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Understanding Contemporary Pilgrimage as a Social Practice

A Camino de Santiago Case Study

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Abstract

This paper examines the increasingly popular pilgrimage, Camino de Santiago de Compostela, through a social practice theoretical lens. The surging popularity has changed what it means to do the Camino and the way people engage with it. To understand the contemporary pilgrimage and the fluidity in its significance, the Camino is dissected and analysed into three elements: meaning, competence, and materials.

Through field observations and semi-structured interviews in situ, this thesis offers insight into the unique constellation that shapes the practice of the Camino as it is today, exposing the intricate nexus of connections between the practice-forming aspects. It demonstrates that by manipulating a single element, the perceived meaning and way of doing the Camino changes. This knowledge contributes to the still-developing field of practice theories and assists future policymaking in preserving the Camino and sustainable management strategies for similar tourist activities.

Keywords: social practice theory, Camino de Santiago de Compostela, contemporary pilgrimage

Table of Contents

List of Figures

1. Introduction

1.1. Introducing Camino de Santiago de Compostela

In 2018, as a 21-year-old boy, I finished vocational education and was not sure what the next step in my life should be. Like, my mother before me, I chose to engage in the pilgrimage of Camino de Santiago de Compostela (hereafter referred to as 'Camino'). I journeyed to Bayonne in France to walk an ancient 800-kilometre trail to the tomb of Saint James in Santiago de Compostela in Spain (hereafter referred to as 'Santiago'). I met many others who chose to venture the same route towards a shared destination. Regardless of sharing a similar physical journey, everyone had different motives to be there. I chose to engage with the pilgrimage as I wanted a break after finishing my education, my mother had chosen to do the pilgrimage after her husband (my father) had died to reassess her life. Others I met were in between jobs or had some difficult choices to make.

Historically, the Camino is a Christian pilgrimage. Pilgrims of old used to engage in their pilgrimage to show their piety and look for penance, or forgiveness. The pilgrims I met, however, including myself, were often not religious and engaged with pilgrimage for secular reasons. Everyone on the way attributed different meanings to the journey. While the context, in terms of physical space, was the same for all, the meaning of the Camino differed. On a rare occasion, a pilgrim may still partake in the Camino as a way to show their devotion. While another individual may be there for a cheap vacation. It raises questions regarding the meaning of the Camino, and what it means to do a pilgrimage and to be a pilgrim.

The Camino is a network of trails in Spain. Traditionally, they are reenactments of journeys that significant figures of old have undertaken, e.g., priests and kings. The trails originate from all corners of Spain, as well as Portugal, and all end at the Cathedral in Santiago, where Christians believe the remains of Saint James lie. Officially, the trails reach into the exterior of Spain and Portugal but unofficial routes extend even further. Trails are starting from France, Italy, the Netherlands, and Britain. Some people start their pilgrimage from home, wherever that may be. Most people journey to Santiago by foot, however, some pilgrims travel by bike or on horseback.

Walking long distances is part of human history. It used to be the sole method of traversing distances until technological developments and the domestication of animals allowed humans to travel in other ways. Regardless of contemporary tools for efficient travelling, people still choose to commit to walking for days, weeks, or months on end when starting their journey to

Santiago. In Western society, recreational walking has been identified as one of the most popular leisure activities (Den Breejen, 2007). Walking is not only done for its recreational value but can also be part of physical or mental health recovery or a way of showing devotion to certain beliefs.

There are many 'ways' of walking. One may stroll around the housing block or through the city centre. Others take a more athletic approach and energetically pace through the forest. Both of these are a form of walking but they are perceived differently. The former in this case would be a stroll, while the latter could be a hike. Some only bring a phone on their walk and others carry their whole life on their back in a backpack. The context in which the walk takes place shapes the way it is perceived and described.

Assuming the context is what gives meaning to the walking activity, we can investigate the context wherein it takes place to understand it. In the case of the current thesis, pilgrimage, as another 'way' of walking is investigated, specifically the Camino. Of course, not all pilgrimages consist of walking practices. For instance, Muslims may take a plane to Mecca for Hajj and Tibetan Buddhists could do full-body prostrations for the entire length of their journey to Lhasa. In Western society, however, pilgrimage often connotes travelling a distance by foot towards a place of religious significance (Wooding, 2020). The present thesis therefore assumes that walking underpins pilgrimage. It offers a comprehensive account of pilgrimage as a walking practice, which will be elaborated upon later.

Pilgrimage is believed to have been in existence since prehistory. Shrines like Stonehenge, which are proclaimed to be of spiritual value, are suspected to have been the destination for travellers for cultural and spiritual reasons. As the phenomenon of pilgrimage dates back to prehistoric times, it is impossible to say when and why it exactly started. To understand the origin of pilgrimage and the term pilgrim, I draw from Wooding's (2020) historical account of the emergence of Western pilgrimage. The word 'pilgrimage' emerged when Christianity became an institutionalized faith (AD 313 - AD 380) in the Roman state. The term 'pilgrim' stems from the Latin term 'peregrinus', which originally meant 'alien' or 'stranger' (Wooding, 2020). Pilgrims, in the name of Christianity, abandoned their worldly ties. It meant to separate from the current dominant religion and part with material goods. This meant that they had to abandon old ideologies and often roamed the streets of cities as they did not own housing.

Pilgrimage symbolized a state of being as well as a state of mobility. It refers to physically moving through space or being a stranger in a place that is not yours but also implies a process

of movement through liminal spaces (Wooding, 2020). Liminality, borrowed from anthropology, means "the transitional period or phase of a rite of passage" (Dictionary.com, 2024). It refers to being in between two stages, or on the verge of transitioning to something new. To use a personal example, I chose to engage with pilgrimage as I finished vocational education. After finishing vocational education, I needed to make a decision which would affect the immediate following future. Hence, I was on the verge of a big transition in my life.

Collins-Kreiner (2016) argues that moving through liminal spaces is a typical process within a pilgrimage. It allows participants to reflect on past experiences and contemplate the life ahead. The Camino, thus, is a rite of passage that enables personal growth. As this research will show, many pilgrims share this idea of liminality. However, not everyone on the way chooses to participate in the pilgrimage because they are moving through liminal spaces. If contemporary pilgrims decide to commence the Camino for various reasons, what then grants the Camino its legitimacy as a pilgrimage and not just a random walking activity?

James et al. (2019) argue that to comprehensively understand an activity, the context in which it takes place should be investigated. For instance, Shove and Pantzar (2005) demonstrate that making adjustments in the context affects the meaning of the activity. By adding new materials and forms of knowledge as a form of changing the context, they present how 'regular walking' transforms into 'Nordic walking'. Shove and Pantzar explain that adding walking poles and new walking techniques evolved normal walking into a way of walking which is often associated with health and fitness. They demonstrate how the context surrounding the practice of walking affects the perceived meaning of it. Contextuality, thus, shapes an activity and the way society perceives it. For instance, walking the Camino is physically not much different than walking the Kungsleden in Sweden. However, because of the context in which the walks take place, the latter might be considered a hike, whereas the former a pilgrimage. The classification of different kinds of walking is thus context-dependent.

The context in which the Camino is embedded is perceived differently for each individual. While the perceived context varies, all share the same physical trail and destination. Pilgrims often re-enact a grand tour that has been travelled by either a real or apocryphal figure in history (Wooding, 2020). Sometimes it is the journey and the way of travel which is recreated (e.g. Buddhists following the footsteps of Siddartha or prostrating to Lhasa). For other pilgrimages, it is the destination which is the main purpose (e.g. Muslims travel to Mecca or Hindus to the Ganges). It should be noted that one purpose does not exclude the other. These examples demonstrate religious groups undertaking a specific pilgrimage. Pilgrimages are often connoted

to institutionalised religion, however, as earlier mentioned, modern-day pilgrimage is not always grounded in religion (Wooding, 2020). For instance, Alderman (2002) posited people's journey to Graceland, the estate once owned by Elvis Presley, as a pilgrimage. Pilgrimage used to be a pious endeavour but Alderman shows that contemporary pilgrimage has a much broader meaning.

An aspect of pilgrimage which is untouched by the ravages of time is that the practitioner engages in embodied travelling, allowing a juxtaposition between pilgrimage and tourism. Smith (1992) shows that the terms *pilgrim* and *tourist* are etymologically very similar. 'Pilgrim' comes from 'peregrinus', which means foreigner or traveller. 'Tourist' comes from 'tornus', which describes an individual making a circuitous journey for pleasure before returning to the starting point. Both terms describe a person who is travelling. The main difference is that a tourist returns after their journey, whereas a pilgrim travels through liminal spaces. There are inconsistencies between scholars discussing pilgrimage and tourism. Historically, a pilgrimage was considered something other than tourism, today, however, this border is fading (Collins-Kreiner, 2016). This allows the Camino to be investigated not only as a religious journey but also as a secular touristic venture.

1.2. Research relevance

The number of pilgrims undertaking the Camino each year is rapidly increasing. Over the past decades, the yearly number of pilgrims who complete their pilgrimage in Santiago has increased from seventy thousand to almost half a million (Pilgrim's Welcome Office, n.d.). Seventeen routes lead to Santiago—five of which received UNESCO cultural heritage status in 2015 (The Camino de Santiago World Heritage Site, n.d.). UNESCO describes the network of routes to be of historical importance, created to meet the needs of pilgrims. According to UNESCO, those needs include inter alia cathedrals and churches. Interestingly, current research on motivations for pilgrims who enact the Camino, shows that most contemporary pilgrims undertake pilgrimage for secular reasons (Amaro et al., 2018; Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Oviedo et al., 2014). Reasons for undertaking the pilgrimage are mostly spiritual, e.g., expanding consciousness, finding one's deeper self (Oviedo et al., 2014), enjoying solitude, and looking for a quiet journey (Amaro et al., 2018).

There is a discrepancy between UNESCO's way of presenting the Camino compared to reality as secular pilgrims do not particularly need to visit churches on their way. This creates a void of information between what is transposed by authorities and real-world experiences. Collins-

Kreiner (2010) argues that pilgrimages are an important subject to understand due to their scope and spatial influence. They have the capacity to influence political, economic, social and cultural domains. This statement resonates especially with the Camino as the number of its practitioners is rapidly growing. There is much research done on the motivations for pilgrims to undertake the journey as well as historical and theological works on the existence of the Camino. However, the literature underrepresents the practical nature of the Camino, which is required to develop sound management strategies regarding the several ways to Santiago.

The fact that there is little practical research done on the Camino and assuming that the context reveals much insight into a practice compels me to turn to the family of practice theories. Practice theories involve a holistic approach to deconstructing the praxeology of the Camino as it includes all contextual factors which cumulative construct and shape the practice. They avoid the pitfalls of individualist and systemic paradigms that often dominate social theories (Spaargaren, 2011). Lamers et al. (2017) argue that practice theory offers an alternative to psychology and economically driven policies, which is much needed today in a world wherein the tourism industry increasingly grows and intertwines with daily facets of local people's lives.

Practice theorists assume that the smallest unit of analysis of the social world lies within practices. In other words, things that hold meaning in and create the social world are found by studying practices. A practice, thus, is the centre wherein meaning-making happens. With the current thesis, I aim to understand the Camino as a practice by deconstructing it into its contextual aspects. Doing so adds the Camino to a network of practices which are interwoven and form the social world. A comprehensive understanding of social practices is necessary to grasp their nature. Therefore, a more detailed research question will be proposed at the end of the theoretical framework chapter.

I have shown that the Camino finds its roots in Christianity, while now, it is strongly mingled with secular tourism, displaying that the perception of the Camino changed over time. To understand the development it went through, I use practice theory to gain insight into its contextuality which altered the socially constructed meaning of the Camino.

No research has been done on the Camino using a practice theoretical lens which creates a knowledge gap that the present thesis seeks to fill. Deconstructing the practice aids in understanding three things. The first is to gain insight into the Camino as a practice-as-entity. Shove et al. (2012) differentiate between a practice-as-performance and a practice-as-entity. The Camino as a practice-as-entity consists of "forms of bodily activities, forms of mental

activities, 'things' and their use, background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge" (Reckwitz, 2002b, p. 249). In other words, a practice-as-entity is the bundle of contextual factors which form, in the current case, the Camino. A practice-as-performance is the actual bodily activity that is undertaken. In the case of the Camino, it would be, among other thing, walking.

The second insight gained through deconstructing the Camino is an understanding of how the conceptual factors are interlinked and form the practice. By extension, it also provides insight into the way the Camino relates to others (e.g. local people, policymaking, and the environment). Lamers et al. (2017) argue that identifying, delineating, deconstructing, and contextualising practices assist in advising more effective policies, or highlight how more desirable practices might emerge and can be fostered by policies.

The third way this thesis contributes to filling the knowledge gap is that it allows comparison between the Camino and other walking practices. Juxtaposing different walking practices provides insight into the differences and similarities. Based on this information both the Camino and other walking practices can be further developed and promoted more effectively and sustainably.

The fact that the Camino is growing in popularity lends this thesis its relevance. As mentioned, the context surrounding a practice ascribes meaning to it. This means that the growing number of people engaging with the Camino affects the perceived meaning of it. The current thesis aims to offer insight into the practice and consequentially understand what effect the surging popularity has on the perceived meaning of the Camino, assisting its management.

1.3. Outline of this report

The next chapter outlines social practice theory and sets the theoretical framework as it is used in this thesis. The chapter continues operationalising literary findings, resulting in a conceptual framework which translates theory into practice. The end of the chapter offers a research question that the current thesis continues to answer. Chapter three describes the used methodology. It argues for the methodological choices and theoretical underpinning used to find answers to the research questions. The methodology chapter, using a reflective stance, offers possible limitations of the used methods and describes both the advantages and disadvantages of the used methods. Chapter four offers the results of the research and includes a discussion of the findings, answering the research question. The last chapter entails a concluding remark and proposes future uses of this thesis.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Practice theories

As mentioned, the current thesis draws from social practice theories to deepen the understanding of the current-day Camino. To offer insight into the Camino as a social practice, I draw from Shove et al.'s (2012) conceptual framework. They propose an analytical tool that allows dissecting practices into three elements: *materials, competencies,* and *meanings.* An explanation for the workings that institute the relationship between these elements comes from Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (2010) and *The Logic of Practice* (1990). They provide insight into the mechanics that shape, change, and dissolve practices. This structure underpins the theoretical framework of the current thesis which I will now continue to elaborate upon.

