



University Pontificia Comillas

Perceptions and meanings of pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago for North American walkers

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1. Abstract

The Camino de Santiago of northern Spain is one of the oldest and most historic pilgrimages in Europe. Modernly, people from around the world travel to Spain to walk its plethora of routes to arrive at the Cathedral of Santiago and experience the history and culture over 1,000 years old. People of all ages, economic and religious backgrounds are now walking the Camino for a multitude of reasons and motivations.

In the United States there is a distinct lack of historic pilgrimages, and an overall lack of knowledge of them. This research intends to examine and draw conclusions of how Americans experience the Camino de Santiago, their perceptions and opinions, and identify the American situation in regards to this historic pilgrimage.

Keywords: pilgrim, tourist, pilgrimage, qualitative study

2. Introduction

As an American woman who has lived in Madrid for 2 years, I find The Camino de Santiago fascinating. Coming from a country that is only about 400 years old, for me the Camino was something new and strange. In the United States I have always enjoyed hiking, camping, or hiking as a form of exercise and enjoying nature, but there is a notable absence of pilgrimages and paths of this kind. Most outdoor recreational activities, hiking, trekking, and road trips in the United States have no religious or spiritual roots. There are very few outdoor recreational activities with historical links, and none of the scale and notoriety of the Camino de Santiago.

In January 2020 I took a road trip from Madrid to Galicia. During my stay in León, I stayed in a pilgrim hostel, the Posada de Gaspar, in a village called Rabanal del Camino. Even though I was traveling during the "off season" of the Camino, and that I wasn't technically even walking the road, the hostel owners welcomed me fondly and engaged in a lively conversation. I had a huge feast of typical food for pilgrims, garlic soup, cod with ajoarriero, and much more. The hostel was full of objects, images and history of years of welcoming hungry and tired pilgrims. It was built in the seventeenth century and was an old pilgrim hospital.

The Cathedral of Santiago is a place to behold. During my trip, I sensed a gothic and spiritual atmosphere, and there was a queue of people waiting to pray to the bones of Santiago. I was surprised, and even knelt down and prayed. Unfortunately, I could not see the swing of the Botafumeiro, but seeing the censer itself still was still impressive.

From my experience in Galicia, I have been fascinated by the Camino de Santiago and how different it is from everything we have in the United States. I began to wonder what other Americans thought of the Camino, or if they knew of it. In the contents of this report I will explore the vision of the Camino from the perspective of my compatriots. I will measure Americans' general knowledge and perceptions of the Camino, motivations for walking it, what it means to them, and how they experience the Camino as American pilgrims.

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3. Objectives and Justification

- First, I approach an approximation of the current situation of the Camino de Santiago creating perspective through its history, and evolution over the years, to draw an image of what it means to be a pilgrim today.
- Second, I introduce the concept of pilgrimage from the American perspective, identifying the routes that exist in the United States, and also what American walkers are like in general terms.
- Finally, I conduct an investigation to try to define what Americans know about the Camino, the elements that shape their perception, the motivations they have and the differences between them, and finally their attitudes and experiences after the pilgrimage.

During the research process for the subject, I have found some studies already done on the perspectives, motives and profile of the pilgrims who have made El Camino. Of particular interest, in relation to the motivations and characterization of pilgrims on the Camino, are the articles by Amaro (2018), Lois-González and Santos (2015), Murray and Graham (1997), Nilsson (2016), Rudolf (2004) or Santos (2002). Of these, Amaro (2018) and Lois-González and Santos (2015) specifically include interviewees of US nationality. On the other hand, some articles related to the meanings of the pilgrimage (especially for Americans) are noteworthy; Anthony (2018), Greenia (2014) or Rudolf (2004).

I have found that the most important scientific literature that truly begins to address the question I raise in this report, is above all the primary research carried out by anthropologists, sociologists and other researchers, in the form of first-hand interviews with pilgrims who travel the Camino. Other very valuable sources of secondary information have been the statistical studies carried out by the managing entities (such as the Pilgrim's Office of Santiago de Compostela) on the people who travel the Camino.

Throughout my research for this topic, I have found that this topic has many layers. I believe that, in order to offer the best view of the American perspective, it is necessary, first of all, to recognize the distinction between "tourism" and "pilgrimage" and to analyze how these terms have changed over time to become what we know today as modern pilgrimages. Second, it is necessary to delve into the general motivations for walking El Camino, and how these

motivations are reflected in the Americans who participate in El Camino. Finally, I will analyze the American situation and evaluate the availability of pilgrimages in the United States and how they differ fundamentally from the Camino de Santiago.

4. Methodology

In order to respond to the problem, a double methodological approach has been used: first, the review of the previous relevant literature and then, empirical research of qualitative approach.

The first half of this report consists of a review of the state of the question, to formulate a general conceptual framework on the subject. In order to properly introduce the topic and provide useful background on the history of the Camino, its modern use and how it has changed over time, I have used sources of secondary information in the form of studies and academic articles. I found these sources using the Google Scholar and EBSCO database platforms, and used them to create the outline of the overall theme. To search for relevant bibliographic contributions, use keywords such as "Camino de Santiago", "Pilgrimage", and "American perceptions". It was also necessary to introduce some background on travel habits and pilgrimages in the United States. Many of the anthropological studies I found and used for this report speak to the American situation in this regard, and provided a lot of useful information.

The second half of the project consists of empirical research conducted through a qualitative technique; in-depth interviews. Semi-structured in-depth interviews of free and spontaneous dialogue between the interviewer, myself, and the interviewee were conducted. It was possible to interview 14 people, all of them Americans, who had had experiences with the Camino de Santiago. This could mean people who have gone through it in its entirety, or people who have only done small parts. All experiences are valid for the purpose of my research. I found people to interview through my networks in North Carolina and Madrid, receiving contacts from friends, colleagues and through American professors at the University. I also used Facebook and Instagram to ask my followers if anyone who met my criteria would be willing to be interviewed. Over the course of 3 months, from April to June, I conducted the bulk of the interviews (10) and during the months of December and January of 2022 I conducted the last 4. Through these interviews I was able to gain a lot of valuable insight from the views of Americans, who varied in gender, age, time of experience, and type of travel. With this information I was able to draw conclusions about the American perception of the Camino de Santiago, in terms of previous knowledge, expectations, motivations, revelations and conclusions, and the experience in general.

5. Structure

The report is divided into three parts.

- The first part is introductory, where the approach of the topic, the objectives of the work and the methodology of the work are introduced.
- The second part consists of the theoretical framework, where I present the secondary sources that I have used for my research and development of the subject of the report.
- The third and final part consists of empirical research, where I introduce and explain the process, I used to collect my primary information, and then analyze and draw conclusions from the data.

6. Literature review

6.1 The Camino de Santiago. From its origins to present day

The Camino de Santiago Compostela has been around for over 1000 years. In the ninth century, according to Catholic Christian tradition, the body of James, one of Jesus' disciples, was discovered by a shepherd in Galicia, Spain. It is said that the apostle was preaching the Gospel in present-day Galicia, but was beheaded by King Herod in A.C 44 on his return to Jerusalem. The followers of Santiago transported his remains to Galicia, (History of the Camino de Santiago, 2014) where they rested without being discovered until the ninth century. When they were discovered, the then King of Spain, Alfonso II, had a modest chapel built on the site of the remains, and in 1078 the construction of the Cathedral of Santiago began. In the twelfth century, the cathedral was finished, even after it had been destroyed by the Moorish army in the tenth century. The Romanesque cathedral that we know today is where the bones of Santiago are kept, which serve as a destination for the Camino de Santiago.

There is evidence of pilgrims in the ninth and tenth centuries, but the pilgrimage began to acquire international notoriety in the eleventh century. In the thirteenth century, it is estimated that 500,000 pilgrims arrived each year at the sanctuary of Santiago (Amaro, 2018). The twelfth and thirteenth centuries are considered the golden age of the Camino. Soon after, there was a significant decline in the number of pilgrims to Santiago during the renaissance and reform years in Europe. Also, at this time the remains of Santiago disappeared, which were lost for three centuries. However, at the end of the twentieth century, the road experienced a resurgence of its notoriety. In 1985 the city of Santiago de Compostela was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Shortly after, in 1987 the Council of Europe recognized the Camino as the first European Cultural Itinerary (Amaro, 2018). The Camino originally only crossed northern Spain, but in the twentieth century the French Way was established, which is modernly the most popular route of The Camino (History of the Camino de Santiago, 2014). At present, there are 15 different routes that all form parts of the Camino (*Figure 1*), each of which departs from different parts of Spain. All the routes of the Camino add up to more than 800 km of distance (Noble, 2022), and all are marked by the distinctive scallop shell that serves as the motif of the Camino or by an arrow drawn with yellow paint (*figure 2*).

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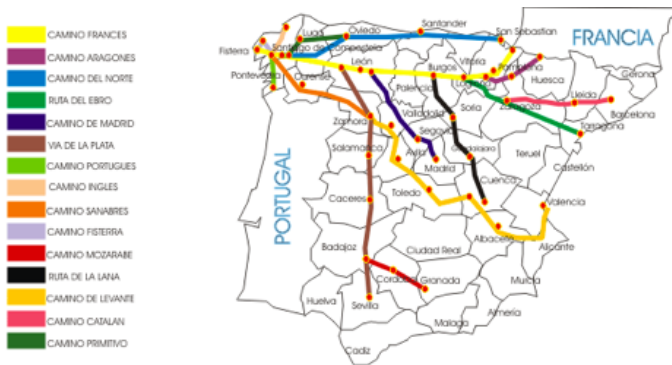


Figure 1. The routes of the Camino de Santiago

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Figure 2. Signage of the Camino de Santiago

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In the XXI century we continue to see the popularity of the Camino grow. The Camino is recognized as a tourist product, since it has economically benefited the towns it crosses. Over the years, hostels, albergues and hotels have been built along the route, offering pilgrims places to eat and sleep, and to enjoy the local gastronomy and culture. In turn, these small towns have acquired notoriety and have experienced economic growth by the mere fact of being located on one of the routes of the Camino.

