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Cover Page Footnote

The organisation and execution of the projects described in this article would not have been possible without the exceptional support of my two co-supervisors Dr Alexander Trefz and Janis Warncke. Their enthusiasm and commitment have contributed to the success of the projects. I would also like to thank Ilona Renken-Olthoff, who supported the project financially and organisationally in her role as managing director of the BSP Business School Berlin. My greatest thanks, however, go to the students who have participated in the projects in the past years: You are great!

Pilgering Researchers or Researching Pilgrims: Experiences from Four Student Projects on the Camino de Santiago 2016-2019

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Between 2016 and 2019, I accompanied four student groups on the Camino de Santiago - however the planned 2020 project was cancelled due to the coronavirus epidemic. In this article, I describe the project, its planning, its implementation, and its conclusion, as well as some experiences and impressions of the participating students on the basis of an ethnographical approach. The projects presented have two objectives: on the one hand, to teach the students qualitative and quantitative research methods in a delimited, protected environment, and on the other hand, to introduce the students to the fascination of pilgrimage and the Camino de Santiago. During the four years, 45 students of different disciplines from BSP Business School Berlin and its partner universities in Berlin and Hamburg, participated in the projects. Although this paper can be used as a kind of instruction manual for student projects on the Camino de Santiago, it represents above all a work-in-progress that continually needs to be improved and adapted. I encourage other university teachers to embark on the Camino de Santiago with their students. It can be an enriching, valuable, and sometimes life-changing experience for all participants.

Key Words: Camino de Santiago, Way of St. James, student project, pilgrimage, research project, progress report

In the Middle Ages, the Camino de Santiago (Way of St. James) was one of the most important pilgrimage routes of Christianity. After centuries of waning interest following these ancient times, the Camino has been revived and is thriving in the past 20 years (Griffin & Raj, 2017; Havard, 2017). In 2019, 347,578 people received their pilgrimage certificate – the Compostela – at the Pilgrims' Office in Santiago de Compostela. One of the numerically largest groups, after Spanish (146,350) and Italian (28,749) pilgrims, are Germans (26,167) (Oficina del Peregrino, 2020). The growing interest for Germans started in 2006, when the German comedian, actor, and presenter Hape Kerkeling published his book *'Ich bin dann mal weg'* (I'm off then), in which he describes his impressions, adventures, and experiences between St. Jean Pied de Port and Santiago de Compostela.

A couple of years earlier, in 2003, while still a student, I had walked almost 800 kilometres of the Camino de Santiago for the first time. From the moment I arrived in Santiago, I was fully aware that this would not be my last time on the Camino. Nevertheless, it took more than ten years for me to return: Between 2016 and 2019, I have led four student groups with an average of 12 people on the Camino de Santiago – accompanied by two different

colleagues from the university. In each case, we flew from Berlin to Madrid by plane and drove to Astorga by rental car. From Astorga, we followed the almost 300 kilometres to Santiago in eleven stages. Once we even prolonged the journey with a further three-day hike to Finisterre. Even if this last section is perhaps the most beautiful of the entire Camino, this extension is not recommendable: due to this additional section, Santiago no longer becomes the destination, but only a stopover. After 14 to 15 days, we took a return flight from Santiago back to Berlin.

In this article, I describe how I set up and carried out the Camino de Santiago project, what experiences and impressions I gained with the students and what effect the Camino had on the students. Above all, this paper should be understood as a kind of instruction manual, which in the best case will lead to similar projects, whether on the Camino de Santiago or other pilgrimage routes because Pilgrimage is a fascinating, profound, and sometimes life-changing experience for the students.

This paper is based on an ethnological approach with anonymised participant observation, biographical narrative interviews, and visual material over four years

(Bernard, 2006). Data collection included, among other things:

- (1) two focus groups with eleven students, who had either already walked the Way of St. James (six participants) or who were soon to walk it (five participants). Students were asked to talk about their motives for walking the Camino de Santiago and to what extent these motives were fulfilled,
- (2) 15 participant observations recorded in the form of memory protocols about the behaviour of the students in the group and their interactions with other pilgrims; eight biographical narrative interviews conducted with participants after the pilgrimage, to understand if and how participation in the project has changed them and
- (3) visual material in the form of a short film and a volume of photographs, both created by the students.

