgrimage are two social phenomena with related dynamics; indeed, modern tourism is considered as a metamorphosis of pilgrimage. Since the 1990s, their examination was focused on similarities and differences. Research carried out by the anthropologists Glenn Bowman and John Eade, and the geographer Gisbert Rinschede (all in the early 1990s) have shown their complicated relationships. Still today, there are different positions; according to some experts, pilgrimage and tourism are converging phenomena, even if there is a gap between the two poles of pilgrimage (the Sacred) vs. tourism (the Secular). Others do not see clear boundaries between pilgrimage and tourism; for instance, a tourist may be interested in visiting a church or a sacred shrine (Davie, 2000; Margry, 2008) and pilgrims may behave like tourists (Schramm, 2004). Moreover, religious and

pilgrimage tourism are considered as a subset of cultural tourism (Rinschede, 1992; Gil de Arriba, 2006), so that pilgrims and tourists share the same external and physical space. Further relevant differences concern the following aspects (Cohen, 1992; Turnbull, 1992):

- *Mandatory Character*: pilgrimage is more binding than tourism, which has the characteristics of leisure.
- *Institutionalization*: pilgrimage follows norms and rites (Berger, 1971; Cohen, 1992) and it has cultural meaning. On the contrary, tourism is associated with something frivolous and superficial; it is more ambiguous and related to fun and entertainment.
- *Movement*: Erik Cohen (1992) explains that tourism and pilgrimage are different, because the former is a movement towards the Other, while the latter is a movement towards the Centre. Pilgrimage is an existential quest to a holy site (Barber, 2001), which is a centre for the existential experience (Turner and Turner, 1978). Pilgrimage itineraries and movements have symbolic value (Morinis, 1992), while modern tourism is not as linked to routes and directions.
- *Station*: pilgrimages and religious traditions depend on seasons and change according to sanctuaries and regions (Nolan and Nolan, 1989). Tourist activity can take place at any time according to the desire of the human being.
- *Motivations*: pilgrims use travel for spiritual reasons, while tourists prefer secular ones.
- *Behavioural schemes*: pilgrimage requires an existential mode, as pilgrims' behaviour is bound to rules and schemes. Tourism follows a recreational scheme.
- *Relation with other companions*: tourists and pilgrims can travel with others, but they give different importance to the company; for the pilgrim, it is part of the experience.
- *Spiritual dimension and emotions of the subject*: sacred power can transform the individual; tourists' search is more social and secular.

### **Italian Pilgrims and the Way of St. James: their experiences in online travel diaries**

Without pilgrims, it is difficult to understand the nature of sacred places, whose experience changes according to the subject. The geographer Veronica della Dora (2011) affirms that researchers examining sacred space

need to know the value of the spiritual experience. This idea has not yet received enough attention, nor has attention to pilgrims' emotions and experiences. These are unpredictable concepts and difficult to investigate. For this reason, today pilgrims' behaviours and practices are becoming always more relevant; but the problem is: how to study the intimate space? The emphasis on pilgrims' subjectivity requires a new methodological approach and in this sense, literature can be a 'place' for showing and sharing emotions and feelings and keeping alive the memory of the pilgrimage experience. By means of their narratives, pilgrims are free to negotiate their *estatus viatoris*; their authorship is part of this process (Coleman and Elsner, 2003).

Marshall McLuhan (1964: 7) coined the phrase: 'the medium is the message', suggesting that the media chosen by a human being is a semantic and historical sign of the message. Since any historical period has its own unique media, the present technological revolution cannot be ignored in this regard. The significance of technology in the development of tourism (Vera, López, Marchena and Anton, 2011; Beltrán López, 2011) can be traced in the definition of tourism 2.0. which has been formulated by Tim O'Reilly (2006):

*Tourism 2.0. is the business revolution in the tourism and leisure industry caused by the move to the tourist ecosystem as platform, and an attempt to understand the rules for success on that new platform. Chief among those rules is this: Build business and destinations that harness network effects to get more productive the more people and business participate in them'.*

This notion is inevitably related to the definition of Web 2.0. that O'Reilly (2005) uses to explain the evolution of the Web towards a new bidirectional and active use of internet based information system, which puts people in communication (Malecki, 2003). Based on the idea that ICT enables 'users/creators' to actively participate in the world (Castells, 2006); tourism, as well as pilgrimage is being transformed.