Practice theories are labelled by Reckwitz (2002b) as a subtype of cultural theory. Falling in the realm of social theories, cultural theories aim to understand human action and social order. Attempting to discern practice theory in scientific discourse, Reckwitz starts by juxtaposing cultural theories, as a single unit, with two classical vocabularies of social theory: *homo economicus* and *homo sociologicus*. The former explains action through individual purposes, intentions and interests. Social order, thus, is a product of the combination of single interests of reflective individuals. The latter explains action by pointing to collective norms and values through which social order is guaranteed. Homo sociologicus, thus, explains that action of individuals derives from their understanding of collective norms and values. Cultural theories differentiate from other social theories in the sense that action is explained and understood "by reconstructing the symbolic structures of knowledge which enable and constrain the agents to interpret the world according to certain forms and to behave in corresponding ways" (Reckwitz, 2002b, p. 246). This means that social order is embedded in collective cognitive and symbolic structures which dictate the way people act. The unconscious layer of knowledge which enables the symbolic organisation of reality is what sets cultural theories apart from the two classical social theories. Basic schemes are foundational to which desires are regarded desirable and which norms are considered legitimate despite that they are not always recognized by the actors (Reckwitz, 2002b).

Reckwitz (2002b) continues to provide a detailed work offsetting practice theory against three other subtypes of cultural theory, namely, mentalism, textualism, and intersubjectivism. By doing so, he argues that the 'smallest unit' of analysis conceptualizes differently in each strand

of theory. This means that the intelligibility, or way of understanding the social, lies elsewhere in each subtype. In practice theory, that smallest unit is found in practices. There is a great family of accounts regarding practice theory. There are many strands and lines of thought to follow. Multiple practice theorists contribute to the body of practice theoretical literature, offering personal insights and opinions, which create a complicated network of similarities and dissimilarities (Nicolini, 2012). Despite its inconsistencies, there exists a consensus by the practice theorists which predicates that the meaning of social life is created through practices. The way practices are to be understood is situated within a complex web of human activity and social structures. Understanding the Camino as a social practice, thus, provides insight into the way the social world is given meaning through the Camino. Dissecting the Camino into its constituent contextuality also offers a deeper understanding of the way the Camino relates to other practices and its position in the complex web of human activities.

Before explaining the theory of social practice, I define my understanding of the term 'practice'. Reckwitz (2002b) stresses the importance of distinguishing between 'practice' and 'practices' (in German 'praxis' and 'praktik'). *A* practice (praxis) concerns a singular human action, while practices (praktik) is a "routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge" (Reckwitz, 2002b, p. 249). An example to illustrate this: greeting someone by shaking hands would be *the* practice (praktik). Moving the hand forward to reach for the other hand is *a* practice (praxis), a bodily activity that is one aspect contributing to the practice (praktik). Within practice theory, the unit of analysis lies in the practice as a bundle of human activities as well as several other aspects.

Contemporary practice theory has notably been influenced by Giddens' (2005) *Theory of Structuration*. He proposes that the basic domain of study should be "neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of societal totality, but social practices ordered across space and time" (p. 121). Similar to practice theorists, Giddens emphasizes the importance of analysing both the structure and agents within a social system, without giving primacy to either. Agency is an important concept within sociology. It refers to the capacity of individuals to have power and resources to facilitate socialization processes. An individual with the power to act is called an agent or actor. Philosophical questions regarding free will, for instance, consider whether an individual has the capacity to act as they see fit or whether their 'free will' is constricted by predetermined social structures. Structures are another important

concept in sociological research. It refers to social arrangements in society. For instance, the system of beliefs held by members of a social group or the relations between the constituent groups of a society. Giddens argues that structure and agency are not only mutually constraining but also mutually generative, which he calls the *duality of structure* (Nicolini, 2012).

Schatzki (1997) agrees with Giddens on the recursive relationship between the agent and structures. He argues that the social is a "perpetually metamorphosing array of manifolds of human activity" (p. 284). If we assume that the social happens through practices, then Schatzki's argument means that practices are constantly metamorphosing through human activity. Extending this thought, Recke (2011) argues that rather than solely human activity, practice theorists recognise the significance of social life through a nexus of concepts, e.g., situation, intention, information, causality, individuals, consciousness, and cognition. A nexus means that all of these concepts are interrelated and form a bundle. It means that the social, or a practice, is created through a bundle of interrelated concepts.

By acknowledging that the social is created through a bundle of concepts, social practice theory scholars move away from dominant dualisms, such as structure-agent opposition (Røpke, 2009). A dualism is a division of something conceptually. When adhering to a dualism, one assumes there is either one or the other as two distinct isolated entities. A classic example is that of the mind-body dualism proposed by René Descartes. He argues that the mind is immaterial and non-extended, while the body is material and extended in space, completely separating them. They may influence each other but they adhere to different rules, as the body is mechanistic while the mind is a thinking, conscious entity. Thinking in dualities is strongly ingrained in contemporary academics. However, today there are an increasing number of scholars who argue against dualistic thinking as there tend to be blind spots. An important contributor who opposes dualisms is the French philosopher and anthropologist Bruno Latour. Latour specifically challenges nature-society dualisms. He agrees that nature and culture are not the same thing, however, they share territory and act as a unity, creating a *hybrid* (Possamai, 2015). An example that reinforces Latour's concept of hybridity is climate change. It is a consequence of both societal and natural forces which can, therefore, not be seen as individual entities. When studying humans or social phenomena, the peculiarity of humans renders dualities often too simplistic to comprehensively understand what happens in the social.

Hitherto, I have shown that practice theories assume that the social world can be explained through understanding practices. Practices are bundles of concepts which are non-fixed entities and ever-changing. Practices are a product of the recursive process between agents and

structures as they shape each other reciprocally. To understand the Camino as a practice, thus, we need to understand which concepts constitute the practice and how they relate to each other.

2.2. Reflexive individuals

As we have seen, practice theories move away from actor-structure dualities. The individual and social structures form in that sense a hybrid. They are separate entities which cannot be isolated from each other when analysing social phenomena. They are embedded in a reciprocal relationship, meaning that they shape each other by asserting pressure in both directions. I will continue to explain the role of the agent within this mutual process.

Unlike theoretical models like *homo economicus* and *homo sociologicus*, practice theorists acknowledge the unconscious layers of knowledge within the agent, which enable a symbolic organization of reality (Reckwitz, 2002b). This refers to the tacit, pre-reflexive knowledge that underlies the agents' symbolic understanding of the world. Tacit knowledge is not solely located in the mind but is also embedded in practical activities and routinized bodily performances. The individual thus is not only a reflexive actor but also a nonreflexive *carrier* of practices.

Giddens (2005) emphasizes a nuance regarding the term reflexivity, namely, that it is not merely a synonym for self-consciousness but rather the "monitored character of the ongoing flow of social life" (p. 121). It refers to the reasons that human actors have for their activities and their capability of elaborating upon those reasons. By elaborating on one's reasons for carrying out certain practices, agents establish and reinforce connections between various concepts that form social structures. The notion of practice, in this sense, is interchangeable with the idea of a social structure.

Actors not only physically carry out practices unreflexively. Their reflexive mental activities play a role in reinforcing social structures. The reflexivity of human agents in the form of knowledgeability of practices is what conserves and entrenches practices within a social system. Individuals who transmit knowledge about practices contribute to the fortification of those structures. This recursive process is what establishes practices within cultural groups and keeps them in place. In other words, knowledge regarding a practice is passed on to others through agents, reinforcing that knowledge within the group and by extension reinforcing the practice.

Bourdieu (2010) notes that within a group, individuals synchronize and orchestrate a variety of actions which adhere to the norms of that cultural system. He stresses the importance of collective submission to these structures as they give meaning to the world as well as to the group itself. Within the current research, this becomes visible when respondents discuss their

idea of a real pilgrim. They adhere to an existing structure that encompasses the archetype of a real pilgrim. Through their attempt to recreate this archetype, they submit to the existing structures. This structure, thus, underlies the behaviour of agents as it holds the socially constructed meaning of what it means to be a pilgrim.

Normativity, as an ingrained need for human beings, promotes stability through predictability and constant repetition, hence it becomes the foundation of morals and ethics, and thus the norms of a society (Recke, 2011). However, Bourdieu argues that norms are a second order of cultural and communicative structure as they are a "cultural observation objectified into a set of rules semantically accounting for the likeliness of repetition of specific social activities" (Recke, 2011, p. 183). Framed like so, norms are spoken of and thought about, a cognitive process, but are not embodied by practitioners. Embodiment, here, refers to the wider spectrum of cognitive functions, e.g., perception bias, memory recall, sensorimotor experience and reasoning. In other words, norms exist in the reflective consciousness of carriers but are not bodily perceived or felt. Practice theorists do not disregard the reflexivity of agents. However, like the unconscious phenomenological phenomenon of pre-reflexive symbolic understanding of the world, the sensed norms are not the prime unit of analysis. They are rather one aspect within the nexus of concepts that form the practice.

To understand the mechanisms that hold (pre-reflexive) norms in place, I draw from Bourdieusian concepts: *field, habitus,* and *doxa* (Bourdieu, 1990, 2010; Recke, 2011). *Field* refers to an arena wherein competition between individuals or groups takes place regarding different species of capital or structures. It is a system of social positions with an internal structure of power relations. Structures that are reproduced most often shape the dominant paradigm within that field. Based on different incentives, actors may choose to contest hegemonic structures to destabilize, changing the dominant paradigm. For instance, within the current research, respondents discuss what they consider an authentic pilgrimage. Through their responses, they illuminate the field of perceived authenticity. It offers insight into dominant social structures that surround the meaning of authenticity within the Camino. When the majority of respondents similarly construct authenticity creates the dominant paradigm, or in this case, what is perceived as authentic. A minority might offer a different construction, competing for the hegemonic perception of authenticity.

Habitus, one of the key concepts in Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, refers to "the material conditions of life, and of pedagogic action" (Recke, 2011, p. 189). It consists of

strategies and mechanics that stabilize norms within social dynamics and power hierarchies, or, in other words, the field. Habitus as defined by Bourdieu is:

> *"Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53)*

Habitus is a form of knowing in practice. Nicolini (2012) compares it to a 'feel for the game' that can be experienced in sports, referring to the practical knowledge of the rules that make sense. For instance, when practising a game of football, it is logical not to use one's hands. In daily life, habitus contributes to the embodied feeling of socially accepted behaviour. Sometimes these rules are normalised to the extent that agents are not aware of their existence, perceiving those rules as 'common sense', and as a consequence, reproducing and reinforcing existing structures (Bourdieu, 1990). This idea resonates with Schatzki's (1996) description of practices as "doings and sayings" (p. 89), a thought which Reckwitz's (2002b) develops by arguing that carriers of practices (read: human agents) not only enact patterns of bodily behaviour but also "routinized ways of understanding, knowing how, and desiring" (p. 250).

Being born in a particular social sphere and socialization processes shape an individual's perceived social stratification. This realm of socially accepted norms, beliefs, and values is what is called *doxa*. Within the boundaries of doxa, beliefs are taken for granted and form a sense of limits. Agents in an established group do not question the entrenched norms. They follow them, and by doing so, constitute the reproduction of social order. An established order "produces the naturalization of its own arbitrariness" (Bourdieu, 2010, p. 164). The mechanics within such structures maintain and contribute to stability by reinforcing existing power structures and hierarchies.

Continuing the line of thought, when human agents are born in certain social structures where socialization processes constitute the doxa and thus the sensed realm of possibilities, it raises a question regarding intentionality. Are all human actions predetermined by their given social context? For an answer to this question, I draw upon Recke (2011), who explains that the intentions of actors are "founded on specific situational platforms, which are afloat and constantly shifting" (p. 180). Also, intentions are "directed towards a future event,

[encapsulating] a time dimension" (p. 181), and thus are estimated and evaluated according to retrospective or anticipatory perspectives of the current time-space. Intentionality, for that reason, is not fixed by habitus but is embedded in and affected by the current time-space. To exemplify this, consider the difference between travelling in the early and late 20th century. The availability and normalisation of travelling due to technological developments changed the way people perceive it. Whereas it used to be something only the rich could afford, today, in the Western world, also the common man can afford to travel and has the time to do so. In less developed countries, people may not have the resources or the free time to be able to travel. This shows that the time-space as well as other contextual factors, e.g. technological advancements, influence the doxa and habitus. Social practice theories consider and acknowledge the contextuality in the analysis of practices for a comprehensive understanding of the social world.

Focussing on the dynamics of practices, Shove et al. (2012) propose "that practices emerge, persist and disappear as links between their defining elements are made and broken" (p. 21). Defining elements, here, refers to the constituent concepts that form a bundle and by extension the practice. The recursive process between the agent and structure is where links are made and broken. Agents who conform to existing structures strengthen current links. Those who contest doxa alter, dissolve, and (re)create connections. The fluctuation of links shows that practices are subject to cultural evolution. However, the connections between the practice-forming concepts are not a random jumble that erratically fluctuates. Bourdieu (2010) argues that the more stable objective structures are, the more fully they reproduce themselves in agents. Following this line of reasoning, I suggest that the longer a practice exists, the more established it becomes within the world. The Camino, therefore, is an interesting case study as it has existed for hundreds of years, withstanding changing elements and dynamic relational links.

2.3. Conceptual framework

Hitherto, I explained that to understand social life, following social practice theory, one needs to acknowledge both agent and structure without giving primacy to one. Agent and structure mutually reinforce each other, nourishing stability within cultural groups. The smallest units of analysis within this interdependent system are practices. A practice is composed of interlinking concepts, forming a bundle. The links between the concepts are formed and broken within the recursive process of reproduction between the agent and social structures. Due to the reflexivity of agents and time, the links between the concepts are subject to change.