The findings presented in this article represent only one example of this project. I am fully aware of the fact that other universities in Europe and the USA offer similar programmes, some of which are similar in structure and procedure. Examples include the Fordham College in New York, which offers lectures on medieval and pre-modern monuments along the route (Fordham College, 2020), and Franklin Pierce University in New Hampshire, USA, which offers the walk from Saint Jean Pied de Port in a one-semester course (Franklin Pierce, 2020).

The article is structured as follows: In the next section, the objectives and the preparation of the Camino de Santiago project are presented. This is followed by a presentation of the students' understandings of themselves as pilgrims and as researchers. Subsequently, the collected experiences and impressions are discussed. The paper closes with a summary and outlook on the planned 2021 Camino de Santiago project.

Field Trips as a Teaching Method

There is consensus that field trips – if done properly – are an excellent teaching method (Lei, 2010). The literature lists a variety of different benefits of this pedagogical method, including making learning more enjoyable, promoting peer interactions, working cooperatively within a team, understanding field research methods as well as enhancing critical thinking, data-collecting, problem-solving and social or interpersonal skills (Chang, 2019; Gilbert *et al.*, 2013; Koernig, 2007). All of these points relate to the

idea of experiential learning (Kelner & Sanders, 2009), which ultimately offers students the opportunity to acquire new knowledge or apply and extend previously acquired knowledge outside of the classroom. One of the most important principles of experiential learning - according to which learning takes place when specific experiences are accompanied by reflection and critical analysis - has been an integral part since the second Camino de Santiago project. Students are encouraged to share their impressions, experiences, and thoughts with the group. What was initially only intended as an offer by the project leader increasingly developed into a fixed component, which was remembered in the evenings and demanded by the students. These conversations were not only about personal concerns, but also about the challenges with research, e.g., the difficulty of addressing interview partners or distributing questionnaires.

As Griffin (2017: 290) notes in the context of tourism related fieldwork studies, the destinations, such as Antarctica or cruise ships, can be sometimes 'exotic'. His survey of university lecturers' views of fieldwork reveals that

- (1) in terms of duration, only a small proportion of projects are seven days or longer;
- (2) in terms of objectives, educational motivations are the most important, and;
- (3) in terms of obstacles, logistical / operational issues are seen as the greatest challenge (Griffin, 2017).

The latter point in particular coincides with the experiences in the project described in this article. Organisational hurdles can arise from the fact that the processes at universities do not always have the degree of flexibility and spontaneity necessary for the implementation of rather unusual projects. Therefore, as the experience in this project has shown, it is enormously important to have the backing of the university's top management.

The Camino Project – Goals and Preparation

The project follows a strictly scientific approach. The participants investigate the business model 'Camino de Santiago – between spirituality and commerce' on and along the way. It has turned out, however, that this original, rather business-related topic setting falls far too short. On the one hand, the Camino offers a multitude of very different topics, e.g., from psychology and sociology. On the other hand, the interests of the students

are very different and not only limited to one discipline. Mindful of this, it has become obvious that the Camino is an exceptionally good research field since it can be studied from many different disciplinary perspectives. Furthermore, research takes place in a protected space with subjects who are usually very happy to participate in interviews or fill out even experimental questionnaires. For the participating students, most of whom are already close to completing their bachelor's or master's degree, the project is an opportunity to collect data for their final thesis or at least to try out dealing with different formats of empirical social research.

The participants are both pilgrim researchers and researching pilgrims. This dual role has its advantages: It allows the students the simultaneous process of taking action and doing research in the sense of the action research approach. It enables the students, for instance, by employing guided interviews, to enter into an intensive exchange with the fellow pilgrims, to conduct deeper, more personal conversations. At the same time, however, this dual role also represents a dual burden. While other pilgrims can fully immerse, the students are always under research pressure to distribute enough questionnaires or to conduct enough interviews.

This pressure can be limited, as has been shown in the course of the projects, through good preparation and a smart selection of research topics. For example, I have increasingly proceeded to not to pose new research questions each year, but to pursue existing ones to increase the number of interviews and questionnaires. Also, topics can be chosen to be worked on either before or – even better – after the actual pilgrimage.