Despite the decline derived from the Covid19 pandemic, every year a growing number of people embark on the Camino, all of them for different reasons. But in general, the Camino is considered a journey of self-discovery. It is a kind of spiritual journey for those who travel it in whole or in part. The Camino is unique because it encourages a slow and unhurried journey. Pilgrims carry very few personal belongings, only what is necessary to survive. You can travel

the route on foot, by bicycle or even on horseback. Depending on the route or the selected section, pilgrims usually spend days without seeing other travelers, walking alone along the trail, marveling at the beautiful mountains of northern Spain and the parts of nature that have not been touched by human development. Hostels and the Camino itself offer spaces where travelers can meet and interact, creating camaraderie among everyone, and some often spend days walking with people they've met along the journey. The Camino itself, the journey, is considered as important as the destination, if not more so in recent years.

When arriving at the Cathedral of Santiago, people usually wait to receive their "Compostela", a document that proves the fact of having made the pilgrimage, and reserved for those who travel at least 100 km on foot or on horseback, or 200 km by bicycle Pilgrim's reception Office, 2022). However, to receive it, the traveler must declare that they traveled the road for religious or spiritual reasons. A Mass service is also celebrated in the cathedral which most people attend upon arrival. In the cathedral is also the Botafumeiro, the large incense burner that measures more than two meters in height and weighs more than 100 pounds (Anthony, 2018). It takes six men to hoist and swing it back and forth using its gigantic system of pulleys, so that the smoke of incense fills the cathedral. It's a sight to be seen, and people from all over the world, despite their religious affiliations, are often thrilled by the experience.

6.2 The Pilgrimage Today

The Camino de Santiago has been the subject of all kinds of studies for many decades, due to the unique debates it intrinsically presents. The Camino in its essence, is a medieval tradition that, by some phenomenon, has been adapted to the contemporary world (Lois-Gonzales and Santos, 2015). Even the definition of pilgrimage is much disputed. Nilsson (2016) deepens his study in the thorny question of defining and giving meaning today to the concept of pilgrimage. Some researchers claim that pilgrimage should be defined as a kind of rite of passage, a journey in which one transforms at the end of it. Others argue that pilgrimage can be defined simply as a journey with a religious or sacred sense. A broader definition of the term states that pilgrimage includes religion, institutional and individual beliefs and practices, spirituality, and belief systems. Nilsson confirms this definition and states that the term "pilgrimage" implies the requirement of some kind of personal or religious sacrifice (Nilsson, 2016).

Over the years, the Camino has changed and adapted to remain relevant in modern society. For example, there are now more than 15 different routes identified and signposted that offer in addition to an itinerary certain service to the walker, and all of them depart from the Camino

de Santiago. These routes have remained a symbol of the history of the Camino for more than a thousand years. The Camino also experienced periods of great decline, especially during the Spanish Civil War, years in which there were hardly any walkers who made the pilgrimage. At present, the Camino is experiencing an increase in its popularity. In 1986, only 2,491 pilgrims were registered on the Camino. 26 years later, in 2012, this figure was 192,488 (Nilsson, 2016). This revitalization of the Camino was not random. There have been many factors that have contributed to turning the Camino into a modern tourist destination.

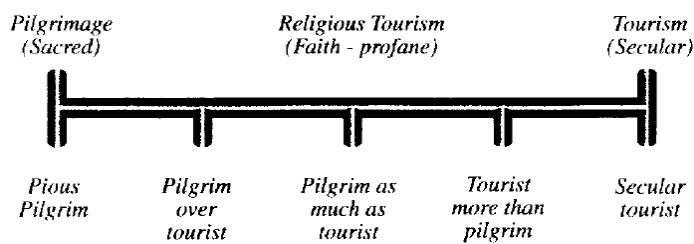
Pilgrimages are considered the first forms of tourism we continue to experience today (Amaro, 2018). The Camino de Santiago is a great example of this. With its undeniable religious roots, its existence is based solely on catholic tradition. However, more and more people are participating in the pilgrimage for reasons other than those upon which it was created. Once it was understood that religious pilgrimages could attract a crowd of people and serve a multitude of purposes, the revitalization of the Camino began. This transition was spearheaded by the Spanish Church and the Spanish public administrations, marketing the Camino as a tourist product rather than an exclusively religious pilgrimage. After the Spanish Civil War, the Spanish economy was in ruin. The economy needed a boost, especially in the small rural towns most affected by the war. With the help of the Spanish government, the Camino was relaunched, hostels and hotels were built to accommodate pilgrims, and it was seen almost immediately that the Camino greatly benefited the villages it touched, attracting pilgrims from all over the world to buy food and stimulate local economies during their travels. Now, guided tours of the road can be purchased, with buses to carry luggage and transportation to large hotels to stay each night.

As route-based tourism gains popularity around the world, the distinction between the terms "pilgrim" and "tourist" begins to blur. From the creation of the Camino, travelers were considered pilgrims, people who undertook the journey for religious and spiritual reasons. Now, as people from all over the world travel to Spain or France to walk the path, the meaning of the term pilgrim is changing. People from all cultures and backgrounds walk the path for their own personal reasons. Whether for religion, spirituality, sports, leisure, gastronomy or any other reason, the path serves as an experience for all types of people. In addition, the Camino is marketed as a tourist product, rather than as a pilgrimage. So, is one who walks the Camino considered a pilgrim? Or are they a tourist?

This debate is addressed in depth in a study on the habits of pilgrims by Lois-Gonzales and Santos (2015). They define that the Camino has a "trilogy", the Camino itself, the destination, and one's motivation. Their findings reveal that people, while walking the Camino, tend to consider themselves more like pilgrims. This turns out to be true, since the pilgrims who traverse the Camino do not have the spending and behavioral habits that normal tourists have. However, upon arriving in Santiago, the one who was previously considered a "pilgrim", very often becomes a tourist. Their spending increases significantly, almost matching the regular tourists in Santiago who did not take part in the Camino. Nilsson (2016) confirms this phenomenon, in interviews with pilgrims of the Camino, he found that they did not like to classify themselves as tourists, but often referred to tourism when they talked about their motivations and personal trips. Even pilgrims who claimed to have religious motivations still had tendencies similar to those of tourists.

Murray and Graham (1997) expand on this idea, presenting an interesting continuum of motivation based on a spectrum ranging from "pious pilgrim" to "secular tourist". Figure 3 is a great visual tool for seeing the range of distinctions between the concrete terms "pilgrim" and "tourist." However, it does not address the different definitions of "pilgrimage" that exist today, nor how modern conceptions of spirituality have overcome the more "pious" and "holy" nuances of the Camino, since many people no longer believe that the bones of Santiago actually rest in the cathedral.

Figure 3: A pilgrim-tourist continuum, after Smith



Source: Murray and Graham (1997)

With all this in mind, some conclusions can be drawn. Pilgrimages in the West are seeing a revitalization (Anthony, 2018), the Camino de Santiago showing how this transition is possible. These experiences are accommodating a set of people with all kinds of motivations. To maintain the relevance of these experiences as drivers, it was necessary to market them as

tourism products. In one way or another, pilgrimages are now part of commodified consumer spaces. This means that, no matter how religious the motivations for doing the Camino, the "pilgrims" are also intrinsically tourists, and vice versa, especially in the case of the Camino de Santiago.

6.3 Motivations to do the Camino de Santiago

In my process of reviewing literature relevant to this work, I came across the study of Nilsson (2016) that has been very useful to show the modern motivations to undertake the pilgrimage of Santiago de Compostela. In 2012, Nilsson traveled to Spain to conduct interviews with pilgrims who had traveled the Camino. He interviewed a total of 53 men and women staying at the Monte do Gozo shelter, on the outskirts of the city of Santiago. All interviewees spoke English, but all had different ages and nationalities, from 7 to 71. Interviews were conducted individually, in which the interviewee was asked to describe their personal experience on the Camino, and the interviewer waited to ask more questions after each person had told their story (Nilsson, 2016).

As mentioned in the previous section, the pilgrimage has changed a lot over time. Just as it has changed, so have people's motivations to embark on the Way. Although the Camino has undeniable religious roots, it is increasingly used for non-religious reasons. According to the aforementioned Nilsson study, most of the interviewees claimed to have done the Camino for religious or spiritual reasons, the majority of the respondents affirmed the latter. However, very few of the respondents specified why their motivations were spiritual. It is also noteworthy that very few claimed to be practicing Catholics.

Most said their motivations came from a personal desire to learn more about themselves, or to "find themselves." Others said they embarked on the Camino because they wanted to find answers or solutions to personal questions or problems in their lives. Some said they wanted their time on the Camino to be a quiet time to spend with themselves, a time to find peace in their busy lives. These motivations are certainly spiritual in nature, as they are geared toward recognizing something "transcendent" outside of oneself.

Interestingly, other respondents reported that they were motivated by curiosity. That is, curiosity about the mythology of the origins of the Camino, Spanish history, culture and gastronomy, or simply curiosity about the landscape of northern Spain. Of course, there were also those who stated that they were attracted to the Camino as a way to test their endurance, for sporting and athletic reasons, and for the sense of adventure.

Overall, Nilsson's study found four main purposes for people to make the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. First, to participate in a deep-rooted religious and historical tradition. Second, for more spiritual reasons, to reach a deeper level of self-understanding and sense of place in the greater scheme of things. Thirdly, in some cases, to reflect on questions of personal life and life in general. And finally, Nilsson discovered that people were motivated by the desire to find existential meaning in and through the journey to a sacred place.

Of course, there are many other reasons to do the Camino. However, I think it is important to recognize a key statement that Nilsson makes as a result of his study.

"The typical pilgrim of this study spoke first of his individual experience and secondly of religious or spiritual experience. ... My interpretation is that the main motivation for the pilgrimage was personal rather than religious, and individual rather than collective."

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This statement is crucial to understanding that people's reasons for making their own pilgrimage are totally personal and unique. It demonstrates why the Camino has evolved into a pilgrimage that can be customized to meet the unique needs and desires of each person who chooses to participate in it.