To understand the changeability of practices and conceptualise the theory, Nicolini (2012) offers a "theory-method package" (p. 219) which is based on the premise of zooming in and out of practices. Zooming in refers to looking at the different elements that form the practice and focus on what people are doing, how they talk about it, and through which strategies they try to accomplish their goals. It is based on thick descriptions of practices which constitute a representation to be used in scholarly discourse. On the other hand, Nicolini (2012), proposes that we zoom out. He assumes that practices never happen in isolation. They cannot be carried out independently from other practices. The researcher should, therefore, zoom out and consider the relationality between practices. Carefully following trails of connections between practices allows the researcher to find nodes of connections where different practices meet. However, considering the scope of the current thesis, I choose to only zoom in on the practice of the Camino. Zooming in on the Camino offers a conceptual springboard upon which future research can build to analyse hiking practices elsewhere and analyse the cultural evolution of contemporary pilgrimage practices.

To zoom in on the Camino, I draw upon Shove et al.'s (2012) conceptual framework which is a condensed version of Reckwitz's (2002b) framework. Reckwitz juxtaposes practice theory against similar cultural theories, allowing him to conceptualize a praxiological worldview through seven key terms: body, mind, things, knowledge, discourse, structure/process, and agent. Shove et al. offer a more streamlined approach to defining and analysing a practice using three key elements: *meaning, competence,* and *material*. According to Shove et al (2012), practices are built on these three elements. Analysing these elements and the way they are interlinked offers insight into the practice and how it gains meaning in the world. These elements underline the current thesis and each will be elaborated upon next.

2.3.1. Meaning

Meaning is described by Shove et al. (2012) as everything "in which we include symbolic meanings, ideas, and aspirations" (p. 14). It is a simplified account of Reckwitz's mental activities, emotion and motivational knowledge, including the symbolic significance of participation. It refers to reasons for people to do a pilgrimage, understanding the shared idea of what the practice entails, and the mental image of what the practice is about (Lamers et al., 2017). I argue that the denominator meaning strongly intertwines with Bourdieu's notion of symbolic capital. Capital, as defined by Bourdieu (1986), is "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (p. 286). In other words,

symbolic capital entitles an individual or group to establish or reinforce an actor's social position within a Bourdieusian field. In the current thesis, I refer to meaning, inter alia, when inquiring about the perceived authenticity of pilgrimage.

2.3.2. Competence

Competence, as Shove et al. (2012) propose, encompasses skill, know-how, and technique. To elaborate upon the element of competence, I refer to Schatzki (1997), who describes that practices can be "understood to be an open-ended set of actions linked by (a) pools of practical understanding, (b) arrays of explicit rules, and (c) a teleoaffective structure" (p. 304). With teleoaffective structures, Schatzki refers to both goal-oriented (teleological) and emotional (affective) dimensions within a social practice. For instance, imagine a teleoaffective structure within the context of a football team. The teleological aspect could involve goals related to becoming more streamlined as a team and developing their passing game, while the affective dimension could encompass feelings of camaraderie among the team players. Together these elements form a complex structure that influences how individuals behave and interact within that particular social setting. Combined, these three theoretical constructs describe practical intelligibility, or, in other words, things people do that make sense to them (Lindberg & Rantatalo, 2015).

A carrier of practice draws from past meanings and constituted rules when acting. This applies to both physical capability and cognitive understanding. History, thus, is an important aspect when analysing practices. Giddens (2005) argues that the history of an agent underlies reflexivity and hence her or his actions. He says: "An ontology of time-space as constitutive of social practices is basic to the conception of structuration, which *begins* from temporality and thus, in one sense, 'history'" (pp. 121-122), stressing the importance of understanding time-space in which the practice takes place.

In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu (2010) describes a conversation with a Kabyle woman which exemplifies the importance of temporality within practices. When discussing the topic of dying, the woman recalls that people used to not know what illness was. People would just go to bed and die from pain in the belly. There was a strong connotation between illness and dying. Nowadays, they are learning words like liver, lungs, intestines, stomach, etcetera. The woman describes how, today, everyone is sick and complaining about something. She says that to be ill and dying was a social status which changed over time. The practice of dying changed with an increased knowledge of the bodily apparatus. It shows that knowledge and time are substantially related.

Not only cognitive structures are relevant, but also physical skills should be considered. For instance, the suppleness in the fingers of a professional guitarist or the cardio-vascular fitness needed to run a marathon are examples of bodily competence with is cultivated over time. Of course, competence is never as unambiguous as the examples portray. It is often a combination of both cognitive and physical factors. Learning a musical piece on the piano, for example, is a combination of the mental ability to read the notes, transform what is written into a rhythm, and direct both hands to touch the right keys at the right time.

2.3.3. Materials

Shove et al. (2012) describe materials as "things, technologies, tangible physical entities, and the stuff of which objects are made" (p. 14). I suggest expanding this description as the explanation of Shove et al. is rather simplistic and does not do right encompassing the whole element.

Schatzki et al. (2001) argue that "understanding specific practices *always* [emphasize added] involves apprehending material configurations". Reckwitz (2002b) offers a very concrete example of the fundamental features of a ball and goals when playing a game of football. In this case, the materials "enable and limit certain bodily and mental activities" (Reckwitz, 2002b, p. 253). Being a part of doxa, materials are often used based on a practical consciousness that does not require active reflection (Røpke, 2009). A fitting analogy for this statement is Heidegger's famous example of the craftsman and the hammer. In the process of hammering, the craftsman is not conscious of the hammer being a piece of wood with a piece of metal on the end. It is an extension of the arm which helps to attach two things together. Only when the hammer breaks, does the craftsman become aware of the hammer, its parts, its malfunction, and how it changes the practice of hammering at that point in time. This seemingly simple example shows how 'things' are fundamental aspects of practices which should be investigated to understand social phenomena.

Things, however, are not only passive components to be used by humans. I argue that the material denominator should also include *quasi-objects*, which are capable of agency (Jóhannesson & Bærenholdt, 2009). They are "non-human creatures that are neither pure nature nor cultural projections, but indispensable components of social 'networks' or 'practices'" (Reckwitz, 2002a, p. 207). Examples of quasi-objects are the ozone hole, diseases, and genes. It can be argued that quasi-objects have a reciprocal agency relationship with human actors. The body itself is a quasi-object, as it influences how practices are conducted, transmitted,

repeated, and thus reinforced. In the current thesis, the body will be shown to be an important factor in the meaning-making of the practice.

My last argument to expand the material element is based on Hui et al. (2017) who emphasize the connective quality of e.g. infrastructure and built environments. They argue that infrastructure like roads and electricity improve accessibility needed for certain practices. Also, the development of the internet and the ability to share information has a considerable impact on practices. In this case, the internet can be seen as an object and should be treated as a means of transferring knowledge.

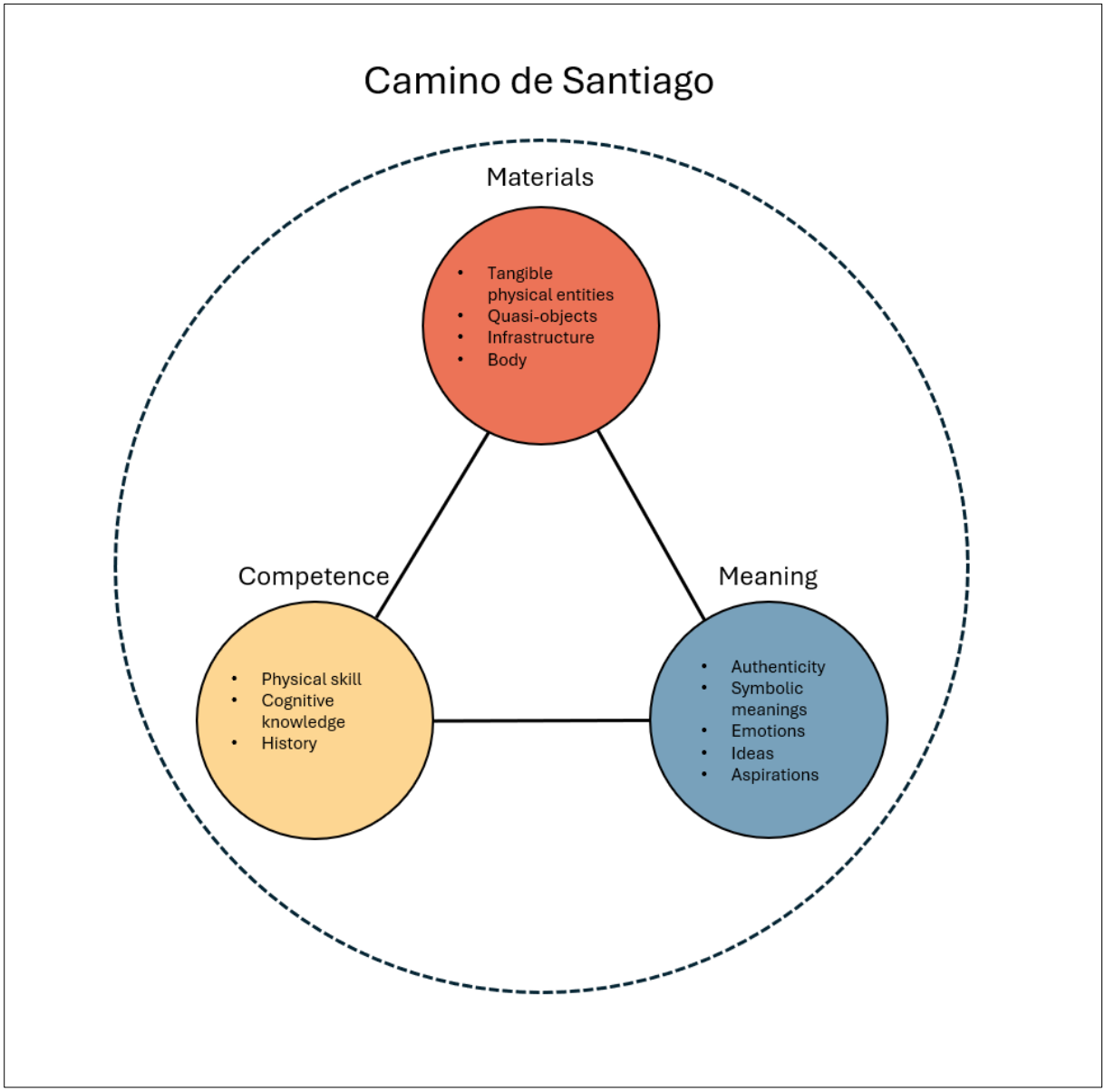
2.3.4. Conceptual model

The three practice-forming elements cannot be seen as singular aspects of a practice. They are always interlinked and overlapping with each other. However, investigating each element separately and defining its constituent aspects, allows for an analysis of societal behavioural change (Shove & Walker, 2010). Based on the proposed theoretical framework above, including the conceptual mould, I suggest a conceptual model (see Figure 1). Visualised in Figure 1 is a dotted circle which depicts the practice of Camino de Santiago de Compostela. Within the dotted circle are the interlinking elements that together form the practice. Each element entails constituent aspects which are investigated in the current thesis.

As mentioned, Shove et al (2012) argue that the elements and the links between them can change. The conceptual model helps to understand the Camino as a practice, how it changed over time, and possibly how it will transform in the future as the aspects of the elements and the links between metamorphoses.

Figure 1

Conceptual model: Santiago de Compostela as a practice



2.4. Research aims and questions

Pursuing to comprehensively understand the Camino and potentially assist policymaking concerning hiking practices, the present research aims to offer a detailed description of the Camino as a practice. Also, gaining an understanding of the effects of the surge in popularity of the Camino may contribute to comprehending and managing the meaning of contemporary pilgrimage in Western society. This leads me to introduce the following research questions which are answered through this thesis:

1. Which meanings, competencies, and materials constitute the social practice of Camino de Santiago de Compostela?
2. How are the three elements that form the practice interlinked?

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection

3.1.1. Overall methodological design

The current research aims to understand the Camino as a social practice. To find the elements that interlink and constitute the practice, qualitative research is conducted. Chandra and Hareendran (2017) argue that qualitative research is common in social sciences when studying social and cultural phenomena. The outcomes of such research can be diverse and rich because, unlike quantitative research, it does not look for indefinite proof but rather emphasises discovery.

Qualitative research focuses on explaining the world which is unstable with ever-changing parameters (Bairagi & Munot, 2019). This resonates with practice theory and the notion that interlinking elements and the connections between them change over time, shifting the meaning of practices. This volatile nature of practices renders it impossible to find one indefinite truth which remains constant over time. It should thus be noted that the present research is embedded in the current space-time. Hence, if this research had been conducted decades ago, the outcomes would have been different. The same goes for when a similar inquiry will be conducted in the future. However, I argue that obtaining a descriptive account of a practice in the current space-time holds the potential to further comprehend the practice when compared to a future account of a similar practice and understand why and how it changes. Qualitative research aims to capture a time frame which may contribute to developing new or existing theories. Using a qualitative design contributes to the literary body of practice theory which, currently, is not yet fully established as there are many different nuances in both the theory and conceptual interpretation thereof (Nicolini, 2012).

Qualitative research on its own is undefinable as it crosscuts disciplines, fields, and subject matter (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The context in which the research is conducted dictates what the qualitative research entails. Within the social domain of research, Erickson (2011) argues that qualitative inquiry seeks to report what ordinary people do in their daily lives and discover what meaning they adhere to their actions and things. Based on the research aim to understand the Camino, I narrow down the methodology and assert that the current thesis is a case study. A case study "investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context" (Yin, 2018, p. 45). Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines a case study as follows:

"An intensive analysis of an individual unit (such as a person or community) stressing developmental factors in relation to environment."

Following this definition, case studies investigate a single unit. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, a practice-as-entity is a bundle of elements which together form the practice. The practice, and thus the case, is in this instance the Camino.

Case study research has been criticised for providing little basis for generalisation (Chandra & Hareendran, 2017; Crowe et al., 2011). However, Flyvbjerg (2011) contests this by arguing that specifically case studies form the foundation on which 'hard' research may build upon to develop generalisations and theories. He offers examples which prove that point. One illustrative example is that of Galileo's rejection of Aristotle's law of gravity. Aristotle (322 BC) argued that terrestrial objects rise or fall according to the ratio of the four terrestrial elements (fire, air, water, and earth) of which they are composed. He proposed that the speed an object falls is directly proportional to its weight and inversely proportional to the density of the medium through which it moves. Simply said, he believed that heavier objects fall faster than lighter objects. This assumption was believed to be true for over 2000 years until Galileo (1642) rejected his theory. With a few conceptual experiments or case studies, Galileo demonstrated that objects regardless of their weight accelerated at the same rate due to gravity when air resistance was negligible. This example demonstrates how a case study was the foundation that overthrew a 2000-year-old standing dogma regarding gravitational law.