It has been shown that it is an advantage, if the researchers have already had an experience of the Camino themselves. This assumption is consistent with previous research, that some degree of shared understanding and connectivity can increase knowledge production (Finlay & Gough, 2003; Gough & Madill, 2012). First, students are better able to contextualise the statements; second, interviews become richer and deeper; and third, subjects' willingness to engage in an interview increases because it is a face to face peer discussion. A particularly extreme example of this connectivity was an interview with a female pilgrim in the first year of the project who used the Camino to process the death of her son. As the conversation revealed, shortly before his death the son had applied to the university where the interviewer was currently studying.

An important and therefore time-consuming part of the project is preparation. Each time the project is proposed, the question of the route, the time period, and the purpose of a safety cars arises anew:

The route:

Many Germans associate the Camino de Santiago with the Camino Frances (probably because this is the route which Hape Kerkeling walked). Even if the other routes have their charm and a lot of time has already gone into alternative route planning, we have remained faithful to the section between Astorga and Santiago. This has two reasons: first, the entrance to the path, the first stage from Astorga to Rabanal del Camino, is comparatively easy to manage and secondly, I know the path, its potential pitfalls, the hostels, and their hostel parents well. But therein also lies a certain danger: precisely because we already know the path very well, it is important not to anticipate the participants experiences, to give them the chance to discover the path for themselves.

The travel period:

Spring has turned out to be the ideal time for pilgrimage. First, this has to do with the fact that at our university the semester starts at the beginning of April and the students, who choose the project as a kind of additional module, do not miss too much of their course material. Secondly, most hostels open around this time after the winter break. Thirdly, there aren't too many pilgrims on the way yet. This sometimes makes it difficult to find sufficient test persons, but it makes it easier to find free beds in the hostels. The latter is an important aspect: As a group we do not want to compete with other pilgrims for the occasionally limited bed capacities in the public hostels. A race for bedding would antagonise other pilgrims against us.

The pros and cons of a safety car:

Since the first project, a safety car has accompanied us along the hiking route, which my colleague and I take turns driving. The purpose of the car is questioned every time. After all, it prevents the two of us from walking the entire route ourselves. At the same time, the car also offers a certain degree of security. This is important whenever students overestimate themselves and fall behind on the route, or whenever, students injure themselves so badly that they have to sit out one or two stages. So far, not a single student has taken advantage of the safety car as a

taxi. On the contrary, injured students had to be persuaded or softly forced to use the service of the safety car.

During the preparation of the first two projects, a lot of time went into the selection of the participants. Participation is open to all students in the university network at the Berlin and Hamburg campuses with about 3000 students. In the first three projects, the university covered the cost of the excursion; the fourth time, the participants had to cover the costs of about 650 euros themselves. The number of participants is limited to 12 and thus, interested persons were required to submit a letter of motivation and a curriculum vitae as their application documents. An average of 30 people applied each year, the majority of applicants were female (almost 80 per cent) and the majority (almost 60 per cent) studied psychology or courses related to psychology.

The motive of religiosity plays a subordinate role among the students who have applied so far. Less than 10 percent describe themselves as religious; some, however, do classify themselves as spiritual. The terms deceleration, different form of vacation and psychological / physical challenge are frequently mentioned. The group experience is also rated as important (González & Santos, 2014; Collins-Kreiner, 2018). Religiousness or membership of a religious community plays no role in the process of participant selection. Instead, value is placed on as much diversity as possible in the biographies. The initial attempt to introduce a gender balance (for example, to allow as many male as female students to participate) seemed neither feasible nor fair due to the majority of female applicants. Increasingly, it became apparent that two selection criteria are particularly important: firstly, the underlying motivation and secondly, the fit of the individual participants into the group.

Much time is spent on the preparation and development of the group. In three or four one-day preparatory meetings, the participants are

- (1) informed about the trip (incl. itinerary, timeline, and packing list);
- (2) prepared for the research tasks (incl. questionnaire or interview guideline development as well as data collection and data analysis) and;
- (3) formed as a group.

The latter happens, among other means, via a one-day test hike on a 20-kilometer section of the German Camino de Santiago. At this point, the participants should already

have bought all the equipment, in order to check the suitability of their backpacks, hiking boots and clothing. After this final practical test, most students relieve their backpacks of superfluous equipment.