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Another study conducted by Amaro (2018) consisted of an online survey to evaluate the motivations of pilgrims to make the pilgrimage. We collected 1140 surveys of people from all over the world who had done the Camino at least once. Versions of this survey were available in English, Spanish, French, Portuguese and German. The results provide useful insight into the motivations of American pilgrims compared to other nationalities.

When comparing the responses, it became clear that there are many distinctions within the motivations based on nationality. Below is a table showing the standard deviations and means of each nationality for each of the motivations listed in the survey conducted by Amaro (2018). As can be seen in the table, Americans declared themselves more motivated by the desire for nature and sport, to escape the routine and to meet new people and places than any of the other nationalities, with averages respectively of 4.46, 3.48 and 3.65. In general, American respondents are characterized by being similar to the Portuguese and Brazilians in terms of spiritual, new experience, and cultural motivations. However, Americans also differ from these groups in that they value nature, sport, and escape from routine more.

Table 1. Predominant motivations by nationality of origin of the pilgrims

Pilgrim's motivations by nationality.

	Portuguese	Dutch	French	Spanish	Brazilian	American	German	Kruskal -Wallis p	Multiple Comparisons
	Po	Du	Fr	Sp	Br	Am	Gr		
	Mean SD	Mean SD	Mean SD	Mean SD	Mean SD	Mean SD	Mean SD		
F1 – Religious Motivations	2.87 1.16	2.21 0.88	2.23 1.25	2.32 1.29	3.19 1.05	2.68 1.34	2.29 1.12	<0.0005	Du, Fr, Sp, Gr < Po, Br
F2 – Spiritual Motivations	4.24 0.7	3.96 0.65	4.04 0.93	4.05 0.76	4.31 0.60	4.28 0.65	3.90 0.66	<0.0005	Gr < Po, Br, Am Du < Po, Br
F3 – New Experiences	4.20 0.76	3.84 0.69	3.54 1.02	4.08 0.81	4.38 0.72	4.32 0.76	3.91 0.88	<0.0005	Fr, Du, Gr < Po, Am, Br Fr < Sp
F4 – Cultural Motivations	4.07 0.78	3.50 0.76	3.65 0.89	3.95 0.90	4.12 0.78	4.07 0.84	3.59 0.89	<0.0005	Du, Gr < Sp, Po, Am, Br Fr < Po, Br
F5 – Nature and Sports	3.84 0.96	3.98 0.76	3.95 1.05	4.09 0.87	3.88 1.03	4.46 0.63	4.19 0.72	<0.0005	Po, Br, Du < Am Po < Gr
F6 – Escape from Routine	2.86 1.12	3.08 1.12	2.62 1.09	2.75 1.23	2.72 1.27	3.48 1.08	3.44 1.08	<0.0005	Po, Fr, Sp, Br < Am, Gr
F7 – Meet new People and Places	3.37 0.92	3.35 0.74	3.13 0.99	3.21 0.95	3.44 1.02	3.65 0.87	3.14 0.85	0.001	Sp, Fr, Gr < Am
F8 – Fulfill Promise	1.98 1.05	2.11 0.93	1.83 0.92	2.16 1.23	1.88 1.06	2.16 1.27	1.97 0.97	0.363	NS

NS – Non significant.
Higher mean values for each factor are bold faced.

Source: Amaro (2018)

While Nilsson (2016) found that most pilgrims are motivated by spiritual and religious reasons, Amaro (2018) found that most American, German, and Brazilian pilgrims are motivated by other reasons, such as nature and sport, the desire to meet new people and new places, and new experiences. Nilsson did a great job of finding the basic motivations of pilgrims in general, but Amaro went a step further and analyzed the motivations based on a number of discernment factors such as gender, marital status, and nationality. Murray and Graham (1997) present another contrasting perspective, stating that many people who embark on the road may not initially consider themselves "pilgrims" due to their personal motivations for walking, perhaps for sport or leisure or for meeting new people. However, many people claim that their motivations changed along the way to be transformed into something more spiritual or transcendent, perhaps after a shocking experience they had along the journey. Nilsson (2016) also acknowledged that many pilgrims claim that their motivations change throughout their journey based on personal experience and experience.

6.4 The Context of American Walkers and Pilgrims

To begin to understand the Camino de Santiago from the American perspective, I must first delve into the case of American travelers and walkers. This means analyzing American travel patterns, and defining what a pilgrimage means for Americans. During my research, I came across a couple of studies that provide valuable insight into these topics.

Firstly, I will focus on a study conducted by Anthony in 2018, where he defines the concept of "hypermobility" and relates it to the American situation. Hypermobility is the need to travel far and at a relatively fast pace, hence the 'hyper'. This phenomenon is a relatively new concept,

as it comes from globalization and how modes of travel are becoming more accessible and normalized in society. Compared to the rest of the world, Americans especially suffer from hypermobility. Americans reportedly walk significantly less than people from other countries (Anthony, 2018). Why is this? American culture glorifies one's travel and ability to move. It is very normal in American society to travel for work. This can mean flying from one side of the country to the other multiple times a week, an act that is considered part of the "American dream," despite its obvious displacement and carbon footprint repercussions.

Hypermobility is also reinforced in American culture. The country itself is huge, and it requires one to have easy access to means of transportation to fully utilize the ample space we have. Part of the "American dream" is to be a hard-working, successful person. This is usually accompanied by being very busy and having to move between several places that are far from each other. Americans live in a fast-paced culture, where you have to see and do everything as quickly as possible, travel the world, succeed, see all 50 states, etc.

With this vision, it can be understood why many Americans do not know the main European cultural itinerary that the Camino de Santiago represents. When Americans travel, they tend to be attracted to touristy and convenient options. In a study conducted by Expedia, 67% of Americans surveyed stated that they preferred all-inclusive vacation and travel options (Solutions, 2021). When the average American plans their vacation, it is rare to find those who want to travel to Spain to basically take a very long walk. However, each year it is reported that there are more American pilgrims participating in the Camino. In that same study, 81% of Americans stated that, when it comes to making their vacation plans, exploring the outdoors and being active are some of the main requirements (Solutions, 2021). There are extensive blogs on Lonelyplanet.com (a travel blogging website), Facebook groups with thousands of Americans helping each other plan their trips to Santiago. As modern American tourism changes, experiences and destinations like the Camino de Santiago become more popular, breaking with the norm of resort-style, all-inclusive tourist destinations that have been so popular in American culture.

6.5 Pilgrimages in the United States

To correctly compare the Camino de Santiago with pilgrimages in the United States, it is necessary to first establish the difference between secular and religious pilgrimages. As mentioned above, the Camino de Santiago was initially established as a religious pilgrimage. The pilgrims walked hundreds of kilometers to reach the Sanctuary of the Apostle Santiago to

pray and get closer to God. Now, in modern times, these practices are still an important part of the Camino experience, attending Mass upon arrival at the cathedral, receiving the Compostela and being alone in nature. However, it can be said that the Camino has evolved into something new. As already mentioned, people's motivations for undertaking the Camino have become less and less religious in recent decades. Even in Spanish culture, within the Spaniards who travel the Camino, you can see this transition. People all over the world are attracted to the Camino for increasingly secular reasons. For example, to exercise and overcome a physical challenge, to immerse oneself in nature and the beautiful landscapes of northern Spain, to enjoy Spanish culture and gastronomy, and many other reasons that have little or nothing to do with religion and, therefore, would be argued to not be interpreted as a pilgrimage in itself.

However, the differences in people's perceptions of the Camino and their motivations for doing the Camino do not change the history of the Camino and what is fundamentally, a religious pilgrimage.

With this in mind, I would now like to show some examples of routes in the United States that can be compared in some way to pilgrimages. In undertaking this research, I was almost certain that the Camino was something very exclusive to Spain and that nothing similar existed in the United States. As I researched, I found that this statement was absolutely correct. However, I was surprised by the number of pilgrimages that actually do exist in the United States. I used to have the impression that America was too young to have pilgrimages, too mixed with different cultures and people from all over the world to have established something as deep and historic as the Camino.

In the following, I extract information from Greenia's pioneering study in 2014 called *Pilgrimage and the American Myth*, where he explains that, in fact, there are pilgrimages in the United States, but they are very different from that of the Camino.

When I think of an example of pilgrimage in America, the first thing that comes to mind is the Appalachian Trail. The Appalachian Trail is a hike of more than 2,000 miles that begins in northern Georgia and ends in Maine (Greenia, 2014). This trail is famous in the United States and is on the bucket list of many Americans to do certain parts of it or, for the more adventurous, the entire trail. A backpacker takes months to complete the entire route, and requires a lot of training and pre-equipment, as it is very tactical and challenging at some points. In the United States there is also the Continental Divide Trail and the Pacific Crest Trail. Together, these three trails make up what Americans call the "Triple Crown," as it is considered

an epic achievement to complete one, or even all three. These trails can be considered cultural pilgrimages because they are trips that involve traveling a specific distance through estimated natural settings of the United States (Greenia, 2014).

There are other interesting examples of pilgrimages linked to American culture. They are interesting because many Americans participate in these activities and most likely don't even realize that they are participating in a kind of pilgrimage. For example, the High Pointers. High Pointers are a national organization of people who travel throughout the United States to hike to the highest elevation points in each of the 50 states (Greenia, 2014). There are also the Harley Davidson motorcycle rallies, "Bike Week", which are held in Daytona Beach (Florida), Sturgis (South Dakota) and Laconia (New Hampshire) (Greenia, 2014), where bikers and vendors from all over the country meet and, subsequently, double the population of each state.

The United States is also home to a few more examples of more profane pilgrimages. For example, those who travel the country following bands or artists can be considered a type of pilgrim. The "Dead Heads", who follow the band The Grateful Dead. Also the "Parrotheads", who follow Jimmy Buffet. There's also the Star Trek convention, which is a global phenomenon, where thousands of Star Trek fans from across the country gather in one place to commemorate their shared passion (Greenia, 2014).