The current thesis is not looking to overthrow long-standing generalisations. However, the practical understanding that this research offers, despite being context-specific, contributes to understanding and expanding generalisations regarding long-distance walking and pilgrimages, and in extension, to the development of sustainable walking practices and policies.

3.1.2. Ethnography

To gain in-depth insights into the social practice of the Camino, two interrelated methods were used: semi-structured interviews and field observations. These methods are widely used for ethnographic research as they contextualize reality as it is lived and allow the researcher to include meaningful operations which are invisible in social science texts (Silverman, 2004). One of the core ideas of the ethnographic methodology is that the researcher becomes a participant in the situation but at the same time a 'fly on the wall'. It allows the researcher to experience the situation as it is for the participants who are being interviewed and observed. A point of concern, however, is the *Hawthorne effect*. The Hawthorne effect is a type of behaviour

reactivity which occurs when individuals are aware of being observed. It emphasizes the importance for the researcher to be inconspicuous when observing so as not to influence the behaviour of participants. As mentioned earlier, there are many people on the Camino which allows the researcher to go unnoticed as a pilgrim among others.

I have walked the Camino before and consider myself to be an 'insider ethnographer' (O'Reilly, 2009). An insider ethnographer is part of the cultural group which is being investigated. An outsider ethnographer would be a researcher who investigates a cultural group to which they do not belong. There is an active debate on the effects of being an in- or outsider on the validity of the results (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; O'Reilly, 2012). I discuss some downsides of being an insider ethnographer first which is followed by my reasoning for still choosing this methodological underpinning for this research.

The first and most common issue of insider ethnography is that being part of a cultural group situates the researcher in the existing Bourdieusian field which might affect the doxa of the researcher. In other words, the researcher can be biased and overlook certain things because they are taken for granted, considered to be 'normal', and not worth mentioning in the research. This would be the main argument supporting outsider ethnography. O'Reilly (2009) argues that ethnographic research is never fully objective, whether it is insider or outsider ethnography. She explains that all societies have internal variations. This renders the researcher, to some extent, always unobjective as they cannot personally fully grasp all variations. Despite this unavoidable subjectivity, to still produce viable research, a researcher should acknowledge their socio-historical background, include their reflexivity and produce transparent works of science. Humberstone (1997) even argues that reflective works provide "insight into the ways in which webs of power in both the culture under exploration and within the particular research process [are constructed]" (p. 200).

Another pitfall of insider ethnography is proposed by Dwyer and Buckle (2009). They argue that an insider ethnographer may experience a role conflict. This happens when the role of being a participant and being a researcher conflict. As I experienced, many pilgrims choose to engage in pilgrimage to 'escape' from their daily life. Of course, I was on the trail for the reason of gathering data for the present thesis. Being a researcher, I was going about my daily life, which conflicted with my role as a pilgrim on the Camino. Asselin (2003) proposes the term role confusion. It refers to the state of being when the researcher interprets a situation from another perspective than that of a researcher. Also, role confusion can lead to feelings of frustration when the participant interprets a situation which cannot be responded to accordingly because

of the researcher's role. For the current thesis, soliciting individuals to sign a consent form and conducting formal interviews seemed incongruent with my, as a pilgrim, perception of the escapist nature of pilgrimage which many pilgrims seek.

Taking the disadvantages of insider ethnography into account, I still believe it is a viable methodology to answer the research questions. O'Reilly (2012) describes that being an insider helps to understand important nuances to gain a more detailed understanding of the subject. As mentioned before, this thesis aims to understand the Camino as a practice. A practice consists of three interlinking elements. Therefore, rich data is needed to offer thick and comprehensive descriptions of the elements. Being an insider enables the researcher to further investigate seemingly small aspects of the practice that participants provide. Whereas an outsider would not have been able to pick up on these things. Also, Dwyer and Buckle (2009) explain that an insider establishes a relation of acceptance quicker than an outsider. It means that participants open up to the researcher faster and speak more freely. Considering the relatively short time frame of the thesis, having fast results is desirable.

3.1.3. Research context

The study of the Camino took place in situ, which according to Stan (2020) is essential to ethnography as being in the situation *with* participants and *as* a participant allows to gather context-rich data. Context-rich data is essential to form thick descriptions regarding the three practice-constituting elements. Data collection took place from January 21st until the 31st. This rather short period was chosen due to the time frame of the thesis and my schedule. Researching the Camino in winter came with some practical difficulties affecting the research process, which I will elaborate upon next.

Statistics show that between December and February, relatively few pilgrims engage in the Camino (*Statistics | Pilgrim's Welcome Office*, n.d.). Knowing that only a few pilgrims would be on the way, I decided to walk a popular Camino: Camino Francés. Officially, the route starts in Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port in France and is about 800 kilometres long. It is the first way which was given a UNESCO Cultural Heritage status in 1993. Considering the short data collection period, I could only walk the last 100 kilometres, starting in Sarria, Spain. This part of the Camino is amply the most popular and, by far, the most travelled way to Santiago (*Statistics | Pilgrim's Welcome Office*, n.d.). It is roughly 100 kilometres long. Part of its popularity is due to the fact that pilgrims need to walk at least the last 100 kilometres to Santiago to be eligible for the Compostela: the official accreditation for completing the walk. Many pilgrims choose to start their pilgrimage in Sarria and walk to Santiago in a week. This way is less strenuous

and easier to plan than e.g. Camino del Norte, which is 800 kilometres along the north coast of Spain with a more varied altitude.

Originally, the plan was to spend all ten days on this section. Generally, pilgrims walk between 20 and 30 kilometres per day. Walking 10 kilometres per day would mean that I meet new pilgrims and potential participants each day. However, as it was winter, most albergues were closed. Albergues are pilgrim hostels, which are generously spread along the way. The only albergues housing pilgrims in winter are albergues de la Xunta. These are region-funded albergues and are only open to pilgrims. Albergues de la Xunta are not as abundant and usually located in bigger towns and at the endpoint of each official day section. This resulted in a fixed itinerary. Also, most albergues do not allow a pilgrim to stay longer than one night. This affected the research in such a way that I had to follow the same path as other pilgrims and was bound to the same schedule as them. The resulting issue here is that I did not meet many different pilgrims. On Camino Francés, I conducted four interviews. This amount resulted in an undersaturation of data. Another consequence of the fixed itinerary was that I arrived in Santiago earlier than planned. The solution to this problem was continuing the journey towards Fisterra.

Fisterra is the westernmost point of the Iberian Peninsula, where also Santiago is located. Its name derives from the Latin 'finis terrae' which means 'end of the earth'. As the name suggests, this place is what people historically thought to be the end of the world. 'Camino Fisterra' is 90 kilometres long and much less popular than the other Camino's. Most pilgrims return home after arriving in Santiago or take a bus to see 'the world's end' instead of walking the way. On this relatively short Camino, I conducted two more interviews. One of the interviews was with a couple.

3.1.4. Participants and sampling

The scarcity of potential participants demanded a non-random sampling design. Pilgrims are easily identifiable based on visible characteristics (e.g. backpack, hiking shoes, walking poles, sun protection) and the fact that we shared lodgings. Participants were approached based on their presumable engagement with the Camino and asked whether they wanted to participate in the research. Seven people agreed to participate. They came from the Netherlands, Spain, Germany, Italy, and North America. Kumar (2014) identifies this sampling method as *quota sampling*. The main argument for this method is the "ease of access to the sample population" (p. 161). The main disadvantage of the used method is that the sample group is not a probability one (Kumar, 2014). This means that when the current research is repeated, a different sample

is used, resulting in a different outcome. The results of the study are thus not generalisable and may not be truly representative. Seeking to present valid research still, I decided to conduct six interviews (one interview was with two people), aiming to saturate the dataset.

Saturation is a term which is used as a criterion for discontinuing data collection (Saunders et al., 2018). It is achieved when participants do not produce new information (Kumar, 2014). Hennink and Kaiser (2022) state in their systematic review regarding saturation in qualitative research that between nine and seventeen interviews should be conducted to reach saturation. However, there is no clear-cut, universal answer which argues that the number of interviews to reach saturation is fixed. Baker and Edwards (2012) state that data saturation is not only achieved through interviews but also by the presence of observations. Brinkmann (2013) points out that asking how many interviews should be conducted often comes from a quantitative logic perspective. He argues that qualitative interviewing distinguishes itself by its ability to get close to people, not by including many participants. The research question, theoretical position, and analytical framework dictate the number of participants needed to achieve data saturation (Saunders et al., 2018). Based on this reasoning and taking practical difficulties in terms of available time into consideration, I believe that seven participants allowed me to meaningfully contribute to the body of practice literature without devising a universal generalisation.

Another consideration concerning the sampling method was to approach pilgrims online through forums and internet groups (e.g. Facebook). This method would potentially yield a larger sample size. However, I decided against this method as the sample would still be non-random and therefore not generalizable. Also, as mentioned earlier, being physically present in the research context grants thick descriptions which allow accounts of unspoken rules and invisible operations, this would not have been possible if the interviews were conducted online.

To put the participants in perspective, I will introduce them shortly using pseudonyms. To further ensure anonymity, I resort to the chronological age periods offered by Lachman (2001), "young or early adulthood (approximately aged 20–39), middle adulthood (40–59), and old age (60+)" (p. 135). The first participant is Emma. Emma is a young Dutch woman who had finished the Camino before and agreed to meet in Santiago. At the time of her Camino, she just finished her master's degree and lived in Spain. Soon, she would marry and start a PhD position. The second interviewee was Rick. Rick is a middle-aged American backpacker. He is used to backpacking trips in the United States but because it was winter, he deviated to the Camino for its lower latitude. When I met him, he just started Camino Francés after he found that nobody was on Camino del Norte. So far, he enjoyed the company that Camino Francés offered. The

third interviewee is Anna, a young German girl. Anna decided last-minute to engage on the Camino without any long-distance hiking experience. She had long been intrigued by the Camino and thought it was time to just do it. On the way, Anna met Diego, the fourth participant. They met on their first day on the trail and decided to walk together for a few days. Later, they met two other pilgrims whom Diego continued the rest of his Camino with. Diego is a social man, who starts writing his master's thesis after his Camino. As a climber, he is used to walking climbing approaches and camping but other than that, he did not have any long-distance hiking experience. The next participants have a lot of hiking experience. Matteo and Luna are a middle-aged Italian couple who regularly do thru-hikes all over the world. For them, the Camino is a way of keeping in shape in preparation for longer, more challenging trails. The last participant is Greta. Greta is an older woman, whom I met on Camino Fisterra. She wore very casual clothes. To her, one does not need any specialized gear to do the Camino, only what one feels comfortable in. I met Greta in the last albergue before the 'world's end'. We walked this last stretch together. Greta enjoyed the Camino for the solitude it offered. Sadly, her plan to continue walking to Muxia fell apart because of the enduring strain on her body which is fundamental to walking long distances.

3.1.5. Semi-structured interviews

For this thesis, six semi-structured interviews are conducted between 35 and 90 minutes long. For semi-structured interviews, the researcher uses a preplanned interview guide (see Appendix A). The guide acts as a script which structures the interview through the main topics that are under review (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Smith & Sparkes, 2016). The main themes for the interview guide were based on the three interconnected elements that form a practice and their constituent aspects. Smagacz-Poziemska et al. (2021) offer three strategies to extract information from participants specifically designed to gather practice-centred information, which are interwoven in the interview guide. The first is to ask participants to provide detailed instructions on how to do 'normal' things to reveal their practical knowledge. For instance, "How would you describe a typical day on the Camino?" offers such insight. One of the interviewees described how his days on the Camino became very streamlined. Hence, in this case, questioning the 'normal' way of doing provided information regarding the competence element of the practice as the participant mentioned something that he learned on the way.

The second strategy is "questioning the 'unquestioned' ways of doing things by […] offering and discussing alternatives" (Smagacz-Poziemska et al., 2021, p. 72). It reveals motivations and beliefs that underlie certain habits on the Camino. During the interviews, when discussing

authenticity, I often suggested examples of other ways to do the Camino, e.g., what it means to do it by bike or on horseback. This stimulated the interviewees to reflect on and reveal their perceived authenticity concerning their pilgrimage.

The last strategy is to ask about inappropriate performances of the practice. It shows implicit standards, norms, and rules underlying the practice. I incorporated this strategy into the interview guide by, for example, including the question: "What is a 'real' pilgrim?" and a follow-up question: "When is someone not a real pilgrim?".

The examples provided above and other questions in the interview guide parallel the Bourdieusian concepts of field and doxa. Challenging participants by probing what they consider normal behaviour offers insight into the field of the Camino and which discourse is currently dominating it. Discussing what is abnormal behaviour among pilgrims establishes a deeper understanding as the subordinate dialogue is outlined and offset against the hegemonic. The answers of interviewees are the result of their doxa.

Note that the interview guide was susceptible to change as new data was gathered. Inherently part of semi-structured interviews are open-ended questions and flexibility. Open-ended questions allow participants to express their feelings and thoughts (Sparkes & Smith, 2014), thus increasing the depth and richness of data (Kumar, 2014). Flexibility applies when a participant deviates from the topic, addressing a new theme that could be interesting for the research. This allows the researcher to probe further as well as reassess the interview guide to see if the right questions were asked, potentially adding, altering, or removing topics (Adams, 2015). The interviews have been recorded which allowed me to concentrate on the topic and the dynamics of the interview as there is no need to take notes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

While conducting interviews, the researcher should be aware of the uneven power relation between him and the participant (Kvale, 2006). A common misconception is that interviews are dialogical, or in other words egalitarian (Hill et al., 2020). One way to counter this hierarchical power relation is to be a participant-researcher. As mentioned before, being an insider of a cultural group helps to establish a relationship of acceptance faster, allowing participants to speak more freely (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Experiencing the same hardship and sharing lodgings has a fraternising effect among pilgrims, and thus also the participant researcher. Not only verbal transparency during interviews is arguable. Kvale (2006) points out that the researcher holds a "monopoly of interpretation" (p. 485) regarding the interviewee's statements. The hermeneutic nature of interviews is a controversial topic. One way of overcoming the pitfall

of wrongly interpreting is through method triangulation (Carter et al., 2014), which entails the use of multiple methods of data collection. In the current research, both interviews and field observations are used to triangulate data aiming to establish valid research.