Concerning contemporary pilgrim and tourist behaviour before they travel, apart from arranging their journeys they surf the Net to seek information. This anticipates their tourism or pilgrimage experience and produces emotions and feelings, which may lead to the real journey (Raffestin, 1991). They read travel blogs, travel diaries, opinions and comments of tourists and pilgrims who have already completed the experience they are planning. In addition, in virtual communities it

is possible to solve doubts, formulate questions and ask for advice. In other words, these virtual spaces facilitate interaction with others and sharing experiences; because of this, there is not only a 'tourist 2.0.' but also a 'pilgrim 2.0.'. Websites and social networks are becoming new meeting places, where subjects create and reformulate the issues of their conversations. On the one hand, these tools enhance a psychological displacement and a projection into a third temporal and spatial dimension. On the other hand, the original essence of pilgrimage changes; in other words, ICT is transforming the adventure from an unknown world, (for instance, the space of the Way of St. James) into something that can be explored via entirely virtual media or more concrete representations of reality such as looking at webcams.

### Methodology

In this paper, exploring the experiential importance of the Way of St. James is realized by examining 63 travel diaries (listed in the Appendices), which Italian pilgrims have published on the Internet. The research combines phenomenological dimensions and ICT. These sources allow the researchers to reinforce the image of the Way of St. James from an experiential point of view; in this case, the word image refers to emotions, sensations, advices and general features of the Way. As far as methodology is concerned, the first step is the identification of Italian blogs and websites; the second step is analysis of online travel diaries by

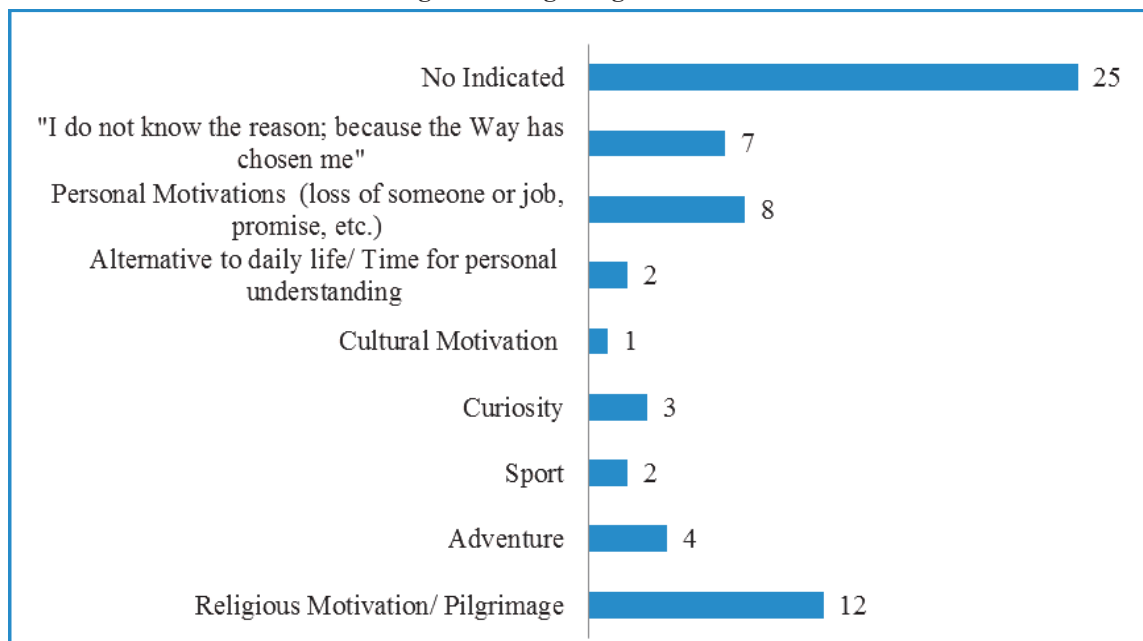
pilgrims who have travelled the Way. The various travel diaries differ in style, order and organization of content, and are interpreted and presented according to the interests of the research. The interpretation relates to an array of variables which have been classified as 'attributes of the Jacobean pilgrimage': motivation, route, transportation, features, emotions and the effects of this experience.