Pilgrimage and Research on the Camino

From the first project onwards, a basic structure emerged, which was increasingly refined in the coming years through our own experience, suggestions from colleagues and at the request of the students. Arrival to and departure from the Camino de Santiago takes place as a group. It has been shown that this defined start (meeting for joint departure at the airport in Berlin) and the defined end (farewell after arrival at the airport in Berlin) form a good framework.

The routes are on average 23 kilometres long (see table). The first stage is deliberately kept short at just under 20 kilometres, some stages are slightly longer, and some sections of the route are based on the availability of hostels. The last leg from Pedrouzo to Santiago is considered to be mentally and physically demanding, as the participants set off at 4 am in the dark to arrive at Monte do Gozo at dawn and arrive in Santiago before the morning rush hour.

Most other days follow a certain rhythm: After getting up and having breakfast together, the course of the stage is discussed. One participant is assigned to each stage and gives a short talk about the route and its special features as well as discussing possible alternative routes. The participant gives background information about the places that are passed through and about the sights that can be visited along the way. Questionnaires are also distributed to individual students to hand out to pilgrims along the way. At the request of some students, a kind of morning circle was introduced from the second project onwards: Every morning, the group decides on a kind of 'topic of the day' that the students can reflect on during the hike and report on in the evening. Afterwards, everyone starts hiking. Since the students walk at different speeds and take breaks at different times, small groups are formed from the first day onwards, but they also change regularly. All participants should be able to walk at their own pace without feeling rushed. Some participants prefer to walk alone, others with project group members, others with pilgrims they meet on the way. The only predefined element is the targeted hostel. Participants who may not reach the destination by 6 pm must report to the group.

When selecting hostels, the two criteria are that it is public and that it is equipped with a kitchen. The reason for this is that the students want to spend as little money as possible on both accommodation and dinner. That's why we cook together in the evenings, instead of going out for dinner. In order to distribute the effort as fairly as possible, a purchasing team, a cooking team and a washing-up team are appointed. The joint dinners – either in the open air or at long tables in the kitchens – contribute to group bonding, and offer an opportunity to talk about the day and, thus are a good way to end the day. Students use the time before going to bed to collect data, do laundry or simply to rest. Since the public hostels in Galicia have kitchens, but are rarely equipped with sufficient kitchen utensils, we occasionally resort to inexpensive private hostels with kitchens.

Research plays a central role, which is already evident in the naming of the fieldwork: instead of excursion or field trip, we speak of the trip being a research project. The project is only completed when all students have carried out a data analysis following the data collection on the Camino and have written a seminar paper of at least 15 pages. In the process, the students usually work in groups of two to four and have one year – until the start of the next project. Nine students have also used the data to write term papers as well as bachelor's and master's theses. Students regularly investigate the pilgrims' motives for walking the Camino or for walking it several times - for example, one of the interview participants had walked to Santiago 15 times on different routes.

One Masters student used three different measurement points to investigate how the pilgrims' self-awareness changed while they gathered data on the way, when they arrived to Santiago and when they returned home. Students have researched the use of digital media (De Ascaniis & Cantoni, 2016), the pilgrims' expectations of the hostel facilities or the motives of the hostel parents. Increasingly, the various smaller research approaches, are combined and linked into larger research projects. In this way, data on specific topics has been collected and cumulated over the past years.

Experiences with Pilgering Students

The project is particularly rewarding because the response and feedback have been almost exclusively positive.

This was the best experience of my studies

said one of the students who had just received her master's certificate, almost two years after her participation in the project.

Two particularly moving experiences come to mind. Incident one occurred on the way to O Cebreiro: We started in the valley in the morning in steady rain, and as we climbed the mountains, we were caught in a raging snowstorm. Chilled and soaked, we plodded along the glistening, steep trail. Suddenly, the student walking directly in front of me turned and beamed at me with a wide grin,

This is the best thing I've ever done!

Incident two happened a year later, on the return flight from Santiago (via Madrid) to Berlin: shortly after take-off, I heard the quiet sobbing of a student in the row in front of me. When asked why she was so sad, she replied,

Because it's over now.