Four interviews took place in albergues, one was on the trail, and one was in Santiago. Except for one, each interview was a one-on-one interaction. One of the interviews was with a couple who walked the Camino together. The interview with the couple allowed access to social interaction and the way meaning is negotiated as the couple answered questions as well as interacted and responded to each other (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Before starting the interview, I asked for permission to record and asked the participants to sign a consent form. I explained verbally that it was not required to answer all questions and that they could stop the interview at any time without giving a reason. Also, if they would say anything incriminating or something they regret, it is their right that I am obliged to remove (part of) the recording. This was stated in the consent form as well.

One interview was conducted in Dutch which is the mother tongue of the researcher and participant. The other five interviews were in English. Only one of the participants is a native English speaker, the others spoke English as a second or third language. One needs to consider the effects of one's proficiency of language on the quality of the interviews. Language is used to shape and constitute thoughts (House, 2006), thus representing the lifeworlds of those who are communicating. However, "language is not just a transparent window to the world but rather the primary medium through which social identities are constructed" (Viruru & Cannella, 2016, p. 186). This means that even when one is very skilled in the use of language, it is still a representation of the thoughts and experiences of the communicator. The subjectivity of the spoken word should be considered twice when the interviewee is not proficient in verbalizing their thoughts. This could serve as an argument to exclude participants from the research. However, the low availability of potential participants led me to include one interview with someone who, I argue, is unskilled in English. I suggest that triangulation and comparing the interview to others, allows the interview to be relevant and still offer valuable insights.

A last note on the interviews is acknowledging that conducting a proper interview is a craft (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). It takes personal skill and judgement as well as understanding it as a rule-governed method. My limited academic experience in devising and conducting interviews undoubtedly influenced the collected data. Nevertheless, Mishler (1990) argues that "skilled research is a craft and like any craft, it is learned by apprenticeship to competent researchers, hands-on experience, and by continual practice" (p. 422). Thus, without

disregarding my inexperience with the method and acknowledging its effect on the data collection, I chose to proceed with the method.

3.1.6. Field notes

Taking field notes is often the main method of data gathering within ethnographical research (Emerson et al., 2011). While the main source of data for the current study was semi-structured interviews, I relied on some field notes taken in situ to comprehend the context in which the interviews were taken, allowing me to triangulate both sets of data. Also, informal conversations with pilgrims on the way and in albergues were a source of data which contributed to revealing the three key elements that constitute the practice.

Emerson et al. (2011) describe that field notes consist of personal reflections on what the ethnographer deems relevant and emotions that are felt in situ. Relying on a personal sense of what seems significant or unexpected, the researcher can reflect on contradictory pressures in the Bourdieusian field of the Camino. I argue that my role as an insider ethnographer allowed me to understand conflicting doings and sayings that emerged during informal conversations because I am familiar with the pilgrim lingua. Knowing this language helped me to 'read between the lines' of what pilgrims said for a more intricate understanding of the practice.

When something of relevance happened or when someone made an interesting remark, I would take a mental note. Whenever I was alone with my thoughts (while walking or in an albergue), I wrote down personal thoughts regarding the situation. Taking field notes away from the subjects minimizes the "contaminating" (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 4) effect on participants. As mentioned before, considering the Hawthorne effect, taking notes likely affects an otherwise natural conversation if taken during a conversation or in sight of the participants.

The field notes supported the reflective process concerning the interview guide. After conducting an interview, personal reflections on that process were written down. Based on these reflections, succeeding interviews were handled differently. For instance, I removed a question regarding the Camino landscape after three interviews. The interviewees' answers corresponded with observations, and therefore, seemed unnecessary to continue probing in further interviews.

For the current research, field notes were taken but served as a secondary source of information. They served as a memory notebook which assisted in recalling significant events and relevant personal thoughts during my journey on the Camino. During the process of data analysis, they served as an account of the reflections I had after conducting each interview. This allowed

triangulation of the data and a more thorough report of the interviews by including the context in which they were conducted, contributing to a thick description of the elements of the practice.

3.2. Data analysis

3.2.1. Transcribing

All recordings of the interviews have been transcribed. Transcribing is when audio or visual data is transformed into text. Transcribing simplifies the coding process and allows the researcher to navigate the interviews more easily. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) state that there are no rules as to how to transcribe, except that the research should explicitly state how the transcriptions are made as it contributes to the transparency and validity of the research.

Transcribing is an interpretative process. It involves judgment and is therefore the first step in analysing data (Bailey, 2008). Decisions regarding what to transcribe and how are made based on the methodological and conceptual underpinning of the research. Hence, the same data may be transcribed differently by different scholars based on their research aims.

For the current thesis, I used the software WhisperTranscribe to assist in transcribing the interview recordings. The software relies on AI to generate a written transcription. It runs and stores its data locally on the computer ensuring the privacy of the participants' data. After the software generated a transcription, I read through it and made adjustments regarding the readability of the text. For instance, to find an answer to the research question, much verbatim was not needed and therefore removed. Verbatim is a literal, word-for-word transcription. This would include emphases on intonation, short pauses, and emotional expressions. One could argue to use of verbatim transcriptions when a detailed analysis of the social relationship between two people is investigated. However, for the current thesis, I decided to exclude verbatim from transcriptions as it does not contribute to understanding the practice. Nevertheless, occasionally, I added verbatim when an interviewee was sarcastic or when another pilgrim interrupted the conversation as there would be a risk of wrongly interpreting the text in later stages. This ensured a consistency between my interpretation of the written text and the participant's intent.

3.2.2. Coding

After 'cleaning' the data of unnecessary verbatim, the next step is to code it. The coding process enables "collected data to be assembled, categorized, and thematically sorted, providing an organized platform for the construction of meaning" (Williams & Moser, 2019, p. 45). In other

words, having coded the gathered data supports further interpretation of it and provides more manageable data.

NVivo 20 was used for the coding process. NVivo is a coding software which allows coding, categorizing, and management of data. Despite the software's capability of automatically generating codes, I decided to manually devise the codes and use the program only for its management functionality.

There are many ways of coding and making sense of data. Before explaining the process used for the current thesis, I refer to Elliott (2018) who stresses the importance of recognizing the subjective nature of coding, as each researcher's way of coding is founded on their methodological background, research design, research questions, and practicalities of their study. By acknowledging Elliot's statement but still seeking to deliver sound research, I turn to Williams and Moser's (2019) suggestion. They propose to comprehensively define and consistently apply the used method to conform to validity and reliability standards associated with qualitative research.

Miles and Huberman (1994) encourage having a 'start list' of codes prior to the fieldwork as it benefits the researcher to tie research questions or conceptual interests directly to the data. The conceptual framework proposed by Shove et al. (2012) predetermined the themes of the current thesis. This means that the initial coding themes are the key elements: meaning, competence, and material. During the process of coding, codes emerge which do not exactly fit the initial themes, allowing for new 'sub-themes' (Stuckey, 2015). In the following, I elaborate on which steps are taken in the present research during the coding process. Note that the coding process is not exactly linear. The researcher might come back to an already-executed phase when consecutive steps require it.

The first step is to become familiar with the text (Braun et al., 2016). This involves reading and rereading transcriptions and making notes of interesting ideas and concepts which could contribute to answering the research questions. The second step involves actual coding. Coding in this sense, means identifying and labelling chunks of data with descriptive terms and concepts, which Williams and Moser (2019) identify as "open coding" (p. 47). This process helps to create an overview of the large texts and to make sense of them regarding the research question (Elliott, 2018). A code, thus, identifies and labels something of interest in the data. The result of this process is that the researcher has a 'summary' of the transcriptions in codes which allows them to refrain from reading the whole text repeatedly. Also, according to Williams and

Moser (2019), it identifies distinct concepts and themes for categorisation. Saldaña (2016) warns against the use of the word 'theme' during this and following phases. He argues that themes are the outcome of coding, categorizing, and analytical reflection, but are not something that itself is coded. Some examples of these primus codes used in the current research are: "slowing down", "escapism", and "flow".

The following step is referred to as "pattern coding" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 69) or "axial coding" (Williams & Moser, 2019, p. 50). This phase entails grouping the codes made before into smaller categories. This phase functions to reduce large amounts of data into smaller analytical units. It results in codes being segmented together. Codes are categorized to create distinct categories in preparation for the final phase. The emerging categories during this phase are the aspects that constitute the key elements of the Camino as a practice. Braun et al. (2016) argue that during this stage, coding may evolve as the researcher becomes more analytically engaged with the text. For instance, the codes "slowing down" and "flow" converged and categorized into "simple lifestyle". This category encompasses the sentiment of the codes that were found during the previous step.

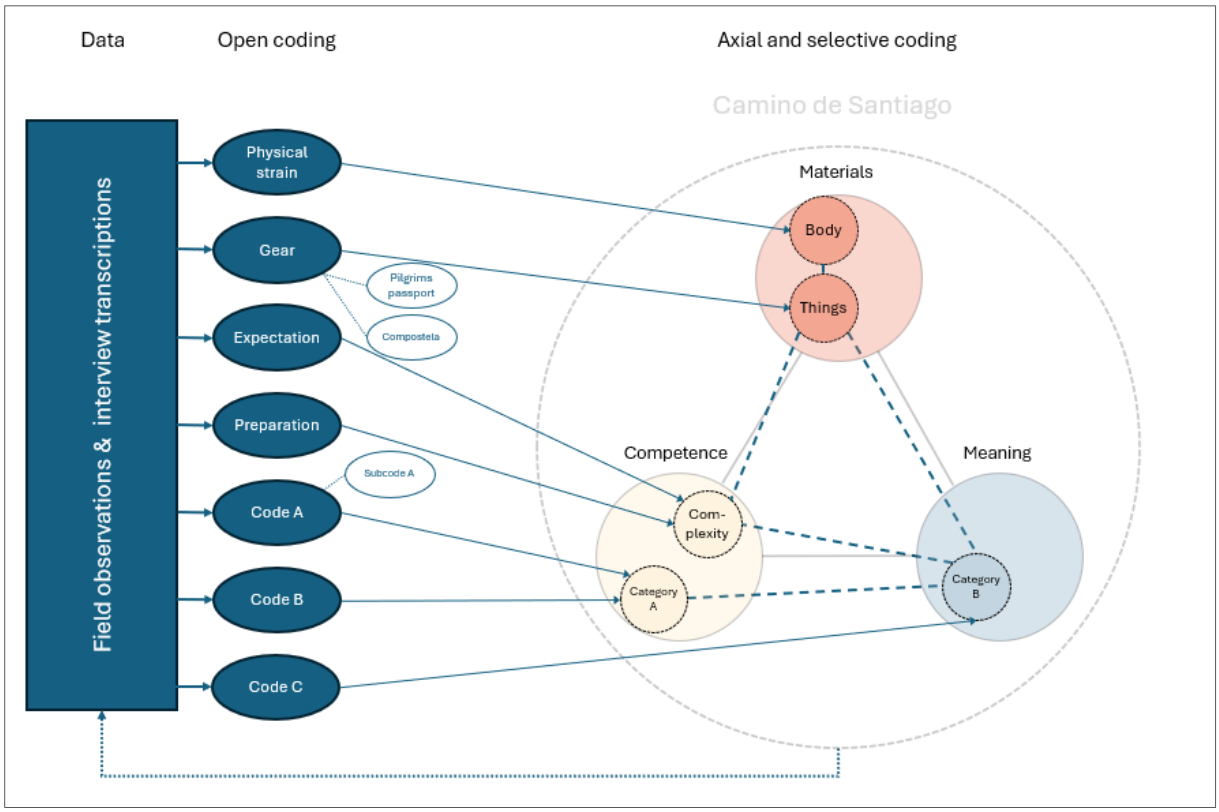
The last phase in the coding process entails "theme development, refinement and naming" (Braun et al., 2016, p. 198) or is defined as "selective coding" by Williams and Moser (2019, p. 52). Normally, during this phase of coding, themes are created based on the categories. However, the themes in the current research stem from the conceptual framework and were predefined. This means that the themes used are the three elements that constitute the practice: meaning, competence and material. This meant that the last phase of coding involved a process of connecting the emergent categories to the already existing themes instead of developing new themes based on the categories. Continuing the example from before, I linked "simple lifestyle" to the "meaning" element as it entails an idea of the Camino.

To summarize and visualize the coding process, inspired by Saldaña (2016), I designed a flowchart (see Figure 2). Figure 2 resembles how raw data evolves into the conceptual model used in the current thesis. On the right is the Camino as a social practice. Because the conceptual framework precedes the data-gathering process, it affects the researchers' bias and subjectivity, influencing which data is gathered. The first round of coding yields the initial codes, which are divided into categories during axial coding based on their similar sentiment. Finally, the categories are branched under the corresponding key elements. Figure 2 illustrates that the categories are mutually relational. This means that certain categories affect one another. For pragmatic reasons, I linked a single category to a single key element. However, in reality, as the

analysis section will demonstrate, one category can have multiple implications and fall under different elements.

Figure 2

Coding process visualised in a flowchart



3.2.3. Data interpretation

It is misleading that data interpretation is discussed as the last phase because analysing data is not a linear process. Castleberry and Nolen (2018) state that interpreting data is inherently part of the transcribing and coding processes. Despite data interpretation not being an isolated phase, it is still briefly discussed.

After condensing all raw data into categories, the researcher seeks to uncover structures and relations of meaning between the categories (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The emerging categories from the coding process are the aspects that structure the three key elements (see Figure 2). Through data interpretation, the categories are linked and divided into their corresponding element. This process allows the researcher to reflect on the links between the aspects as well as the major elements. The interpretation of the data was written down as detailed and comprehensively as possible in the analysis chapter. The descriptive interpretations

answer the research questions by defining the practice-forming elements of the Camino and how they are linked.

3.3. Ethical considerations

Before and during data gathering several ethical issues should be considered. The current research is conducted for the University of South-Eastern Norway. In Norway, before conducting official research, the research proposal and design need to be approved by the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (Sikt). After their approval, data gathering took place (see appendix B).