### Results

The examination begins with the motivations. Apart from the 24 writer-pilgrims who do not mention it, the chief reason for undertaking this activity is a 'religious reason/pilgrimage' (See Figure 1). The second reason is a 'personal' one, which groups a number of motivations such as the loss of a beloved person or a job and personal promise. Human beings approach and seek the Sacred because they want to reach a goal; through the subsequent sacrifice he or she exchanges 'something', as stated by the rule of *do ut des*: a practice of offerings and sacrifices, a bargain between humans and divine power (Ries, 1995).

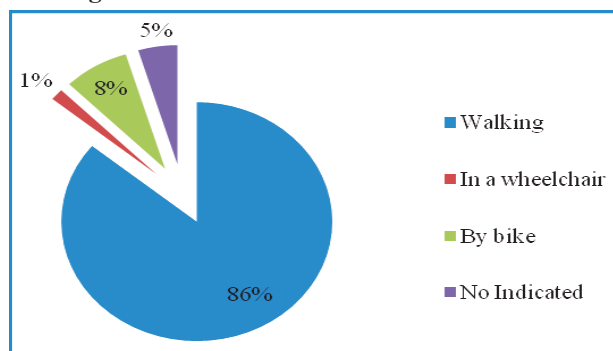
The spiritual aspect remains important for the third most common reason, which is quite interesting: 'I do not know the reason; because the Way has chosen me'. According to these seven individuals, the decision comes from something intimate. This answer may belong to more secular pilgrims as this is how they define themselves in their diaries. However, it suggests

Figure 1 : Pilgrimage Motivation



Source: Various

Figure 2 : The Camino can be carried out . . .

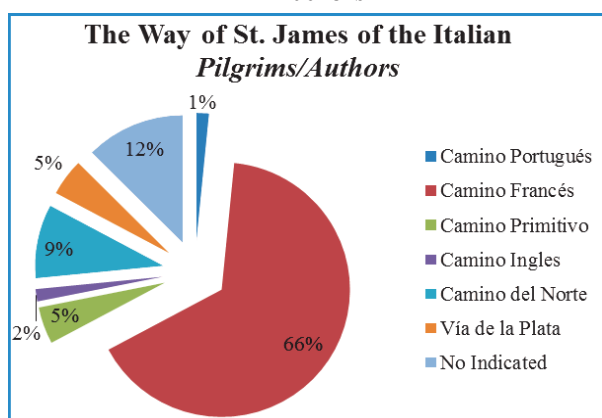


Source: Various

a quality of Sacred: Otherness (Berger, 1971; Croatto, 2002); that is the worship of something beyond everyday life that produces fear and fascination. Other Italian pilgrims have carried out the Way as an alternative to their daily life, for curiosity or for cultural reasons; even if this motivation is less frequent. Thanks to its polysemy (Lois González and Lopez, 2012), the extra religious motivations are important for the Way (Santos Solla, 1993); although, in the case of the Italian sample, spirituality is still more relevant.

With regard to the way they have carrying out the Camino, the records highlight the dominance of its traditional image: ‘walking’ (See Figure 1). Only 8% of the pilgrims completed the Camino by bicycle. As far as route of choice, 66% of the pilgrims chose the Camino Francés (the French Route), the second most popular route is the Camino del Norte; the Camino Primitivo and Vía de la Plata are equally popular and few pilgrims prefer the Camino Inglés or the Camino Portugués. Only nine of the pilgrims continued on to Finisterre.

Figure 3 : The Way of St. James of the Italian Pilgrims / Authors



Source: Various

These accounts should be considered ‘personal literary spaces’. Given the fact that their content is not homogeneous, some authors indicate multiple aspects for each of their diary entries. The following table (Table 1) presents the most outstanding features of the Way of St. James; it suggests that the experience begins at home, as twenty-one pilgrims agree about the importance of physical training and mental preparation. This suggests that the decision to carry out the pilgrimage is already part of the experience. Pilgrims must prepare themselves for it; they know that it can be dangerous, but suffering seem to be irrelevant, as it will reward them during the encounter with the divine or as they perform their personal pilgrimage. Pilgrims make distinctions between physical and spiritual preparation; as far as the physical one is concerned, training is essential. Regarding the spiritual dimension, they believe that their success depends on inner strength and determination to undertake such a hard and tiring experience. For this reason, it is very important to be well equipped, to carry only useful things and, thus, to reduce the weight. The importance of travelling with only a few things not only facilitates pilgrimage but also trains the traveller to live in an essential and simple way.