The aforementioned author also shows examples of more religious pilgrimages in the United States, however, none that have existed as long as the Camino de Santiago. There are many religious pilgrimage sites that attract American Catholic visitors from all over the country; the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC, and St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York. These are just pilgrimage sites, there are very few examples of Catholic shrines that require a pilgrimage on foot similar to that of the Camino de Santiago. There's mission Chimayó, New Mexico, where pilgrims carry crosses for miles to reach the chapel. The California Mission Trail links prominent Franciscan churches such as Santa Barbara and San Juan Capistrano. However, this trail is complicated by the American highway system in California that covers many of the ancient mission roads that are important parts of this pilgrimage.

Although it is not an American pilgrimage, it is worth mentioning the pilgrimage shrines of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré and the Oratory of St. Joseph in Quebec, Canada. They have an 18-day walking tour and both were inspired by the Camino de Santiago (Greenia, 2014).

Within the Church of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), there is also a remarkable religious pilgrimage. In the 1930s Mormons en masse fled their former residence in New York. On their journey to Illinois, there was a mass execution of many of the Mormon leaders, which caused them to continue fleeing, until they reached Salt Lake, Utah, where they took up permanent residence. This historic pilgrimage is now an important rite of passage for young Mormons. The pass is recreated using props such as the medieval costumes that were worn and the traditional carts that were used to travel so many years ago. This pilgrimage differs greatly from that of the Camino de Santiago, since the participation of people outside the Mormon Church is not allowed, and also that those who embark on the Camino do not usually use any type of props or distinctive garb (Greenia, 2014).

All these examples of American pilgrimages serve as points of distinction of the Camino de Santiago. I was surprised to discover that there are, in fact, religious walking pilgrimages in the United States, but I was not surprised to discover that none of them had the scale, notoriety, and profound history of the Camino. As I researched, it became more apparent to me why the Camino is so strange to most Americans. Pilgrimages that exist in the United States are rare and distant from each other, and most people do not even consider them a type of pilgrimage. This affirms the uniqueness of the Camino de Santiago, not only for Americans, but for people around the world.

6.6 Americans on the Camino

Given the examples of pilgrimages in the United States, it should be clearer why every year hundreds of Americans travel to Spain to participate in the Camino de Santiago. It is simply because there is nothing like it in the United States. It should be noted that Americans who decide to travel to Spain to do the Camino are, in most cases, the same ones who value other classic American excursions, such as the Appalachian Trail. Americans who complete the Appalachian Trail, for example, typically have other athletic feats on their "bucket lists." Consequently, the Camino de Santiago seems the most obvious for these types of people to achieve next.

Between 2011 and 2016, the number of people walking the Camino quadrupled, with the majority of these being new American walkers. In ethnographic interviews conducted in 2015 with Americans walking the Camino, American walkers reported experiences of deep friendship and community, sacred time, and deep connections to nature (Anthony, 2018). These interviews were conducted by an American woman, Cara Anthony, to gauge Americans'

perceptions and opinions about their experiences, while also walking the Camino herself. Anthony interviewed 12 Americans, all white men and women, ranging in their mid-20s to late 60s. Six of those interviewed identified as religiously unaffiliated, the rest identified as Catholic or Methodist. It is interesting to note, that, despite the religious affiliations of the interviewees, each person reported that they stopped at the many churches along the Camino, either to rest, pray, participate in church services, admire the beauty of the churches, or to feel connected to pilgrims who have visited the churches centuries before (Anthony, 2018).

In addition, these interviews show a great appreciation by the Americans for the traditions and culture of the Camino. As mentioned above, Camino walkers must travel light, with only what is necessary to survive, due to the availability of hostels and albergues along the way to provide food and accommodation for each night. This practice is not typical for most Americans, since traveling with an abundance of things is normal in American culture, nor are there accommodations on the main trails of the United States, so backpackers must carry with them everything they need to survive. One of the interviewees stated,

"I'm heading towards a more minimalist lifestyle. Even before I went on this trip, I started getting rid of things. And when I get home, I'm going to be able to get rid of even more because I've lived for a month on the Camino with everything in my backpack. So that's one of the reasons I thought this would be a good workout to get rid of things."

It is also typical for walkers to meet other people and form quick friendships. People who walk at the same pace usually coincide and may end up walking together for entire days. There is also a culture of close community in the hostels and albergues of the Camino that welcome pilgrims. Previously strangers, people end up eating, lodging, and walking together, a norm in the experience of the Camino. Another interviewee stated,

"Over the course of the last forty days I have met several people who have become my Family of the Camino. And is... you bond very quickly through this experience, I think partly because you don't have a lot of time together, so you get to the point. There are not many trivial conversations. It immediately moves on to a big talk because you have an entry point like "Why are you here?" And that's usually a profound question."

Based on these accounts, it can be said that Americans experience the road like any other pilgrim. However, it can also be said that each person experiences the path in their own way,

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due to their unique perceptions and background. Americans come from a totally different culture, with values and trends very different from those of the Camino. Therefore, American pilgrims find on the Camino a unique and powerful experience, and most of the time, a way to disconnect from the norms of American culture.

7. Field study

7.1 General approach to research

The goal is to measure the individual perceptions, motivations, and experiences of American pilgrims in order to draw conclusions about Americans' general perception of the Camino de Santiago, and how these perceptions may differ from person to person. In the literature review, previous studies on the Camino and pilgrims' perceptions and motives are cited, but I found a lack of general information about Americans in particular. Many of the studies focused on people from different parts of Europe, which is valuable information, but for the purpose of this report I found it necessary to conduct my own research. To properly address the subject of this report, to learn and analyze the American perception of the path and all its facets, I decided that it was necessary to conduct my own research to generate primary information. I needed first-hand accounts from Americans who had had experiences along the Camino, in the form of in-depth interviews in which each person could adequately share their experience and perceptions. In-depth interviews were necessary for this topic, because a simple survey or questionnaire would not be able to capture the depth and meaning of each person's individual experience.

7.2 Methodology

To acquire this primary information, I have conducted fourteen in-depth interviews with fourteen different Americans who have done some or all of the Camino. All fourteen people were contacted by my own network of contacts, among people I know here in Madrid, in North Carolina and also by my Instagram and Facebook accounts. I posted a few posts on Facebook and Instagram asking my followers (about 1,000 on each page) if any Americans had had an experience with the Camino de Santiago and if they would be willing to share their experience with me for my research. I received about four responses by this method, also facilitated by my friends and colleagues who shared my post to also reach their respective followers. Only 2 of the respondents were willing to be interviewed.

I found that the best way to find people willing to talk to me was through my own network of contacts. I asked my friends and family in North Carolina and Madrid if they knew anyone who had made the journey. Thanks to this method, I got in touch with 7 people who were willing to share their experience with me for my research. I used WhatsApp and email to contact these people to organize the interviews by Zoom and the ones I could, face-to-face. I

also found willing interviewees through American professors at my University in Madrid, helping me locate four other people.

7.3 Universe, sample and analysis variables

The universe of my research is represented by all of the Americans who have done, or have had experiences on the Camino de Santiago. By experiences I mean that for my research it is not necessary that each person has made the journey in its entirety. People who have made parts are still valid for my research

The final sample has been the 14 people with that profile that I have been able to contact and were willing to do the interviews in depth.

Sample's descriptive variables:

Interviewee	Age	Gender	Religious affiliations	Year of experience	Basis of the trip
E1	45	F	Raised Catholic.	Summer 1995	Walked with her Spanish cousins.
E2	32	M	Believes in God, but does not follow any religious tradition.	July 2020	Walked just after the lockdown in Spain.
E3	22	F	Raised Catholic.	Spring 2019	Went initially with her parents and returned later to do parts alone.
E4	23	M	Not religious.	Summer 2013	Walked with an American summer camp program for high school students.
E5	26	M	Christian Presbyterian.	Summer 2019	Walked with his partner while on vacation in Spain.

E6	20	M	Not religious.	Summer 2017	Through an American summer camp program for high school students.
E7	27	F	Raised Catholic but is currently not religiously affiliated.	Summer 2015	Walked while on vacation with her family.
E8	22	F	Raised as a Lutheran but is now not actively Lutheran.	Summer 2020	Walked with two friends after the lockdown in Spain.
E9	72	M	Was born into a Jewish family, but claims he has never been religious.	Summer 2019	Walked with friends of his on a guided tour.
E10	19	F	Practicing Presbyterian Christian.	Summer 2019	Walked with her Spanish friends.
E11	45	M	Not religious.	Spring 2014	He walked the entire northern route with a friend from work.
E12	69	F	Grew up as a Protestant. She is now a practicing Presbyterian.	Summer 1998	Walked the first time with her son, she did it again a few more times with her husband and with friends.
E13	74	M	Grew up Baptist, is now a practicing Quaker.	Summer 1978	The first time he did it with a friend, he now does it almost

					every year with a program at the university where he works.
E14	25	M	Grew up Baptist, he now declares himself agnostic.	Summer 2021	Walked as a graduation gift to himself.

7.4 Questionnaire

The interviews consist of 4 sections. The first 5 questions correspond to the socio-demographic issues necessary to be able to identify the profile of each person. After the introductory questions, the interview moves on to the 3 stages of one's experience. The first stage is the pre-experience, which consists of questions about previous knowledge, motivations and preparations for the trip. The second stage represents the experience during the Camino, where the interviewee can share the details of their journey. The last stage represents the post-experience, which consists of questions about personal reflections and conclusions made after their Camino experience. These sections best capture every facet of the experience along the Camino, while leaving room for the interviewee to express their personal thoughts and opinions and anything else they may want to share. Here is the script of the interview:

Interview script:

Question Topics	Specific questions
1. Demographic questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What is your gender? b. How old are you? c. Where were you born? Where did you grow up? Where do you currently reside? d. What is your current job position? e. What are your religious/spiritual affiliations today? Are they different now from when you did the Camino?
2. Motivation and previous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. How did you find out about the Camino? Did you have any previous knowledge about it before your experience? If so, what?