For the current research, no incriminating data is recorded. Participants were implicitly asked before the interview to refrain from saying anything compromising, e.g., full names, place of residence, and bank details. The recorded files were named 'Interview 1', 'Interview 2', etcetera, to further guarantee anonymity. To ensure that the files stayed out of the public domain, they were stored locally on my computer. Also, transcriptions were processed and handled offline.

Participants received verbal and textual explanations of the purpose of the research and how their data would be handled. They were asked to read and sign a consent form which included this information as well as contact details of the researcher as well as the supervisor for this thesis. This allows participants to reach out for further questions or objections regarding the research. Participation in the research was voluntary. If a participant wanted to terminate the interview without a reason at any time, the concerned data would be deleted and not used during the analysis. No participant used this opportunity.

As earlier mentioned, the researcher should be aware of his power position relative to the participant (Kvale, 2006). Aiming to overcome this issue, participants were interviewed in a setting which was known to them, namely, an albergue or on the road. Throughout the interviews, I remained as non-judgmental as possible.

4. Analysis

The following chapter presents the results of the current study. It offers an in-depth understanding of the Camino as a practice and exposes the interlinkage between the elements that form the practice. The results of the interviews are discussed while drawing from relevant theories, field observations, and personal reflections. I incorporate presenting the results of the data with discussions thereof. This is one of two common ways of presenting findings in a research report that uses interviews as the main source of information (Burnard et al., 2008). The alternative would be offering two separate chapters: the results and a discussion. Nevertheless, I suggest combining the two provides a more natural and preferable reading experience, without compromising the aim of the study.

As earlier mentioned, this thesis assumes that the social practice of the Camino is formed through the interlinkage of meaning, competence, and material. In this chapter, each element has its devoted section which is divided into sub-chapters. The sub-chapters emanate from the categories which emerged through the coding process. The categories form the building blocks that constitute the three major elements. Each of these aspects has its corresponding chapter. Note that a practice is a complex network of interwoven elements. In praxis, the three major elements and their constituent aspects overlap and interweave, rendering it impossible to provide a completely isolated description. However, for pragmatic reasons and to form a comprehensible account of the results, the element-forming aspects are still presented as isolated entities and discussed in their corresponding chapters. The end of the chapter offers examples demonstrating the complex interrelationship between the different aspects of the elements.

The results are presented and discussed based on the conducted interviews. This section therefore draws from and relies heavily on quotes from the conducted interviews. To safeguard the privacy of the participants, fictional names are used to represent the speakers.

4.1. Meaning

4.1.1. Real pilgrim or a 'turigrino'? Questioning authenticity.

"There is no [authentic] pilgrim. (...) [Everybody] can walk every Camino in [their] own way and it's different for everyone, so there is no real pilgrim. (...) You can say it's one walking, it's one carrying his pack, or sleeping in an Albergue, but it's not true." (Matteo)

Pilgrimage is a long-standing tradition worldwide and across cultures. It is historically a Christian practice for devotees to show their piety and receive indulgence. The increasing secularisation of the pilgrimage raises questions regarding the authenticity of the journey. All interviewees considered themselves authentic pilgrims, although only one of them was a practising Christian. Most pilgrims had a strong sentiment regarding the authenticity of a pilgrim but found it hard to demarcate what a real pilgrim exactly is.

Ever since the ninth century pilgrims who make the journey to Santiago receive an official accreditation distributed by the church. It used to be a badge in the shape of a scallop shell, but this was easily falsified. Over time the badge was replaced by the *Compostela*, which is still used today (*The Compostela*, n.d.). The official instance that issues the Compostela today, *La Oficina del Peregrino* (the Pilgrim's Reception Office), requires two conditions to be eligible for a Compostela. The first is that a pilgrim has to travel the last 100 kilometres by foot or horseback or the last 200 kilometres by bicycle. As proof of the journey, a pilgrim shows the *Credencial del Peregrino* at the pilgrim's office. This is a document that is stamped at several locations along the way, e.g., churches, hostels, and cafes. The second requirement is that the person who made the journey did so for "religious or spiritual reasons, or at least an attitude of search" (*The Compostela*, n.d., para. 4). By requiring these conditions, as the official authority that offers the authentic certificate, the pilgrim's office implicitly sets the boundaries for the authenticity of one's journey.

The definition offered by the authorities is broad and loosely interpretable. Note that the pilgrim's office does not mention anything about services that can be used on the way, e.g., luxurious hotels and bag-carrying services. This leads to a discrepancy between the official definition and the sentiment that the interviewees adhere to the authenticity of pilgrimage. Matteo, who walked the Camino six times before, draws a parallel between a pilgrim and a tourist. Both engage with the Camino, albeit in different ways.

> *"For the tourist it's completely different. It's kind of holiday. They take all the services like expensive hotels, they go out every dinner, they send their luggage, they don't carry it, sometimes they walk maybe ten kilometres, they call a taxi to reach the destination. Without needing it."*

The distinction between an authentic pilgrim and a tourist is shared by the other interviewees, although nobody could exactly tell what the difference was. For instance, all interviewees agree that a senior with back problems can have their bag carried from one place to the next and still

be a real pilgrim. However, a young man in his physical prime who lets his luggage transported is described by Greta as a "*turigrino* or at least [someone who is] not taking full responsibility for the fact that you're doing a walk". A turigrino is a term that combines 'tourist' with the Spanish word for pilgrim, 'peregrino'. This defamatory term is widely accepted and understood among my participants.

When interviewed, Greta was struggling with physical pain and discomfort from her journey. After recognizing that her pains originated from her already light backpack, I asked why she did not make use of back-carrying services. She mentioned that she "had never thought of it because I wouldn't consider that a pilgrimage". The interview with Greta shows that the perceived authenticity of a pilgrim is linked with the services that are used on the way.

The peculiar distinction between tourism and pilgrimage is also discussed within academic discourse. When tourism research emerged and developed in the 70s, there was a clear division between tourism and pilgrimage, namely: the secular nature of tourism compared to the inherently religious context of pilgrimage (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). However, in the past decades, the border between tourism and pilgrimage has been blurred (Wooding, 2020). As tourism and pilgrimage have increasingly overlapping interfaces, the prevalent definition of pilgrimage also changed. Whereas the Western world often connotes pilgrimage with Christianity, today, a broader secular definition is acceptable. The participants of this study reflect this, as only one pilgrim was a practising Christian, and yet he participated in the Camino for secular reasons.

Acknowledging the juxtaposition between a tourist and a pilgrim, Luik (2012) offers a system of classification. Luik proposes a continuum with pilgrimage and tourism at opposite ends. The space in between accommodates all journeys. This system allows subjective interpretation regarding the authenticity of a pilgrim. Havard (2017) uses a similar scale, only with medieval pilgrims at one end and "pseudo-pilgrims" on the other. Havard's scale mainly refers to historical pilgrims as authentic and contemporary pilgrims as turigrino's. This implies that a pilgrim is more authentic when re-enacting a historical pilgrimage. Havard argues that the starting point, the amount of things that are taken on the journey, and the use of facilities are contributing to the authenticity of one's journey.

Probing participants further to investigate the conflicting meanings of perceived authenticity in pilgrimage indicated that the motivation for undertaking a pilgrimage contributes to the perceived legitimacy of the practice as well. Matteo mentioned, "The problem is really doing

the Camino as a cheap vacation." A person who engages with the Camino by "going by bus from one town to another and just sleeping in an albergue to save money", would be a tourist according to Matteo. Whereas Luna, his partner who is accompanying him on the Camino, sees no problem "if you walk all day and then when you arrive in a small village (…) go out to eat well [and] drink a cup of wine".

To understand the nuance between a tourist and a pilgrim, I briefly recall the etymology of the word pilgrim which is described in the introduction. Wooding (2020) argues that being a pilgrim symbolizes two things: being in a place unknown to you and being in a state of physical and liminal movement. The latter resonates from the interviews. Whereas a tourist would engage in a circuitous journey for pleasure and finally return to the starting point. A pilgrim travels *through* liminal spaces, a physical, emotional, or metaphorical gap. Simply said, a liminal space is when a person is in a transitional period of their life. Diego, a Spanish man who was nearing the end of his study, had "to make a conclusion about [his] ways to take in the future". He does the Camino as a "catharsis", to emotionally discharge the accumulated effects of having to make a big decision. Another respondent, Emma, mentioned that she was going through a big transition, thus it made sense to her to do the Camino.

> *"I always wanted to do it [the Camino], but you need a moment in your life when to do it. So I finished the master['s degree] and already had this PhD position. (...) So I thought, this is the moment. Also, because I was getting married, you know. (...) It is quite a big transition in my life, so this is a good moment to do it."*

The findings reflect the prerequisite for a Compostela stated by the pilgrim's office. Namely, one needs to be in an attitude of search for the Camino to be legitimate. The interviews show that many pilgrims are in between life phases and expect that doing the Camino will help to organize their thoughts and find solutions to problems allowing them to move further in life.

Without finding a definite answer, I believe that the authenticity of a pilgrim lies in one's purpose for being on the Camino. Most pilgrims on the Camino seem to be looking for something, either: answers to concrete questions or finding one's deeper self (Oviedo et al., 2014).

4.1.2. Solitude amidst solidarity

> *"The people that I asked before to hike the Camino, all the people say almost the same things. (...) [They] told me that you are going to start alone, but you will not finish alone." (Diego)*

Throughout the year, individuals engage in the Camino pilgrimage. Statistical data from the Pilgrim's Reception Office (n.d.) show that thousands of pilgrims undertake the journey from March to October. During these months, encountering fellow pilgrims is unavoidable. During low season there are fewer people on the way, however, when walking Camino Frances (the French way) or Camino Portogués (the Portuguese way), which are the most popular ones, you are still bound to find others. Even in January, when the interviews took place and most albergues and cafés were closed, there were still pilgrims on the way.

During the interviews, many pilgrims talked about being alone among people. The interviewees agree that the Camino is something one does alone. Rick, an American pilgrim, said, "To me it seems like an individualist walk. (…) You might walk with somebody for a bit, (…) [and later] they're going on their way [again]". On the Camino, it happens often that pilgrims meet each other regularly on the way or in shared albergues. Some choose to walk parts of the way together. Interestingly, Anna, a young German girl who walks the Camino for the first time, mentions:

> *"[A pilgrim] is really real if you're doing it alone. (...) A small part of me is thinking [that] doing it in a group is somehow cheating. Because you have something else you can focus on. (...) If you meet [other pilgrims] on the Camino and you just share a few hundred meters or half a day or something and then you walk alone again, then it's not. But it feels like you should go most of [it] alone."*

Anna's perception of a 'real' pilgrim is that it is someone who does the pilgrimage primarily alone. Pilgrims often associate pilgrimage and solitude. Rick confirms this thought: "It's understood, (…) that people are on their *own* [emphasis added] trip."

Dictionary.com (2024) describes 'solitude' as a state of being alone and an absence of human activity. This definition is not in line with the solitude that participants speak of. Research on pilgrims' motivations shows that many pilgrims look for solitude when commencing their pilgrimage, which also contradicts the definition by Dictionary.com (Amaro et al., 2018; Basil,

2023; Den Breejen, 2007; Malis et al., 2023). Diego, the Spanish pilgrim, says: "I started the Camino completely alone (…) [but I] met [other pilgrims] and think that they are good partners." He continued to walk with them for the majority of the trail.

The inconsistency between the interviewees' responses regarding walking together versus walking in solitude is dissolved by a remark from Diego, "It [the Camino] is a good way to meet people. To know people. Even if you make a decision to do it lonely. You will finish together. And even if you walk together. You think lonely." This quote resonates with Mau's (2021) finding that walking in smaller groups does not necessarily diminish the experience of solitude.

Malis et al. (2023) describe solitude as "a condition where one opens up to spirituality, frees the ego from external impulses, and revives the mind by returning to oneself" (p. 587). Solitude in this sense is less dependent on being physically near or away from others, and more a personal subjective experience. Through solitude, pilgrims "re-conceptualize their view of the self, not seeing themselves as members of a certain social stratum" (Malis et al., 2023, p. 588). Pilgrimage allows people to "go away from the routine of your life," the Italian couple said. "Normally we do Caminos when we want to reset. (…) You don't have to think about the usual stuff you have to do in your normal life. (…) It's a reset [where] you don't have to think about home and work." Based on this, I argue that pilgrimage allows practitioners to break away from daily rituals and social structures. It endorses self-reflection because there is a lack of external stimuli on the trail which is present in one's home life.

Another example of solitude among others is expressed by the German Anna who talks about her experience. She walks in a group of people with whom she does not share a common language:

> *"Like yesterday, for example, I wasn't saying a word almost the whole day because I couldn't talk to them. They were just talking in Spanish and doing their stuff. But it was just nice to have them [around] somehow. Sometimes I was walking, like, a few meters before them. Just having them around. Because sometimes I was like, okay, it's hurting. And also I experienced like how it is somehow easy to ignore pain. A lot more than I would do it in my daily life."*

The young woman shares how a group of strangers brings her comfort, despite minimal interaction. The group shares a collective goal or purpose on the trail, revealing that pilgrimage

can be a solitary experience whilst also a communal endeavour. According to Hitchner et al. (2019), all pilgrims encounter personal challenges, transforming the challenge itself into a shared experience. These challenges are either physically shared with fellow pilgrims or cognitively, through the knowledge that others have walked the same path before. In this instance, the girl experiences pain but finds distraction in her company by physically being around them, forming a camaraderie.

Extending that thought, the interviewees spoke of solidarity as a relevant aspect of the Camino. Emma, the Dutch woman who finished the Camino last year, stresses the importance of solidarity between pilgrims:

> *"Being solidary with each other. That is the most important thing. It's not about you finishing your personal thing. But also sharing it. When someone is sick, for example, and you have the bottom bunk, you might give that bed to the person who is sick. You know, so he has a better bed."*

Solidarity "slowly grows when you walk together," Matteo said. "[It is] a kind of reciprocal help. (…) [For example,] I go to the supermarket, do you need anything?" or, "I know that a restaurant starts cooking at 8 [o'clock,] so I tell you." He noted that they are "small things" but nonetheless "normal rules of respect", arguing that these things are important aspects of the Camino.

The Italian Matteo and Luna did the Camino for the first time nine years ago and six times after that. Compared to then, "many more people [are] doing it [the Camino]", also "different people" are on the Camino nowadays. They experience that the growing number of people has an effect on the solidarity between pilgrims and the interaction with local inhabitants.