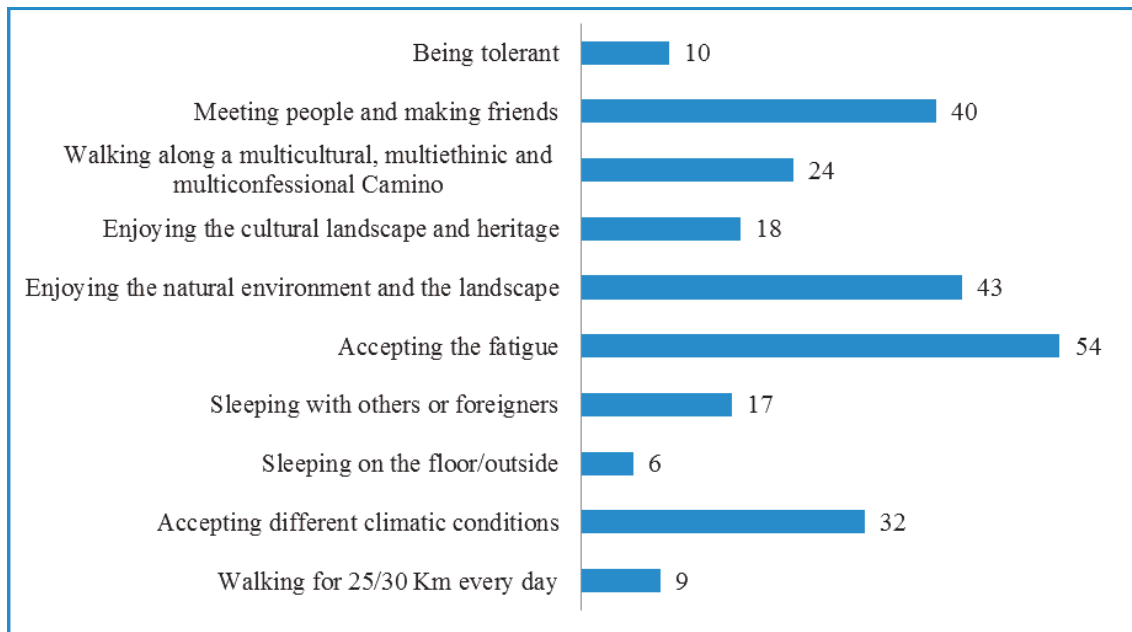
Figure 4 represents the main features that pilgrims highlight when writing about their experiences. First of all, 54 diary authors emphasize their fatigue when walking the Way of St. James; thus supporting the importance of their physical training. This aspect is often related to their descriptions of climatic conditions; pilgrims note that along the Way there might be hot and cold temperatures, or continuous rain. Therefore, the changing climatic conditions throughout the day are part of the experience. The second interesting feature mentioned by many pilgrims refers to landscape and the chance to enjoy the natural scenery; this confirms that landscape is an important attraction / element of the experience (Vera, López, Marchena and Anton, 1997). The chance to enjoy the landscape is one of the new experiences that pilgrims

Table 1. The Way: an Experience that begins at home

Feature	Frequency
Physical Training	21
Mental Preparation	8
Determination and Inner Strength	17
Backpack, Equipment and Organization	17
Plan the Route and the Stages	7

Source: Various.

Chart 4: The Features of the Way of St. James



Source: Various

live during their journeys; in fact, the contributions show that the Way enables them to rediscover, through their experience with the landscape, its human dimension, which is undervalued in everyday life.