<p>knowledge about The Camino</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. What were your main motivations for traveling to Spain to do the Camino? c. How did you decide that the Camino was something that you wanted to participate in? d. How long had you known about the Camino before embarking on it? e. What were your previous expectations of the Camino before arriving to Spain?
<p>3. General questions about their Camino experience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. When did you walk The Camino? b. How did you traverse The Camino? By walking, biking or horseback? c. What route did you take? How much of it did you do? (In miles or km) d. Did you travel alone, or with others? If so, with whom? e. What accommodations did you use? Did you stay in albergues, hostels or hotels? Why? f. Did you receive a Compostela? If so, how? g. Did you attend Mass at the cathedral? h. Did you do any other traveling in Spain before or after traversing The Camino? If so, what? i. What was the most memorable thing from your experience?
<p>4. Takeaways and personal reflections</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What did The Camino mean to you then? And what does it continue to mean to you today? b. As an American, did The Camino culture and The Camino itself feel very foreign to you? c. Would you recommend The Camino to other Americans? If so, why? d. Do you feel like you could have had a similar experience somewhere in the United States? e. To you, how is The Camino different from hiking or backpacking around the States? f. Why do you think more and more Americans are traveling to Spain to embark on The Camino?

	g. Is there anything else you would like to share?
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7.5 Interview process

Each interview lasted about 60 minutes. All were conducted in English. Two were face-to-face, and the rest were hosted by Zoom or other teleconferencing means. I recorded each interview and also transcribed during the conversation what I thought were the most important points of the interview. The quotes highlighted below are taken directly from the interview recordings. Each interview began with a brief introduction in which I laid out the purpose of the interview and asked for consent to record the conversation. After, we began with the questions, and soon came to realize that after my introductory questions, the interviewee began to talk about his or her experience and answered many of my questions without me even having to ask. Each conversation flowed very freely and I listened and wrote a lot while keeping the conversation on track with the topic and order of the questions. All the interviews ended very positively and each person commented on how enjoyable it was to share and reflect on their experience. Overall, each conversation almost did not even feel like an interview, but more of an open conversation about an experience that obviously meant a lot to each person that I spoke with.

7.6 Analysis procedure

The introductory questions, of a demographic nature, serve to establish the profile of each interviewee. Responses can be compared based on sex, age, religious affiliations, time of experience, and mode of travel. The responses can also be compared based on each person's unique experience in each of the 3 stages of the journey, the pre-experience, the walking-experience and the post-experience. Discourse analysis in relation to these stages and demographic differences will serve as a means of analyzing my research.

8. Results of empirical research

8.1 Pre-experience: motivations and expectations

As a U.S. citizen, doing the Camino has many practical implications. It involves crossing the Pacific Ocean, a journey that is extremely long, and that can be longer depending on what part of the United States you are traveling from. It also means that these people choose not to have a typical tourist experience in Spain, perhaps avoiding Madrid, Barcelona, Ibiza, to choose instead to spend a long period of time in the nature of northern Spain. This means that all Americans who have traveled to Spain to do the Camino, have at some point made the decision and commitment to do so. This requires dedication, planning, research and motivation. Next, I will look at these factors based on my empirical research, and how these variables varied between each person.

Each person I interviewed had their own motivations for making the journey. In some ways, these motivations coincided, and in others they did not. I found that the initial spark of motivation, the decision to do the Way, depended largely on the people with whom one planned to make one's journey. E1, a woman who walked the road in 1997 while visiting her family in Spain, said:

"My cousins were Spanish, they were all born in Spain. It was our summer holidays and we were having a few drinks in Seville, talking about what to do in summer. Someone suggested the Camino and at the time I didn't really know what it was. But everyone got excited and it was decided that way. A few weeks later we left. I had no idea what to expect. Only the trip accompanied me."

E1 provides an interesting perspective, because she did not travel to Spain just to do the Camino, but had already been in Spain for a while when she decided to participate. This means that her experience required less commitment, so her expectations were different from those who have traveled to Spain for this experience. Similarly, E10 made the Camino with his Spanish Catholic friends from Pamplona. He said:

"That summer I was in Spain on a retreat with my church. That same summer, the girls decided to take an organized trip to do the Camino for a week. I was excited to be invited and I just did what they had planned."

Although these were the only people in my sample who traveled with Spaniards, I can assume from these two accounts that Americans who travel with Spaniards and who were also in Spain

by chance before deciding to do the Camino, tend to leave planning and to their native companions, and are more motivated by the invitation to do the Camino rather than by the Camino itself.

Another facet of E1's experience is that not only were her companions Spanish, but they were also members of her family. E7, a woman who walked the road with her family during a family vacation, recounts a level of motivation and planning similar to E1.

"My family came up with the idea of doing the Camino together one night while watching 'The Way', that movie with Martin Sheen. We all thought it would be great to do it together as a family. And that was it. My parents planned everything and I just planned to be there."

From these accounts, it becomes clear that people who were not very involved in the trip planning process, did not usually have many previous expectations about the Camino experience, and seemed to be motivated primarily by those with whom they planned to travel. These two stories are interesting because they are both young people who make the journey with their families. E3 also had an experience along the way with her parents, and reported that:

"I did the Camino for my parents. They are super Catholic and just wanted to walk the last couple of kilometers to get to the cathedral."

Based on these accounts, it can be said that being involved in some type of family vacation greatly affects the level of planning and the general motivations of each person. These three interviewees were very passive in the planning process, and seemed to have let their families motivate them to make the journey.

In contrast, those who traveled alone or with friends were much more motivated individually. For example, E5, a man who traveled with his girlfriend on vacation, said:

"I had learned a lot about the Camino in my theology classes and had always wanted to do it with my partner. When we found the time in both of our schedules to do it, we spent weeks planning because we really wanted to make the most of our time."

E14, who traveled the Camino alone said that he spent months prepping, as his journey was meant to be his graduation gift to himself. Interestingly, the two interviewees who traveled alone or with friends made the Camino directly after the confinement here in Madrid. Both

people were highly motivated by the desire to be in nature after months without being able to leave their homes. E2 said:

"After quarantine I wanted to get lost. I just wanted to go back to nature. I had been traveling around Spain visiting friends when someone proposed it to me. I liked the idea and went."

E8 said something similar:

"Coming out of quarantine and being in the heat of Madrid, I was very motivated by the opportunity to be in some vegetation where maybe there was a chance of rain."

She also mentioned:

"After being in a small space for so long, I was very weak and worried that I wouldn't be able to do it. So I planned a lot and trained to make sure I would be able to get through it."

Another worthy mention is that of E9, an older man who made the Camino at 70 years old. His experience was unique because he traveled the Camino through a company that organizes self-guided excursions. He also mentioned that he made a lot of physical preparations, much more than his younger peers. It was very interesting to be able to see the differences in motivations, expectations and planning levels depending on the circumstances in which each person decided to do the Camino.

During my research I discovered that prior knowledge of the Camino tended to be a big motivator for people to embark on the Camino. E5, who had learned of the Camino during his studies, also had previous experience in a type of pilgrimage in the United States, which greatly influenced his desire to travel to Spain to do the Camino.

"I did a long walk from Louisville to St. Louis to the Presbyterian church headquarters to protest the church's support for fossil fuels. I had a deeply spiritual experience, and after I had a strong desire to experience that feeling again."

E5's experience is unique in that none of the other interviewees had a previous experience of religious pilgrimage as such. Similarly, Thomas had known of the Camino through studying Spanish literature. He said:

"The Camino had always fascinated me. I spent much time studying it during my Spanish lit courses. When I saw that a friend of mine had done it, I was jealous! So I decided to finally make the commitment and do it for the first time myself."

E9 had known the Camino for years before finally having his experience.

"I have traveled to Europe many times throughout my life, so I had known the Camino for about 30 years before doing so. After visiting the north of Portugal and getting to know some parts of the Camino there, I decided it was something I wanted to do."

There are not many who had prior knowledge of the Camino before deciding to do it. Five people mentioned watching the movie 'The Way', a popular American film that served to educate many Americans about the existence of the Camino. This movie seems to be the most common way Americans find out about the Camino. From my sample, those who had not seen the film tended to discover the Camino through friends, family or other travel experiences.

However, almost half of those interviewed have in common a love of hiking and trekking in the United States. E5 shared:

"I love hiking and being able to disconnect from work and news and the normal mess of life and being able to connect with nature."

E3 shared,

"I've always liked hiking, so doing the Camino seemed natural to me."

E8, E9, E2 and E11 also mentioned that their love of the outdoors and hiking was an important factor in their motivation to do the Camino. E11 shared:

"I had been living in Spain for around 6 years before deciding to do the Camino. I really tried not to have any expectations, but since I had decided to do the primitive route I had to do some prepping. For me it was minimal, compared to the prepping I had to do for the Pacific Crest Trail, this was nothing."

E11 was the only person that I spoke with who had previous experiences on the "rival" trails of the US, so it was interesting to hear his perspective while comparing his experience on the Camino.

E2 presented a very interesting perspective, apart from the fact that he walked the Camino during COVID. He shared that:

"I had heard about it from a friend on Facebook. I started planning when I got to San Juan, but I didn't really do much planning. I had seen the movie 'The Way' and had a lot of recommendations from friends, but I tried not to have many expectations. I considered it as a way to lose some weight, to get closer to God, to see some nature."

Even though he was traveling alone, he didn't do much planning. He wanted to have as organic an experience as possible. Also, although he claimed not to be a religious person, he was open to the idea of having a religious/spiritual encounter with God. E2, E5 E10 and E12 were the only people who mentioned anything religious in terms of their motivations for walking the Camino. E5's motivations had a religious basis, but he expressed that he was more attracted to the spiritual aspects of the Way.

"I wanted to be able to participate in a centuries-old tradition of pilgrimage and have impactful experiences meeting new people and seeing new things along the way." E10 said: "I was excited about the idea of walking the Camino because I had heard about it from my aunt, who has done many of the routes. She didn't use her phone, and she just took the time to separate herself from the world and grow closer to God. I wanted to have a similar experience."

11 of the 14 people I spoke to had religious backgrounds, but only three of them mentioned it as a motivating factor.