There seems to be a lot of truth in the pilgrim's saying that the way doesn't give you what you want, but what you need. The structured daily routine, the time for reflection, the few distractions, sometimes these all lead to life-changing decisions – sometimes with, sometimes without a happy ending. Here are only two examples: one of the participants proposed to his girlfriend after the hike on the Camino; another participant separated from his wife after returning from Santiago. He had found a new love on the Camino.

One of the secrets of the project is the almost consistently strong group dynamic that developed during the projects and the expressed group-specific behaviours and attitudes. In the process, each group formed different, very special characteristics, for example in the assignment of nicknames such as 'Papa Braun' or 'Don Mureno' and the development of common rituals, such as morning stretching or evening card games. This good atmosphere is repeatedly interpreted by the participants as evidence of a well-considered group composition. But it seems much more likely that the Camino itself, its shared experiencing and suffering has the greatest influence on group dynamics. The project leader can influence the

behaviour of group members by providing clear structures and rules in the orientation phase. They can also allow group members to find their roles and form relationships, moderating and challenging the group in the group phase and – wherever possible – relinquishing responsibility, and moderating the dissolution and enabling recall in the closing phase. In all iterations, the project co-leader has been a valuable advisor and an important sparring partner in this process.

Among the three most important basic rules, which are repeatedly addressed in the orientation phase and which are repeatedly reminded in the project phase, are:

Pilgrims are not tourists, and project leaders are not tour guides.

If there is only cold water to shower in the hostel in the evening (because everyone else has emptied the hot water tank by excessive water consumption), that is of course unpleasant. If you can't sleep at night in the dormitory because there's a snorer in the neighbouring bed, you should definitely buy earplugs at the nearest pharmacy. And if you get lost because you're engrossed in a conversation and no longer pay attention to the direction signs, that's personal bad luck.

The Camino constitutes a circle of trust which remains valid even back home:

Experiencing the Way of St. James initiates a thought process in the students and triggers an opening process in many of them. The resulting conversations are very personal and require a high level of trust that must not be violated under any circumstances. Sometimes imprudence coupled with youthful cockiness leads to behaviour that may later be unpleasant or embarrassing. In these cases, the circle of trust applies too.

We are perceived as a group and represent our university:

Among the other pilgrims, the fact that a group of students is on pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago is obviously a popular topic of conversation. 'We've already heard about you guys.' Any experience with a single group member that is perceived as positive is good, but unfortunately experiences can also be perceived as negative, and this affects the reputation of the entire group. The demand for consideration, respect and friendliness is correspondingly high, but to a certain extent is always based on reciprocity.

It's amazing how quickly students transform into pilgrims (Haller & Munro, 2019). It takes less than two days for them to feel part of a community, proudly wearing the pilgrim's shell on their backpacks and shouting their 'Buen Camino' in a friendly manner to everyone on the way. With this transformation, the distance between project leader and students also blurs. Being with students for more than two weeks, almost around the clock, demands prudence and professional attitudes from both sides.

Even after returning to Germany, the Camino de Santiago does not let go of many of the project participants (Lopez, 2013). The most impressive example of this lasting effect is probably the project co-leader in the first year. While still in Santiago, he told me that he would quit his job at the university and continue walking. In the meantime, he has hiked across New Zealand, been to South America, and walked on different routes to Santiago. Whenever he had time, he also accompanied the student project on the Camino – with the handbrakes on, though. Some students have followed this example, although not to this extent, and have now walked the Camino several times, worked as volunteer auberge hosts along the Camino or walked sections of the Appalachian Trail in the USA. And every now and then one particular student group has the idea to organise a Camino Revival.

Project Cancellation for 2021

The Camino de Santiago in general, and the students' project in particular, remains an affair of the heart. The coronavirus epidemic, which affected northern Spain to a particularly strong degree, ultimately led to the cancellation of the 2020 project planned for the end of April. For the fifth anniversary, it was planned to take a different route on the Camino Frances, roughly divided into the two sections Pamplona to Burgos and Monte do Gozo to Finisterre. On the day of the planned start in Pamplona, the participants met via ZOOM and 'walked' part of the route virtually.