> "In the past people [locals] were more open. Friendly. (…) Now, especially the last 100 km, people are kind of tired, fed up. (…) Local people don't care anymore. (…) When you have 5000 people per day [passing by], you cannot say 5000 times 'Buen Camino, Buen Camino', of course."

Today, engaging with the Camino means that you will share the way with others. Especially closer to Santiago, more pilgrims travel the way. Despite sharing a common destination, each pilgrim has their own reason to do the pilgrimage, making it a solitary liminal journey. The solitude which the Camino offers gives room for self-reflection by breaking daily patterns and

social structures. However, sharing challenges and experiences fosters camaraderie and solidarity, making the Camino a solitary journey among people.

4.1.3. Embracing the simple life: Camino's route to retreat and flow

"After having put my shoes on and let my thoughts wander, I am sure of one thing – to put one foot in front of the other is one of the most important things we do." (Kagge, 2020, p. 9)

Walking is the process of placing one foot in front of the other using muscles and bones and repeating this multiple times. While some start walking at one year old, others take a little longer. For most non-disabled people, walking is so normalized that it does not require a second thought. The activity of walking from point A to B is seemingly so simple. By engaging in the Camino one chooses to commit days, weeks, or months of prolonged walking. Physically, this may be challenging to some while it is a breeze to others. For example, Matteo and Luna, the experienced Camino hikers, regularly do month-long thru-hikes. They do the Camino as a way of maintaining their fitness for bigger trips. For others, the journey may be too challenging, like Greta, who cut her Camino short because her body ceased working properly.

While all pilgrims have unique bodies that dictate the flow of the journey, all respondents agreed that the Camino offered a "simple life". This is reinforced by the fact that most albergues allow a pilgrim to stay for only one night, making it difficult to sojourn in one place and forcing pilgrims to keep walking. Only on some occasions is a pilgrim allowed to stay longer, for example, when they are sick. The future PhD candidate Emma describes how she, after arriving at the albergue around three o'clock, decides to continue walking, "because, what else can I do besides just walk, you know". Emma's statement shows that the Camino offers little distraction from walking.

Many pilgrims on the Camino specifically look to experience a simple lifestyle (Amaro et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2021). Zhang et al. (2021) describe how the simple and slow lifestyle frees pilgrims from the influence of consumerism and the pressures of modern life. Whereas individuals are confined by their social sphere at home, being on the Camino allows pilgrims to separate themselves from the many obligations that society presents (Mau et al., 2021), e.g., social obligations, commitments to their job, and societal pressure. When asked about the meaning of the Camino Luna explains that it is a way to reset.

"Well, it's a way to go away from the routine of your life. Normally we do Caminos when we want to reset. You know, before you work, you are in your house. Routine, routine, routine. [When] you need a reset, you start the Camino. (...) You don't have to think about the usual stuff you have to do in your normal life, so it's kind of a reset. Mind reset."

Distancing from daily routines is easily achieved on the Camino. Being away from home nurtures the establishment of *Communitas*. Communitas, used in anthropology, is "the sense of sharing and intimacy that develops among persons who experience liminality as a group" (Dictionary.com, 2024). Devereaux and Carnegie (2006) argue that communitas is formed through sharing emotional and physical challenges while communally travelling through a landscape that is not ordinary. The liminal and physical journey which pilgrims share creates a unique bond among them, a connection which cannot be found in their existing social spheres. Within communitas apply different social rules or structures than in a pilgrim's normal life. This touches on the Bourdieusian notion of doxa as being on the Camino teaches a pilgrim new common sensical social rules.

Becoming part of a new social sphere enables a pilgrim to temporarily interrupt their day-to-day affairs, which Devereux and Carnegie (2006) call a "timeless present" (p. 51). "I think that part of [pilgrimage] is distancing yourself, not only physically but also sort of emotionally, and spiritually, from your ordinary life," Emma says. Engaging with the Camino offers a place in space which allows pilgrims to temporarily disconnect from the ordinary and live a simple life, sharing with others.

The composition of individuals that are walking together is different for each Camino spread over space-time. Meaning that a group starting their Camino in France is a different group than those who start in Sarria, Spain. Also, pilgrims walk at different paces and distances, contributing to a daily changing constellation of individuals. In other words, at the same time, in different locations, different groups of pilgrims walk together. The groups change in terms of composition because all pilgrims walk in different paces. Additionally, new pilgrims start their journey at some point where a group already is present, changing the constellation. Regardless of the changeability of groups, there still heeds the notion of living a simple lifestyle adhering to a corresponding social structure and doxa. For instance, during my pilgrimage, I met bankers, bricklayers, and students. They all came from very different social spheres but chose the simple life that the Camino offers. Of course, 'simple' is subjective as the banker stayed in expensive hotels which I do not consider simple. Nonetheless, he enjoyed the

simplicity of his Camino. Sharing the idea of a simple life with embodied travelling constitutes, what I call, the Camino bubble. Within this bubble, all pilgrims embrace the simplicity of the Camino. Being in this bubble is part of what Devereux and Carnegie (2006) mean by living in the timeless present. The bubble dissolves when pilgrims arrive in Santiago and their journey comes to an end. They return home, returning to their day-to-day affairs.

Diego, the Spanish student, talked extensively about his need to move away from his established social spheres to "cancellate" "recursive thoughts". Diego started the Camino to "make a conclusion about [his] future". If he stayed home, he would not have been able to stop his "handicap" which is "overthinking". The Camino allowed Diego to get "out of the automatic [thinking schemas]". He argues that a balance between walking and talking with fellow pilgrims "makes the brain throw up", with which he means that "the Camino made [him] stop time to think about [his future] but with the other perspective". Greta also went to engage with the Camino because she wanted to find an answer to a problem. She explicitly mentioned that if she "stayed at home, there were going to be too many interruptions", which would keep her from reflecting on it.

The predictability of the Camino seems to be what many pilgrims enjoy about it. "It's quite a simple life," Matteo says. "For the mind, it is very relaxing because you don't have to worry," Luna adds. Luna continues to describe that the Camino offers little distractions:

> *"Once you have called the albergue to check if it's open, you don't have to worry about anything. Just walk. You follow the arrows. What do you have to worry about? Nothing really. (...) [It's] very basic, place to sleep, food, dry your clothes if they are wet. (...) Very very simple life."*

The simplicity of the Camino offers pilgrims time to reflect while fully engaging with the activity without distractions. Hence, I suggest a parallel between the simplicity of the Camino and the experience of *flow*. Flow is described by Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) as the subjective state of mind wherein the practitioner experiences intense and focused concentration on the present moment. Matteo mentions how their days are "really streamlined" on the Camino. There are only "a few points [things] you have to accomplish each day. And then plan for the next day". Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) also mention how flow enables merging action and awareness, which can also be attributed to Matteo's remark about being streamlined. He and his partner Luna have accomplished a set routine which they execute without thinking every day. One could argue that

Another characteristic of flow is the loss of reflective self-consciousness. This is nicely captured by Anna: "Yesterday at some point I realized that I'm thinking way less. (…) I don't actually know what I'm doing all the time. I'm just walking and there's not too much happening in my head". However, while Anna's statement confirms Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi's description of flow, another respondent, Emma, mentions that she expected to have fewer thoughts than she did on her Camino. From this, I conclude that not all characteristics of flow have to be met for a pilgrim to experience it. Like Matteo says: "You can walk every Camino in your own way and it's different for everyone." Emma experienced flow, albeit through overcoming the physical challenge and pushing her limits. Overcoming "just-manageable challenges" is what Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2002, p. 90) found to be the condition wherein the experience of flow is embedded.

The last two characteristics of flow, according to Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2002), are a distortion of temporal experience (losing track of time) and that the experience of the activity is intrinsically rewarding. The latter is commonly expressed by pilgrims who proclaim that the journey is more rewarding than the destination. This arguable cliché phrase holds especially true for more experienced pilgrims. They may opt to shun Santiago and abort their Camino prior to reaching the city. To this notable group of pilgrims, the journey is the primary reason to engage in the Camino which is why they do not necessarily have to reach Santiago.

The Camino offers a simple lifestyle that holds few distractions from the activity of walking. It allows pilgrims to find a new daily routine which is predictable and simple. The routine and lack of distractions may constitute the experience of flow. Additionally, engaging in the Camino allows pilgrims to halt their ordinary lives. The Camino offers a space away from home and social structures. Moving away from the (social) obligations of one's personal life provides the mind space needed to formulate conclusions to existing problems. The idea of embodying a simple life is shared among pilgrims creating and reinforcing the perceived social stratosphere wherein all pilgrims are equal, regardless of an individual's background.

4.2. Competence

4.2.1. The 'packing' in backpacking

"Is there anything you learned from the Camino?"

"Packing, because you have to carry it." (Matteo & Luna)

Doing a pilgrimage means being away from home for a prolonged period of time. Like with any form of travel, a pilgrim needs to bring luggage for the journey. What one brings on the journey differs for each individual. Some people bring huge backpacks with them, while others carry the bare minimum. Many forums and webpages offer packing lists for the Camino but there is little scientific literature on the topic. A general rule of thumb is that the weight of the backpack should not exceed ten per cent of one's body weight. Of course, not everyone adheres to or knows this rule.

Based on the interviews, I believe that experienced hikers carry less. Matteo, an Italian mountain guide who does regular thru-hikes all over the world, adheres to the 'less is more' principle. "You carry your fear and insecurity," he says. His partner Luna argues that many inexperienced hikers pack too much stuff. They "are worried because [they] say 'I may need this' and 'this could be useful in case of emergency,' and put it in [their backpack]." Luna points out that many inexperienced pilgrims pack their bags while thinking about everything that can go wrong on the way. They bring things to counter each problem, resulting in a heavy backpack. Matteo explains his view on the Camino in terms of packing.

> *"I believe in the Camino, many people, young people at least, but also old people, can understand [learn] that they can accomplish more than they think. And that gives you self-confidence. And so, you remove the insecurity and the stuff related to the insecurity. Then you have problems, you fight your fear, and then you stop carrying your fear. That way your pocket [becomes] lighter."*

Matteo believes that the more experienced a pilgrim becomes, the less they take with them. Both the German Anna and the Dutch Emma were doing their first Camino. Both had their regrets about bringing certain items on the way as they realised that they were not going to use them. Emma brought "*way* too much," she said, referring to the screwdriver and a measuring tape that was accidentally still in her backpack when she packed it. Anna learned that if she needed something, she could probably get it somewhere on the way.

Greta, the older Italian woman, mentioned that the weight of her backpack was keeping her from achieving what she wanted to get out of the Camino. She engaged with the Camino to organize her thoughts while walking Camino Fisterra. However, her backpack was slowing her down and eventually, it prevented her from finishing her Camino. She felt that it would help to "have an even thinner backpack, even fewer clothes, [and thus] have fewer things to worry

about." The parallel Greta creates between having fewer things and worrying less, strikes me as a typical mindset for experienced pilgrims. This mindset arguably overlaps with other long-distance hiking practices. To carry fewer and lighter things is often something hiking practitioners strive towards.

Luna sees "many people carrying stuff and then day by day, they leave pieces of equipment, (…) like pieces of clothing". It shows that, as they go, pilgrims realise the importance of some equipment and the inessentiality of others. The Camino provides an educational experience which teaches that someone does not need many things in their life. This resonates with Gidden's (2005) argument that the history of an agent underlies the reflexivity towards the practice. Meaning that as a pilgrim spends more time on the Camino, the more they realise which material things are necessary to them. The experience being part of their history, as it is happening, affects the knowledge regarding backpacking and thus the action that is paired with it. The interviews show that time spent on the Camino influences the way participants perceive material goods. Those who have not engaged in the Camino or other long-distance hikes before, expect to need much more equipment than experienced pilgrims.

Knowing which pieces of equipment are necessary to bring on the journey comes with experience. It shows that the Camino requires the practical knowledge and skill of packing a bag. Every piece of gear which is not used on the way is an unnecessary weight that slows down or even prevents a pilgrim from finishing the journey. Therefore, carrying fewer things has the pragmatic result of a lighter backpack. But, as Matteo mentioned, the inexperienced pilgrim carries their "fear and insecurity". A preliminary pilgrim may research online what should be on their packing list and add things in case of an emergency. However, as my interviews show, it is the embodied experience of the Camino which enables the realisation that one does not need as many worldly, tangible things to engage with the Camino.

4.2.2. Well begun is half done, spontaneity versus preparing.

"I'm not a great preparer on these things. I just get there and get going."
(Rick)

There are many ways to be informed regarding the workings of the Camino. Some people, like the Italian Greta, ask for information at a pilgrim's office in their home country. Others look for their information online. Rick, for example, turned to online forums where he asked experienced pilgrims for their advice and experience. Social media offers platforms for people to share information about the Camino. Also, guidebooks are a viable source of information.

Since the 2000s, there has been an interest in the Camino by film directors as well. There are many films featuring the Camino. A popular movie is 'The Way' by Emilio Estevez, which has inspired people to do the Camino. It offers a romanticized image of the Camino as the main characters walk the whole way in their jeans and barely endure physical hardship, which is inherently part of the Camino. However, the movie acts as a source of information nonetheless. The popularity of the Camino means that information is abundant regarding the different routes to Santiago, packing lists, behavioural rules, where to find places to sleep, how to find the way, and so forth.

Greta offers a great example of how people would make full use of resources to plan their journey. She worked as a *greeter* for a pilgrim's office in Italy. A greeter informs people about the Camino. They offer advice regarding all aspects of the pilgrimage. She told a story of a woman who had planned each day of her Camino. This included distances she planned to walk, which sites to visit, and where to sleep. It was written down in a finely decorated journal that the woman would carry with her on her journey. Her reasoning was that she did not want to miss anything of relevance. Greta advices against composing and fixating on a tight schedule like this. Emma also argues against the type of pilgrimage that is set in stone:

> *"Because sometimes you walk a bit faster or slower. Or you decide that you want to go to Fisterra or Muxia [another Camino], or you want to do something else. So if possible, I would definitely propose to give yourself that time."*

All respondents agree that a certain flexibility during the Camino is desired for an enjoyable experience. Despite the abundance of available information, almost all respondents stated that they prepared very little for the Camino. Even Rick, who mentioned that he informed himself on online forums, admits that he otherwise barely prepared. Emma argues that her preparation was "almost non-existent" and that she "rarely prepared this poorly". Anna's preparation consisted of a "two-minute Google research", "last-minute ordering stuff" and packing her bag "in the middle of the night" before departing. Acknowledging the small sample size, no generalisation can be made regarding the way pilgrims prepare and inform themselves about the Camino. Interesting to note, however, is that all participants share the idea that extensive preparation is not needed to commence on the Camino.