The human being needs social contacts to shape his or her subjectivity. The experience of the sacred and religious are relational; religion is a cultural system that contributes to social cohesion (Durkheim, 1964; Berger, 1971) and the religious experience originates and lasts throughout the whole human and community life. This explains the sense of *communitas*, which, for the anthropologists Victor and Edith Turner characterizes the assembly of pilgrims, who are willing to intensify social relations during the experience (Turner and Turner, 1978). The testimonies show that this sense of *communitas* still exists, because forty pilgrims are 'impressed by and happy with' the ease of meeting peoples and making friends. Twenty-four authors point out the multicultural and multi-confessional 'humanity' of the Way; along the routes there are people coming from different places and of different faiths. Consequently, it is possible to hear a 'Babel' of languages. The fact of sharing everyday spaces with other people suggests tolerance and patience, as is demonstrated, for instance, in people sleeping in large rooms with people of various cultural or ethnic backgrounds, and even with some people sleeping on the floor.

The Way of St. James reveals new worlds and new habits, as pilgrims learn to have time for others; in fact,

the most relevant emotion is solidarity (See Figure 5). Even if it is a value, in this case it can be considered an emotion that promotes helpfulness and spontaneity, encouraging empathy and warm contact. In spite of this, a pilgrim chooses his or her own rhythm; for this reason, pilgrims always meet new companions. These feelings reinforce the image of 'spirituality' associated with the Way. Reflection, sense of loneliness and spiritual enrichment are further emotions that contribute to define this pilgrimage in terms of detachment from everyday life and routine. It might be an adventure out of the everyday familiar space, where everything is well structured. This *limen* is a boundary between *foris* and *domis*; it is a psychological threshold that determines movements and displacements, somewhat related to what Edward Soja (1980) calls 'third space'. This third space and the idea of the liminal experience proposed by the Turners (1978) define pilgrimage as an experience between two levels of existence. In this space, thanks to their extrication from everyday life (Margry, 2008), pilgrims have time to reach their desired personal understanding (Collins-Kreiner, 2010c). Based on these ideas, pilgrimage maintains its metaphorical meaning: the human quest (Morinis, 1992). This explains why pilgrims choose spiritual journeys as part of their personality formation process (Turner and Turner, 1978; Morinis, 1992; Osterrieth, 1997). As a matter of fact, this latter point is a distinct reason for pilgrimage, which leads to personal enrichment and reconciliation with one's inner dimension.

**Figure 5 : The Emotions Deriving from the Way**

Source: Various

In special cases such as the Way of St. James, the pilgrimage tourism experience continues after the physical journey, so that it is hardly possible to say when the experience ends because: 'Do we know if it really ends?'. Based on this doubt, the examination concludes with an overview on how the pilgrimage experience continues in everyday life: 'the Post-Way'.

Figure 6 shows pilgrims' emotions after the Way. Travel testimonies describe pilgrimage as a cathartic experience, because pilgrims affirm that it has transformed their lives and priorities. They recognize that they felt free from everyday hierarchies that impose order and formality, as they all shared the same intention and condition, the same goal and social status. The authors of the diaries compare the Way of St. James to a way of freedom, because of its distance from mundane structures, everyday life commitments, constraints and frenetic rhythms. The temporal dimension takes on a new meaning and the practical advice to carry in the backpack only useful things can be easily translated into the well-known metaphor of life.

This produces an anti-structural organization that subverts the established order, turning pilgrimages into inclusive experiences. It enhances the above mentioned sense of *communitas*, which ensures its members social safety (Bauman, 2001). Most Italian pilgrims agree on the fact that the Way teaches how to live differently and generates a new system of values. These descriptions confirm what Margry states:

*. . . the cathedral of Santiago . . . is now largely the other way round: the pilgrimage in*

*the sense of a spiritual journey has become the rationale* (2008: 24).

The Sacred is something relative, which depends on personal experience (Stoddard and Morinis, 1997). As a result, the sacredness of a place is strictly bound to human perception; this personal subjectivity also affects the image that pilgrims and tourists produce and disseminate. Such a relative position confirms that both pilgrims and tourists travel in 'existential mode', so that: 'both kinds may be motivated to undergo an experience that will add more meaning to their lives' (Collins-Kreiner, 2010c: 446). This happens because they go on 'intersecting journeys', which Badone and Roseman (2004) identify as the intersection of experiences and places, thus making it difficult to distinguish pilgrims and tourists. Also the 'both / and' approach sustained by Noga Collins-Kreiner (2010c) defends an inclusive perspective, by which the experience defines the mobile individual as a pilgrim or as a tourist.