For 2021, there was a cautious hope (or maybe just wishful thinking) of being able to make up for the cancelled project at the end of September. The extent to which this would be possible depended above all on the further development of the coronavirus epidemic, the progress in vaccination and the associated restrictions on travel. For 2021 and subsequent iterations, it can only be conjectured what impact COVID-19 will have on the

Camino de Santiago (Di Giovine, 2020; Korstanje, 2020; Olsen & Timothy, 2020). The shutdown and the absence of pilgrims have deprived many hostels and corner stores of their livelihood. In addition, many public hostels were staffed by people, some of them elderly, who are particularly vulnerable to the corona virus. There is also the question of how long it will take for pilgrims to regain enough confidence to sleep in a large dormitory rooms with up to a hundred strangers. In any case, it will take years until the Camino de Santiago will gleam again with its old splendour.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to describe the genesis and development of the Camino project at BSP Business School Berlin from 2016 to 2019. The focus was not on a strictly scientific discussion, but rather on a personal report of experience based on the ethnographic research approach. As a kind of instruction manual, it aims to animate university teachers to carry out comparable student projects both on the Camino de Santiago or on other pilgrimage trails. The Camino de Santiago is an ideal place in two respects: As an object of research, it offers students a variety of possible questions that can be carried out in a largely research-friendly environment. As a religious-spiritual space of experience, it has a lasting positive influence on students seeking tranquillity, deceleration or inner contemplation. In reflecting on this 'project' I must self-critically consider the rarely-raised objection of purist pilgrims who criticise efforts which promote the commercialisation of the Camino de Santiago for educational motives. One could argue this, but conversely, there are – despite all efforts to fathom the motives – as many (good) reasons to go on pilgrimage as there are pilgrims who go on pilgrimage.

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Table 1: Route Planning for the Camino Project, 2017

DATE	DAY	ROUTE		KM
01.04.17	1	Astorga	Murias de Rechivaldo	4,5
		Murias de Rechivaldo	Santa Catalina	4,4
		Santa Catalina	El Ganso	4,3
		El Ganso	Rabanal del Camino	6,5
				19,7
02.04.17	2	Rabanal del Camino	Foncebadon	5,9
		Foncebadon	El Acebo	11,1
		El Acebo	Riego de Ambros	3,2
		Riego de Ambros	Molinaseca	5,5
				25,7
03.04.17	3	Molinaseca	Ponferrada	6,9
		Ponferrada	Camponaraya	9,6
		Camponaraya	Casabelos	7,4
				23,9
04.04.17	4	Casabelos	Villafranco	7,4
		Villafranco	Pereje	5,3
		Pereje	Trabadelo	4,7
		Trabadelo	Ambasmestas	5,7
				23,1
05.04.17	5	Ambasmestas	Vega de Valcarce	1,7
		Vega de Valcarce	Ruitelan	2,5
		Ruitelan	Herrerias	1,4
		Herrerias	La Faba	4,2
		La Faba	Laguna de Castilla	2,5
Laguna de Castilla	O Cebreiro	2,7		
				15,0
06.04.17	6	O Cebreiro	Hospital da Condesa	5,5
		Hospital da Condesa	Alto do Poio	3,2
		Alto do Poio	Fonfria	3,5
		Fonfria	Filloval	5,7
		Filloval	Triacastela	4,1
				22,0
07.04.17	7	Triacastela	San Mamede	14,7
		San Mamede	Sarria	5,2
				19,9
08.04.17	8	Sarria	Barbadelo	4,3
		Barbadelo	Ferreiros	9,8
		Ferreiros	Mercadorio	3,6
		Mercadorio	Portomarín	5,6
				23,3
09.04.17	9	Portomarín	Gonzar	8,1
		Gonzar	Hospital da Cruz	3,8
		Hospital da Cruz	Ventas de Naron	1,5
		Ventas de Naron	Airexe	4,3
		Airexe	Palas de Rei	7,8
				25,5
10.04.17	10	Palas de Rei	Casavova	6,0
		Casavova	Melida	9,6
		Melida	Boente	5,7
		Boente	Ribadiso	6,5
				27,8
11.04.17	11	Ribadiso	Arzua	2,5
		Arzua	Salceda	11,5
		Salceda	Santa Irene	5,0
		Santa Irene	Pedrouzo	3,1
				22,1
12.04.17	12	Pedrouzo	Monto do Gozo	16,5
		Monto do Gozo	Santiago	4,7
				21,2
TOTAL KILOMETRES COVERED				269,2