E4 and E6 also provide an interesting perspective. Both did the Camino as teenagers through an American summer camp program in which they lived with a host family in Madrid during the summer. The Camino was included in the summer camp program regimen, so E4 and E6 didn't do any planning and had almost no expectations of their experience along the way. E4 said:

"The Camino itself was not a primary motivation, it was just one of the program activities I was doing. I really didn't have any expectations. I guess my 15-year-old self thought it would probably be kind of boring just to walk for a few days."

E6 said:

"My expectations were not very high. I imagined it would be like a long walk with friends and so on."

Two of the people that I spoke with, E5 and E13, were academics who studied some type of history. They were both drawn to the Camino because of its history and mythology, having learned about it in their respective studies. E12 similarly learned about the Camino while she was studying in Santiago, but decided to actually embark on her journey for a different reason. She said:

“I found out about the Camino while I was studying in Santiago, but that was back in the 70’s so it still was not very popular as a tourist attraction. In 1998 I went on a road trip around Spain with my sons and we saw some pilgrims walking along the road and we were all fascinated. My sons got really excited and said they would want to try, so I think that was my main reason for going for the first time.”

Overall, from my research I have found that the motivation of Americans to do the Camino varies greatly. I was surprised to find that religion and spirituality were not usually a major motivating factor. The biggest coincidence I found was the shared love of the outdoors and nature. Most people had had previous hiking experiences in America, some more than others, of course. I would claim that, in general, sport and nature seemed to be the biggest and most common motivator among every person I spoke to during my research. Those who walked the Camino as adults tended to have more expectations and involvement in the preparations than younger ones, and those who traveled independently from any type of established group were much more involved in the planning process. In addition, those who had already been to Spain, either on a trip or a visit, tended to have fewer expectations and did even less planning than those who traveled with groups or families. Also, those who had previous experiences in Spain tended to make the decision to do the Camino during their time in Spain, or they returned later to Spain with the intention of walking the Camino.

8.2 During the Camino: characteristics of the pilgrimage

In this section, I will compare and contrast the experiences on the actual Camino, drawing conclusions based on the method of traveling. That is, the circumstances of each one's experience, with whom they traveled, how they traversed the Camino and the accommodations used during the trip. All of these factors greatly influenced each person's experience of the Camino, and these differences became extremely apparent during my research. Lastly, I will draw conclusions about people's perceptions when they arrive at the cathedral, the destination of the Camino.

Most of the people I interviewed did the Camino organically, and not through any kind of institution or organization. However, three interviewees used other means to facilitate their experiences on the Camino. As mentioned above, E4 and E6 made their way through a summer camp for high school students. Their experiences were very different from those of the rest of the sample. E4 reported:

"I wasn't really exposed to other people on the Camino. I walked mostly with my friends from the camp and we had counselors who helped guide us and who were basically in charge of our experience." E6 said something similar: "It was more of an experience with friends, walking with guys from my program. It was a nice bonding experience and so I think for me the experience was more of a social thing."

Interaction with other pilgrims along the Camino is an important part of the Camino experience, and is also a factor that differentiates the Camino from other outdoor walking experiences. It's interesting to see the those who traveled outside of established groups, like camps or with family, tended to speak much more about the people they encountered along the Camino, and how meeting those people impacted them. Everyone in my sample except E4 and E6 said that meeting new people along the way was a very memorable part of their experience. E8 said:

"Although I traveled with two close friends, I was more impacted by the times I ended up walking alone and was able to meet cool people while walking. I met a lot of interesting people that I still keep in touch with today."

Some interviewees, like E2, E12 and E14 were able to identify people they had met on the Camino by name, which for E12, who walked the Camino over 20 years ago, shows how impactful these interactions can be to people.

I found that people's experiences were also greatly affected by the accommodations they used during their trip. E3 did not have the opportunity to stay in the albergues that are normally used to accommodate pilgrims on their journey, and reported:

"I felt more like a tourist than a pilgrim. Sometimes I regret not having stayed in the albergues because I feel that I did not really live the whole experience of the Camino." E2, who walked alone, reported that "I was lucky enough to meet very cool people at one of the hostels I stayed in and ended up walking with them for the rest of my trip. I ended up buying a tent to stay with some friends I had made and I had a great time."

Similarly, E11 shared:

"One of my favorite moments was when the Real Madrid game was playing and everyone in the Albergue stayed up to watch it, we had a ton of fun." E7, who travelled with his family, said: "I really wanted to stay in the hostels, but my parents insisted on using the hotels. Which was fine but I feel like I could have had a different experience if we hadn't stayed in hotels."

Those who traveled with family members said they had more isolated experiences than those who traveled alone or with friends. Those who traveled alone seemed to have more spiritual experiences than those who traveled with well-known people. E2 said:

"The most memorable part of my experience was a time when I was totally alone on the road surrounded by nature. I felt alone, but also liberated. I spoke to my father, who had died a few years earlier. It had been a long time since I felt his presence that way."

E8 said:

"What strikes me the most were the moments when I was alone and was able to absorb the natural beauty of the place where I was. After coming out of quarantine, where I had been alone for months, on the Camino I didn't feel lonely or sad when I was alone again. It was liberating."

Arriving at the Cathedral of Santiago is an important part of the Camino experience, and everyone I interviewed mentioned that it was a memorable moment for them, regardless of the circumstances of their trip. Mass and the botafumeiro are important parts of the cathedral experience, and seeing where Santiago's bones are kept under the altar. Not everyone I spoke to was able to attend Mass or see the botafumeiro, but they all said they were impacted by the cathedral itself. E8 commented:

"We didn't attend Mass in the cathedral because my friends wanted to go to the English-language service that was held in a smaller chapel nearby. At the time I didn't care, but looking back I would have liked to see the service in Spanish and see the botafumeiro in action."

E4 said:

"Seeing the botafumeiro impacted me a lot. It was one of the main things I told people afterwards when talking about my trip. It was so cool and medieval that I still think about it sometimes." E6 said "The most memorable thing for me was sitting at the cathedral mass. The cathedral was impressive, I still remember the architecture today. I loved the story of it all, going into Santiago and seeing the church was amazing."

E9 said:

"Spending time in Santiago in the cathedral was powerful. You could feel the excitement of everyone around you, that feeling that you had made it." E3, who had only walked the last few kilometers to see the cathedral with her parents said "When we arrived at the cathedral, there was that strange energy of all the pilgrims reaching their final destination. People were running towards the cathedral, it was crazy. The determination of those people to get to church stuck with me."

It was incredibly interesting to observe how people talked about a change of perception when they arrived at the cathedral. E1 said:

"When I arrived at the cathedral my motives for walking had changed. Entering the cathedral was a great moment for me, because by the time I got there my whole perspective had changed. It was a great moment for me."

E4 said something similar:

"I entered the experience as if we were hiking. But after seeing the cathedral and the mythology and history behind it, I was amazed. Then I understood the meaning of the Camino."

I enjoyed seeing firsthand in my interviews how the road itself, the walk, impacted people, and how the cathedral, the destination, impacted people in an entirely different way.

Overall, I found that the way we travel greatly affects people's perceptions and their overall experience. Those traveling with family members or in previously established groups tended to have less spiritual and more social experiences than those traveling alone or with very few people. I also found that even though the albergues were very strange and different for American pilgrims, almost everyone claimed to have had a deeper experience thanks to the albergues, and those who didn't stay in them often regretted it. The cathedral seemed to be a

profound experience for all parties, no matter the mode of travel of each person. The stunning architecture, botafumeiro, Mass, and unique energy of the space transcended individual circumstances and touched each person I spoke to in many ways.

8.3 Post-experience: Discoveries and conclusions

The Camino de Santiago is a powerful experience, which transcends circumstances and personal motivation. For the subject of this report, the unique conclusions and reflections of the people in my sample are crucial to drawing final conclusions about the American perception of the Camino. Below, I will explain how the Camino affected the people I interviewed and how their experiences differ from each other.

Everyone I spoke to claimed to have drawn profound conclusions from their experience, some more spiritual and personal than others. E1 said:

"The Camino made me think about how my life could affect others and what I wanted for my future. After the Camino I ended up changing my career from biology to philosophy. It really had a big impact on me."

E2 talked about how the Camino helped him to be less critical:

"What I take away from my experience is not judging people. I thought I knew who I was before the Camino, but suddenly I ran into a lot of emotions and it was hard. I used to think it was easy to judge others, but now I see that no one should be judged. We're all doing our own thing."

E8 said she learned more about its identity from its experience:

"I grew up in the Pacific Northwest, where nature is very accessible. When I moved to Madrid, a huge city, I think I forgot how important it was for me to be able to get away from city life. The Camino helped me realize that much of my identity is wrapped up in the ocean, clear water, and nature itself."

E9 expressed how the Camino continues to affect him today:

"Back then it was a test of my physical strength, because I'm older. I'm still proud of that achievement, but I'm amazed at how often I still think about the Camino after almost 2 years. After the pandemic and after moving out of town, I've really enjoyed living outside the hustle and bustle, and I think that was given to me by the Camino."

Amazingly, two of the people I spoke with are actively helping other Americans learn about and prepare for the Camino. E12 in her church runs a ministry group where every few months she presents to the congregation about her experiences on the Camino and how it has changed her life. She also holds information sessions for people who are interested in walking the Camino to help them prepare for their journey. E13 works at a university in Tennessee where he founded a summer program that takes students every year on an academic field trip to do the Camino. On the trip he and his students walk over 300km of the northern route, stay in albergues along the way, and attend Mass. These people were both so impacted by their initial Camino experiences, that they have decided to share the Camino with other Americans, something I am sure many other people do after having a Camino experience.

Of course, many people mentioned that history and tradition were an attractive factor of the Camino. However, some people pointed out that they did not understand the true depth of the Rich History of the Camino until the end of their experience, and that it was a great lesson for them. E4 said:

"As for religion, I had always been against the idea. But the Camino opened my eyes to the influence of religion on the history and culture of the world. I gained a new respect for her and returned to the United States wanting to learn more about Catholicism."