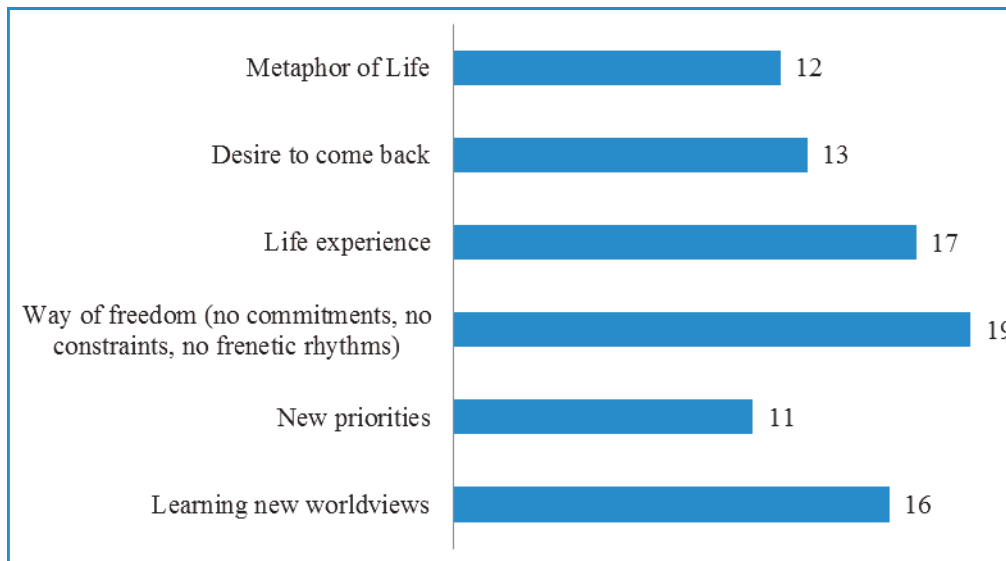
In short, the duration of pilgrims' and tourists' experience can hardly be quantified, as it is personal and variable. Pilgrimage experience production begins at different moments, as well as its consumption, but diaries reveal that the experience consists of a third part: the permanence (both material and spiritual).

## Final Remarks

The social involvement of tourism and pilgrimage links them to the change of human and cultural activity (Margry, 2008); therefore the tourist 2.0. and the proposed pilgrim 2.0. are meant to underline that their behaviours and practices depend on the times in which



Chart 6: The 'Post Camino'



Source: Various

they live. Because of this, the proliferation of blogs, travel diaries and journals can be considered a new practice, which discloses new perspectives to investigate behaviours, experiences and emotions. The production of this new literature can take place during or after pilgrimage, or at a certain time, when the author decides to edit the notes taken during the journey. Consequently, these written sources ensure pilgrims' and tourists' presence in their society and the permanence of their experiences after the Camino. This study wanted to explore the possibilities of the phenomenological methodology to explore human experiences, practices, feelings and emotions; thus, it was not focused on marking the differences between pilgrims and tourists. Moreover, the approach attempts to bridge the relationships between interest in the pilgrims' subjectivity and the increasing phenomenon of on-line pilgrims' travels diaries and journals. In these virtual spaces, pilgrims and tourists share another common space: the virtual one. Here they are free to perform a renewed rite: writing his or her experience and expressing their authorship through action.

The research analysis has shown that:

[m]oving, walking, the accessibility and freedom of the ritual, being in nature, and tranquillity are all elements which have contributed to its success' (Margry, 2008: 24);

These are the same features that Xosé Santos Solla pointed out in 1993, drawing attention to the uniqueness of the Way to satisfy tourists with different motivations and expectations. It can be stated that this approach has enriched the intangible image of the Way

of St. James, which survives in travel narratives that promote experiential marketing (Vera, López, Marchena and Anton, 2011). The creation of such a successful and worldwide famous image ensures a more rapid recognition also thanks to its added value (Santos Solla, 2006), consisting of feelings and emotions that live 'inside pilgrims' once at home.

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