E9 said:

"I didn't really understand the history behind the Camino until the end, when we were in the museum next to the cathedral. I spent hours in that museum. It was really amazing to see that even though the world is so big, something holds it together through it all. People are held together by a kind of humanity and faith. Being in that museum and learning about it all, I think it was the closest I've ever come to being spiritual."

E5 said:

"I had always romanticized the history of Spain and how Muslims and Christians were able to coexist deeply through art and culture. Being able to walk the path and see Spanish history firsthand was incredibly powerful. I came away from the experience grateful and with a renewed sense of connection to my body, and a

spiritual connection to the people I met along the way, to my girlfriend, to God, and to the earth."

Doing the Camino in its entirety requires a great commitment of time. The most common route, the French route, requires a month to cover from Roncesvalles to Santiago de Compostela. Four of the people I interviewed did most or all of the Camino, and they all were very proud of this accomplishment. E5 said:

"I think part of the reason it's a powerful experience is the fact that it requires a huge time commitment. I knew this and was willing to sacrifice my time for this experience. And that sacrifice was worth it."

E6, who travelled with her family, said:

"It really was the last time I was able to spend so much time with my whole family. We took three weeks of our time and spent it all together, something that hasn't happened again in the last six years. That time meant a lot to me."

E11 said:

"As a teacher I tend to value time more than money or those kinds of things. So for me the Camino was a big commitment, almost 3 weeks of my time, but it was so worth it and I don't think I could have had such an experience paying tons of money to some resort or something."

It is clear from my interviews that some people have been more "touched" than others by their experience. However, all people reported that they had some level of deep reflection after their experience on the Camino. More than half of the interviewees expressed a desire to do the Camino again, either to be able to walk with other people, to walk alone, to stay in the albergues, or simply to relive the experience. I was glad to hear that, at the end of each interview, each person expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to reflect on their experience and share it with me.

8.4 The evolution of the Camino

During my field research, through speaking to different people of all ages and backgrounds, I was able to see first-hand how the Camino has evolved over time. Those who had done the Camino more recently had different experiences than those who had done it years ago. In my literature review I mentioned how the Camino has adapted organically over its history to

accommodate more walkers and attract people of all backgrounds. This trend was clearly seen in my research. Another interesting era of the Camino was during the COVID-19 pandemic, which I was also able to see how it affected people's Camino experiences. E2 and E8 both walked the Camino during or directly after the lockdown that occurred in Spain in 2020. They both reported that they did not encounter as many other walkers as they were expecting, and that a lot of the albergues along the Camino were closed due to the pandemic. E14, who walked the Camino this past year in the summer of 2021 reported that he had a lot of trouble finding accommodations along the Camino because they were all full when he arrived. E11 reported something similar, who walked the Camino in 2014, remarking that it was more touristy than he expected it to be. Of the 14 interviewees, E13 was the person who walked the earliest, back in 1976. His experience was the most unique of my sample. He reported:

“That summer we walked the whole thing. Back then there were no markers, hardly any albergues, so we ended up asking priests in the churches we passed for recommendations and they gave us names of people that we could spend the night with. There were also no passports back then, so when we arrived at the cathedral, we showed them the journals we had been keeping to get our Compostelas.”

E1 and E12 both walked in the 90's in 1995 and 1998, respectively. These three people all reported not seeing a single other American on their journey, and E1 and E12 only knew about the Camino from their time living in Spain. From these accounts it is clear that back then, the Camino was not super known to most foreigners, as in people not from Spain. It was incredible to see the evolution of the Camino from these first-hand accounts

8.5 The perception of Americans

The last part of the interview was dedicated to discovering the unique American perspective of the Camino experience. Each person was asked if they thought they might have had a similar experience somewhere in the United States. They were asked if the Camino and its culture were foreign to them as Americans and if they would recommend the Camino to other Americans. I concluded the interview by asking them why they thought the Camino is growing in popularity among Americans. Below I will analyze their answers and draw conclusions about the American perception of the Camino de Santiago.

One of the questions I asked my sample was whether they thought they could have had a similar experience somewhere in the United States. Nine people mentioned the Appalachian Trail (AT), the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT), and the plethora of hiking and hiking options that

exist in the United States in general. However, everyone agreed that although they are similar, these things cannot be compared to the Camino. E2 replied:

"No way. In the United States there are no small towns like those in northern Spain. There are walks in the United States, the AT, the PCT, but they are not the same. The landscape may be similar, but on the Camino I saw mountains as old as the United States itself."

E4 replied:

"There are definitely no similar experiences in the United States. Just because of how unknown (the Camino) was to me and the coherent meaning behind it. I have hiked, but the goal of the Camino is not to hike, but to go between villages and see people reach this goal. You can find hiking, culture, nature and religion anywhere, but it's rare to find something that combines it all."

E5 focused more on religious history in his response:

"There is certainly a great deal of spiritual history in the United States, but it is primarily indigenous. There is not so much Christian history. Here Christianity was always very Protestant, and a guy who killed indigenous spirituality instead of mixing with it. I don't think there are many opportunities in the United States for a long, deeply spiritual walk. I can't think of anything comparable."

Everyone seemed to agree that while hiking in America can be considered similar to the Camino, there are too many fundamental differences to make it comparable. E13 similarly said,

"No, the Appalachian trail is great for hiking and being challenged because you have those same feelings of triumph as one does on the Camino but I don't think it has that monumental nature and history that the Camino. I don't believe you would have that here in the states."

A fundamental difference of the Camino compared to hiking in the United States is that there are no types of accommodation such as hostels, albergues or hotels available to walkers. E7 confirms this by saying:

"I don't think I could have had a similar experience in America. There is no route or anything with hotels or accommodations. In America it's more like you're in the wild, like you're surviving, or you're in a city."

E8 said something similar:

"It's very different from my experience in the OT, cold camping and with no one around me. On the Camino it is not necessary to carry so much equipment due to the hostels and so on. Maybe I could have a similar experience (in America), like hiking and really enjoying it, but it would be something different. I'm reluctant to call the Camino a hike because it's not. It's walking with a purpose."

These and similar statements were made by every person I spoke to. All 14 people agreed that although there are many opportunities for hiking and trekking, there is actually nothing like the Camino in the United States.

Through my research I wanted to see if Americans felt that the Camino and its culture were something very strange and different to them. When asked this question, the answers varied mostly depending on how much the person had traveled through Spain and/or Europe before their experience. Those who had been to Spain before said they didn't feel a big culture shock during their experience. However, they were able to notice the differences in the more connected culture of the Camino compared to experiences in the United States. E8, who had been living in Madrid for a year before his experience, said:

"The cultural aspect of Spaniards, who are kinder and more hospitable, is much more than the people of the United States. If I had come directly from the U.S. and not expected it, it would definitely have been a shock."

E6 said:

"It was my second time in Spain when I did the Camino, so I had already overcome the culture shock. But it felt very Spanish and different. I thought it was a good way to put religion into practice. Compared to American organized religion, people don't do things like that to back up what they say."

E10 said he was very aware of the cultural differences.

"The culture in Europe is very different; few Americans would take weeks of vacation to make a religious pilgrimage. In my experience, Europeans take life more calmly in

general, but they also value the simple things in life, like a good meal or a day off, much more than I think Americans do."

I also asked my sample if they would recommend the Camino to other Americans. Every person said yes. Each person mentioned different selling points about the Camino and the reasons why they think it could be attractive to other Americans, but there was a main common point between the answers. Everyone said that if you are looking for a less touristy and deeper experience in Spain, then the Camino is for you. A couple of people mentioned that if it is your first time in Spain, perhaps you should try something more typical, such as seeing Madrid or Barcelona, before the Camino, due to its intensity and its almost total cultural immersion. However, other people said otherwise. They said the Camino is a great way to get into the history of Spain and that it has the potential to make future travel experiences in Spain much more enjoyable.

It was interesting to see how many interviewees indirectly mentioned the American phenomenon of hypermobility when asked why they believed more and more Americans were traveling to Spain to do the Camino. Many mentioned that the Camino is a great way to escape the pressures of American culture, an opportunity to slow down, disconnect and do something with a clear purpose. E6 said:

"The Camino is something that is not materialistic at all, it is spiritual and requires a sacrifice, it is a long process that is difficult and has no material reward. I think as societies are going now, people are starting to move away from that materialism, especially in the United States, which is so materialistic in general. So I think it's something that Americans want to do because they can't get anything like that in the United States."

Five people also mentioned the Camino as a big item on the bucket list they imagine many Americans would want to accomplish. E5 said:

"I think there are more people who do it probably for wish-list reasons. It's a really cool experience that can be a great piece of conversation."

Overall, my research confirmed many things about the American perception of the Camino. One of them being that the Camino is something very unique to Spain, but it can be appreciated by all other nationalities, especially by Americans. Second, Americans in general notice cultural differences in their Camino experience and tend to claim that similar experiences in

America are not comparable. Overall, I would say that the American appreciation of the Camino is significant. This could be due to how unique the Camino is compared to similar experiences in the United States, and also to the way it challenges American culture with its unique mode of consumption.

9. Conclusions / recommendations

I will now present, firstly, my conclusions, explaining how the objectives set at the beginning of this report have been met. Secondly, I will present interesting recommendations for the management by entities interested in the tourist development of the Camino de Santiago. Finally, the limitations of my research and also interesting future lines of research as a continuation of this Final Degree Project.

My first objective of this report was to introduce the Camino de Santiago, including its history, its evolution over time, and what it means to be a pilgrim today. Through my research I discovered much controversy debating the differences between pilgrims and tourists. The Camino is unique in that it was established as a religious pilgrimage and has thousands of years of rich religious history. However, time and the changing of circumstances has shaped the Camino into something more than just a religious pilgrimage. After the Spanish civil war, the Camino began to be marketed as a tourist product, in an effort to increase tourism to boost Spain's shattered economy. These efforts led to a wider global awareness of the Camino, and the numbers of pilgrims from around the world began to grow. Now, the Camino is being utilized and enjoyed by people of all nationalities for an array of different reasons outside of religious ones. What makes the Camino special is that it naturally adapts to meet the unique needs of each person that makes the commitment to experience it. This causes the lines between the terms "pilgrim" and "tourist" to blur, as modernly these terms have much overlap. Many pilgrims on the Camino do not consider themselves pilgrims, and many tourists on the Camino do not consider themselves pilgrims. The usual habits of tourists are being seen in how modern pilgrims approach the pilgrimage. This duality challenges the fundamentals of pilgrimages and the true meaning of pilgrimages everywhere. The Camino serves as an example of how ancient and historic pilgrimages can be adapted to continue to be relevant in the modern world. Despite the fact that fewer and fewer people are embarking on the Camino for purely religious reasons, it continues to be a profound and impactful experience for all.

My second objective was to introduce the concept of pilgrimage from the American perspective, identifying the routes that exist in the United States, and also what American walkers are like in general terms. Through my research I found that there are in fact many pilgrimages in the United States, some religious and some secular. Interestingly, these pilgrimages do not tend to be considered pilgrimages by those who participate in them, and many Americans are unaware of how they could be considered pilgrims when participating in things like Bike Week, the High Pointers, those who follow the Grateful Dead and other bands alike. While it was interesting to find that there are indeed pilgrimages in the States, my research confirmed that none have the same deep history, mythology and global awareness of the Camino de Santiago. The United States simply lack the years of history and tradition under a unified religion that is ever present in Spain and Europe alike. The US highway system also makes walking pilgrimages difficult, as many people find themselves walking along large roads during their journeys. There is however, a plethora of hiking and trekking options in the United States, as the country is so vast, the wilderness is largely untouched in some places. The Appalachian Trail, the Pacific Crest Trail, and the Continental Divide Trail are all largely known and coveted trails in the States. Those with daring and adventurous bucket lists tend to be the ones who frequent these trails in the States.

Americans also suffer from a phenomenon called hypermobility, which is the desire to constantly be moving between places in a rushed manner. This goes hand in hand with the basis of American culture, a fast-paced life where one works to be successful and travels as much as one's schedule will allow. It glorifies being busy and doing everything to the maximum. This is another reason why the Camino is not normally something an American tourist would actively seek out.

My final objective was to conduct an investigation to try to define what Americans know about the Camino, the elements that shape their perception, the motivations they have and the differences between them, and their attitudes and experiences after the pilgrimage. Through my empirical study I found that Americans largely do not know of the Camino, and if they do it is probably through prior experience in traveling to Europe or Spain, through word-of-mouth discovery, or, from the popular 2010 movie, 'The Way', starring Martin Sheen. 11 of the 14 people that I interviewed walked the Camino after the release of the film, and half of them mentioned hearing about the Camino from this movie.

I also found that overall, people's motivations for traveling to Spain for the Camino are not usually religious. People are more motivated by nature, sport, and the desire to escape the hyper-mobile lifestyle in the States. From my sample I learned that Americans are indeed struck by how different life on the Camino is from anything even remotely similar that exists in the United States. During my research investigating scholarly articles and anthropologic studies, many sources mentioned how the AT and PCT trails in the States were considered by most, to be somewhat similar to the Camino, and I found this to be true from my interview-based investigation. Many people I spoke with also mentioned the AT and PCT when asked to compare the Camino to experiences in the US. It became clear through my research that most Americans identify these trails in the States when thinking about the Camino, not because they are actually similar, but because they are truly the closest comparison Americans can make to the Camino based on most people's limited knowledge and exposure to things such as religious pilgrimages.

Another finding I was surprised to make, was how the Camino has changed over time to accommodate and attract more walkers. This phenomenon was something I discovered in my literature investigation, but it was incredible to see first-hand through my empirical research. Those that I spoke with who had walked the Camino before or during the early 2000's, had distinct experiences than those who walked, say, after 2010. It can almost be attributed to the release of the movie 'The Way', as the turning point in American awareness of the Camino. Before 2010, the Camino was not very well known to most Americans. My interviewees who walked before this year reported having different experiences than those who walked after, the main differences being the number of walkers and how the Camino was upkept. From the people I spoke with who had walked the Camino in the last 6 years, many reported having issues finding accommodations along the route, and how the Camino to them seemed to be more of a tourist product. This change has both its positive and negative affects. It is positive because it helps to boost Spain's economy in attracting tourists that are traveling to Spain and buying accommodations, food, supplies and other products. However it can also be negative because some would say that the plethora of tourists and guided tours available now on the Camino are taking away from its fundamental purpose, and can even create complications on walkers' experiences. If one were to walk the Camino in the peak season (summer time around June and July), they may have issues finding accommodations in albergues and hostels, and could also encounter more people than expected on their journey.

With this in mind I would like to make some recommendations for the management and marketing by entities interested in the tourist development of the Camino. Since there are now many guided tours and upscale hotels available to Camino walkers, there exist new managerial implications that were not present in the past. The marketing of the Camino must reflect the fact that it is now a tourist product/destination. I recommend using a variety of marketing tactics to target different groups of consumers, as there are many different types of people who could be interested in the Camino for different reasons. For example, targeting those who want to have a more organic and genuine Camino experience, without the frills of hotels and guided tours. These people who are more motivated by the mythology of the Camino, by sport and athletic reasons, and even religious reasons. Secondly, I recommend marketing tactics geared more towards those who are looking for a more guided and touristic experience, maybe older walkers and larger groups like families with small children, etc. It is wonderful that so many different people can now come and enjoy the Camino in the way that best suits their needs and wants, and I believe that all of these options need to be properly conveyed to potential consumers. These different marketing tactics apply especially to Americans, as the norm in American travel habits are all-inclusive travel packages, however many Americans are attracted to the Camino due to its more independent and less-touristic aspects. Overall, the Camino has something to offer for all types of people, and marketing should reflect this.

Managerial entities of the Camino must also keep in mind that with the growing number of walkers/pilgrims/tourists traversing the Camino, sustainability is of the utmost importance. The Camino has and always will be a part of the nature of northern Spain, so it must be protected and managed accordingly. It presents a unique situation, as the Camino has not always been considered a tourist product, but now entities must maintain the Camino and all its routes and encourage sustainable tourism. For this, I suggest increased trail maintenance and upkeep in the off season, to conserve and prepare for the peak season. I also suggest making information and best practices readily available to all potential walkers, so that each person knows how best to respectfully and sustainably consume the product that is the Camino. This could also imply hiring Camino experts to be stationed at points along the most popular routes during the peak season when there are the largest number of walkers, to observe and enforce these best practices.

In regards to Camino upkeep and management, I recommend that the guided tours be kept separate (as much as possible) from the more challenging routes like the primitive trail, where those that frequent these paths are looking for a more genuine Camino experience, and most

likely do not want to share their experience with tour busses and large groups of tourists. I also recommend construction of more hostels/albergues to accommodate the growing number of people that are coming to walk the Camino, as there now seems to be a shortage of available accommodations during the peak seasons.

9.1 Limitations / future lines of research

Now I will discuss the limitations of my research, and possible future lines of research that go with this topic. The limitations encountered in this study were, firstly, the lack of studies of solely American Camino walkers. There were of course studies of many nationalities where Americans were included, but I found a lack of modern material discussing in depth the situation of American walkers. Secondly, in regards to my research, I was not able to interview a very large sample of people, because in-depth interviews are long and require lots of time and commitment. Also, I relied mostly on my personal network of people to find interviewees that fit my requirements. Because of this, most of the people I interviewed were either from the east coast of the United States (where I am from and know the most people), or Americans that I met through my network here in Madrid, making most of them (not all) young people with similar experiences either having lived in Spain at some point or having previous Spanish travel experience. I think that despite these limitations I was lucky enough to have a somewhat diverse sample in terms of age, religious background, and social profiles, but I would have liked to have an even more diverse sample demographically and a broader range of when each person walked the Camino.

In the future it would be interesting to carry out an investigation with a bigger and more diverse sample, maybe utilizing qualitative research software such as AtlasTI or NVivo, to be able to reach more people and gain the proper information to be able to draw more accurate conclusions about the true American perception of the Camino.

During my research I discovered an overall lack of knowledge in Americans about pilgrimages in general. Therefore, another interesting future line of study would be to investigate American knowledge and perceptions of other pilgrimages around the world, such as Mecca or Lourdes, and to compare and contrast between them and pinpoint why Americans seem to have such little knowledge of these historic pilgrimages.

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11. Annexes

Interview script:

Question topics	Specific questions
1. Demographic questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What is your gender? b. How old are you? c. Where were you born? Where did you grow up? Where do you currently reside? d. What is your current job position? e. What are your religious/spiritual affiliations currently? Are they different now than from when you walked The Camino?
2. Motivation and previous knowledge about The Camino	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. How did you find out about the Camino? Did you have any previous knowledge about it before your experience? If so, what? b. What were your main motivations for traveling to Spain to do the Camino? c. How did you decide that the Camino was something that you wanted to participate in? d. How long had you known about the Camino before embarking on it? e. What were your previous expectations of the Camino before arriving to Spain?
3. General questions about their Camino experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. When did you walk The Camino? b. How did you traverse The Camino? By walking, biking or horseback? c. What route did you take? How much of it did you do? (In miles or km) d. Did you travel alone, or with others? If so, with whom? e. What accommodations did you use? Did you stay in albergues, hostels or hotels? Why? f. Did you receive a Compostela? If so, how? g. Did you attend Mass at the cathedral?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> h. Did you do any other traveling in Spain before or after traversing The Camino? If so, what? i. What was the most memorable thing from your experience?
<p>4. Takeaways and personal reflections</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What did The Camino mean to you then? And what does it continue to mean to you today? b. As an American, did The Camino culture and The Camino itself feel very foreign to you? c. Would you recommend The Camino to other Americans? If so, why? d. Do you feel like you could have had a similar experience somewhere in the United States? e. To you, how is The Camino different from hiking or backpacking around the States? f. Why do you think more and more Americans are traveling to Spain to embark on The Camino? g. Is there anything else you would like to share?