The Camino is very well-marked with pretty much every intersection containing a yellow arrow in the direction of Santiago. As an experienced mountain guide, Matteo emphasizes that the

Camino landscape "tolerates a lot of beginners". Luna argues that it has to do with the logistics of the Camino:

> *"You have everything. You don't need a GPS or maps because everything is perfectly and well signed, so you just follow the arrows. You have places to sleep. (...) You have a lot of intermediate stops. You have a lot of support. You have everything from luggage transport to food to medical attention."*

Luna argues that the Camino is a trail which is easily engaged with by inexperienced hikers. In terms of competence in the sense of practical knowledge, there is much information about the Camino allowing detailed planning. While some pilgrims swear that preparedness is a necessary good when commencing on their pilgrimage. My respondents all agree that being ill-prepared on the Camino is not a problem and should even be encouraged. Anna specifically mentioned being "excited about not to know a lot" and to "*just* [emphasis added] do it". I argue that the relative ease of this Camino is partly the reason that it is so popular. Anybody can engage with the Camino without proper gear or knowledge. All a pilgrim should figure out before commencing the pilgrimage is the starting point. The rest will be offered on the way.

4.2.3. History

> *"The idea that people have been walking this route for more than a thousand years, I found very moving. And that was the importance to me of the Santiago experience." (Greta)*

The Camino is a network of routes that all share one destination: the tomb of Saint James in the Cathedral of Santiago. According to the New Testament, Saint James was one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ. Christian tradition acknowledges his remains as a significant relic. Often seeking penance or to increase piety, historical pilgrims journey toward places of religious relevance. Relevance was established by acquiring many highly valued relics and shrines. Relics like the remains of Saint James have historically been managed by local rulers and churches as they allow control over the flow of pilgrims (Wooding, 2020). Having many or highly valued relics and shrines, thus, increases the pull factor for pilgrims. As pilgrims bring wealth, commodifying relics and pilgrimage was a common practice in the High Middle Ages (Wooding, 2020). Saint James, being one of the original apostles of Jesus Christ, was very highly appreciated, contributing to the popularity of Santiago as a pilgrim destination.

The several Caminos to Santiago came into existence as kings and prominent disciples have undertaken the pilgrimage from different originations. This created the contemporary network of Caminos (Maria, 2023). In the 12th century, *Codex Calixtinus* was written. This manuscript was an anthology of background detail and advice for pilgrims following the Way of Saint James, which today, is the most popular Camino Francés. I suggest a parallel between the Codex and a modern tourist guidebook. The apparent need for such a transcript shows that the Camino has been a popular pilgrimage since the 12th century.

The fact that the Camino has been travelled for almost a thousand years, resulted in millions of pilgrims undertaking the same pilgrimage across many centuries. The knowledge that many others trod in the same footsteps, Rick describes as "magical". He describes the feeling of an "aura" that is strongly felt on the Camino:

> *"I consider it's more of an awareness. There were people a thousand years ago who this was extremely sacred to them. (...) And this was a special place where there were, there was a life pilgrimage for them. So there's an energy of, I imagine, special energy or radiation. Something deep in civilization. Thousands of lives. Ancient. You feel that at sacred places."*

The seemingly cryptic statement by Rick shows that taking part in an age-old practice like the Camino manifests a recognizable feeling. Emma described it as "being part of a greater whole", while Greta found "the idea that people have been walking this route for more than thousand years (…) very moving".

The rich history of the Camino contributes to a feeling of belonging. Seeking to explain this notion, I draw from the concept of *cultural continuity*. Cultural continuity refers to the transmission of meanings and values through time and generations (*Cultural Continuity*, n.d.). Zhang et al. (2021) state that pilgrims desire a historic experience when engaging with the Camino. Pilgrims therefore welcome the accompanying traditions such as carrying one's bag, walking long distances, and living under simple conditions, which are commonly accepted as traditions that pilgrims of old endured. These traditions are commonly perceived as authentic and underly the way many contemporary pilgrims travel.

I argue that the perceived historicity of the Camino finds its validity through the reproduction of the practice as well as in the fact that it received the UNESCO Cultural Heritage status. Meaning that the Camino's history is what grants it its authenticity and by extension the aura or the feeling of belonging to something greater. Pilgrims, as agents, reproduce the practice of

the Camino by reenacting the journey, reinforcing the practice's authenticity. This recursive process is what I believe to be the foundation that underlies the feeling that the interviewees spoke of. Bourdieu (2010) discusses the importance for cultural groups to adhere to existing structures as they give meaning to the group itself as well as represent the group towards the world. The structure surrounding the Camino has been entrenched in history. Through repeated recreation of the structure, it developed into the archetype that it is today. Now, also institutionalised hegemonic authorities in the sociohistorical field (read: UNESCO) affect the subjective experience of the Camino as a historical journey.

History, as an aspect of competence, is situated in the cognition of the practitioners of the Camino. Like Giddens (2005) stated, the history of an agent underlies their reflexivity, and thus the embodied subjective feeling felt when taking part in an ancient ritual. Through the reproduction of the practice, the structures stay intact. The rich history of the Camino contributes to the perceived depth of the practice. While its history is always changing and therefore asserts new influence on the practice and its carriers, history in itself is not manipulatable like other aspects. Making it an interesting constituent of the competence element that is always present, albeit unmanipulable.

4.3. Material

4.3.1. Albergues de Peregrinos, Credential del Peregrino, and the Compostela

Most pilgrims spend their nights in *albergue de peregrinos* (hereafter referred to as 'albergues'). These are hostels specifically for pilgrims. While some albergues allow tourists, they often give primacy to pilgrims. This means that a tourist may be asked to leave when a pilgrim is asking for lodgings. Each albergue is differently equipped but often has basic accommodations: bunk beds and a shower. Albergues are generously spread along the different Camino's. However, generally, the closer to Santiago, the more albergues can be found. There is a network of albergue de la Xunta. These are region-funded and offer an overnight stay for a low fixed price. Currently, that price is set at ten euros, whereas during my Camino in 2018, it used to be five. It is not possible to reserve a place at an albergue de la Xunta. They operate with a first-come-first-serve principle. For many other albergues, it is possible to make a reservation. During high season this is often necessary if a pilgrim wishes to secure a bed. Albergues are often reach their capacity due to the many pilgrims undertaking the Camino. Some traditional albergues are considered *donativos*. A donativo is run by volunteers who take care of the accommodation and sometimes provide dinner to the pilgrims who stay the night. 'Donativo' means 'donation' in English, these albergues, thus, rely on the donations of pilgrims. They preserve the historical

fashion of pilgrimage, where a pilgrim had to rely on the goodwill of natives and offer what they could spare. A pilgrim gains access to the albergue upon showing their *Credential del Peregrino* (see Figure 3).

All pilgrims carry a Credential. One can acquire the Credential by ordering it through pilgrim groups which are based in many European countries. Or, as Diego did, they can be picked up at a random bakery situated along the way. The Credential serves as proof of the journey that a pilgrim took. Along the way, the pilgrim collects stamps in the document at various instances, e.g., churches, albergues, bakeries, etc. Together the stamps form a 'stamp trail'. It shows where the pilgrim starts, which route is travelled, and how long it takes the pilgrim to arrive in Santiago. The official pilgrim's office in Santiago uses it to confirm whether a pilgrim has travelled the whole way by physical propulsion and did not take a taxi to travel the whole way. The validity of such a measuring tool can be argued.

Upon showing the Credential at the Pilgrim's Office in Santiago, the pilgrim receives their *Compostela*. The Compostela is the official accreditation issued by the church. It is a certificate which serves as proof that the pilgrim completed the Camino in Santiago. The Italian couple, who walked the Camino six times before, discuss the value and validity of the Credential and the Compostela, as they have seen it change over time.

Figure 3

Credential de Peregrino (source: https://www.chemins-compostelle.com/la-credencial)

> *"Four years ago, (...) they where really checking the Credential. (...) [Today,] they don't even check where you stopped. They don't look through the stamps. Not really. It's just 'ok, here is your Compostela'. (...) The part where you receive your Compostela is now, you have to put your own data in the computer. (...) [They used to write] your name on the Compostela by hand with beautiful letters [calligraphy]. Now it is printed by computer."*

As mentioned in the authenticity chapter, the Compostela has been in use for hundreds of years. It started as a badge in the shape of a scallop but developed into the paper version it is today. Its use stayed the same over hundreds of years but, as the Italian couple argue, its value changed over time. A reason for the decreased perceived value lies in the seeming effort that is put into making the Compostela. Whereas it used to give the impression of being an authentic, ancient handwritten document. It is now a printed piece of paper which is easily recreated at home. Also, the fact that the people who check the Credential barely look at it before confirming that the pilgrims' way is legitimate, appears "lax", as Matteo said. The sheer number of people who turn up to receive a Compostela is arguably the reason for the laxness of the distributor of the documents. There simply is not enough time to put an effort into writing the document when many pilgrims wait in line to also receive their accreditation. Regardless of the perceived value of the Credential and the Compostela, they are still very strongly interwoven with the Camino experience. Looking at the Camino as a practice, it is interesting to see to which degree the Compostela as an aspect of the practice, will keep its position being an important material element of it. History has shown that the physical shape of the Compostela has changed. Future policy and management will partly dictate the meaning preliminary pilgrims will give to the ancient document, influencing the link between de Credential and other aspects of the practice.

4.3.2. Milestones and markings

The geographical magnitude of the Camino means there is not one type of landscape that befits the Camino. However, when engaging with the Camino, a pilgrim soon finds yellow arrows to follow and manmade milestones (Figure 4). This typical marker is what shows pilgrims the way to Santiago. The milestone is a concrete or stone bollard engraved with the number of kilometres to Santiago, a yellow arrow and the depiction of the Saint James scallop. Especially in the Galicia region, where Santiago is located, there is an abundance of these signposts, namely every 500 metres on the way. On Caminos that are further away from Santiago, the stones are less frequent. If there is no milestone, the way is marked by a yellow arrow or solely the scallop pointing towards Santiago.

Figure 4

Camino milestone. (Source: own work)

When the scallop is the only marking that guides a pilgrim, there are two ways of interpreting it to decide which way to go. When outside Galicia, the side where all lines converge is the way towards Santiago. E.g. when the lines converge to the left, that is the way to follow. When inside Galicia, it is the other way around. Where the lines diverge is the way the pilgrim should walk.

4.3.3. Painful feet and joyful spirit

"I felt like, not that I had to, but that I wanted to suffer, you know. And it felt really good." (Emma)

Besides a carrier of practice, the body is also a part of the material aspects that form practices (Røpke, 2009; Shove et al., 2012). In this case, the body is perceived strictly in a mechanical sense, a mechanical corporeal thing. On the Camino, one relies on their body as the main form of transportation. It is the only way to continue forward on the path. Without the body, the practice would not be possible and thus has great influence over the practice.

The physiological body is different for each unique individual. All respondents were able-bodied enough to do the Camino on foot. Nevertheless, five out of six mentioned a lack of function of their bodily apparatus during their journey, be it in terms of pain or tiredness. Luna

argued that "it's normal. When you do such a long trail, such a long Camino, it's normal that there are days when you suffer." Diego, a fit and young pilgrim, mentioned "I'm just tired. I don't have pain too much. [Not] more [then] expect[ed]. It's okay. You are hiking. You need to feel, or you need to expect a feeling like tired. Or a tiny bit pain in your feet. You are hiking."

Based on the responses, I conclude that experiencing physical discomfort and pain is inherently part of the Camino. Although pain is a part of the practice, it is not something all pilgrims are specifically looking for. By probing this inquiry, I found contradicting answers. During the first few days of her Camino, Emma pushed her bodily limits to "walk off all the stress from prior days. Just by wrecking myself [physically], you know." Prior to starting the Camino, Emma finished her master's thesis and prepared for a PhD position for which she had to move abroad. Walking in the Camino allowed her to unstress by experiencing and pushing through pain. Luna agrees that pain is part of the Camino, but it is not something she is looking for: "It can happen that you suffer like, I had a blister, I'm suffering, it happened, but I don't look for it, it happened, I'm suffering, but I prefer it didn't happen. I don't look for it."

When hiking long distances, physical discomfort is inevitable. All pilgrims deal with it eventually. Luik (2012) vividly describes how her fellow pilgrim has bloody blisters, a sore knee, and problems with his Achilles tendon, yet somehow keeps going and seemingly enjoying the walk. Luik explains that for many people the difference between a pilgrimage and a recreational walk is the suffering. She argues that the physical body cannot be separated from one's perception and experience. Implying that pain partly shapes the experience of the Camino.

As suffering shapes the experience, it can also be part of self-reflection. O'neil (1985) describes how non-industrialised people are "called upon to think the world with their bodies" (as cited in Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1987, p. 23), whereas Westerners are losing the "human shape of things" (Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1987, p. 23) due to technology and machines, resulting in a loss of touch with one's body. Experiencing enduring pain, however, makes you aware of the body in a way that is different from the mundane. The embodied experience can contribute to the transition of the liminal space that many pilgrims are in between (Luik, 2012). Anna mentioned:

> *"And also I experienced like how it's somehow easy to ignore pain. A lot more than I would do it in my daily life. Like I would be like a little crybaby, having this pain in my daily life. But now it's okay-ish. You have to go. And I'm not even questioning it, you know. Just like part of it or. And I'm not like*

even thinking, ah there are two days left no, I will do them. Of course I will."

From her pilgrimage, Anna learned of her bodily limits and that she could go on where she expected to fail, increasing her self-confidence and capability. Emma also mentions how her pilgrimage attributed to "a lot of confidence in [herself]". And that she is "much stronger than expected". Luik (2012) found similar results, namely that some pilgrims refuse to take painkillers when they have severe blisters as they want "to face the pain of pilgrimage, not hide from it" (p. 37).

Not all pilgrims accept and undergo suffering. Along the Camino are an increasing number of services to assist pilgrims on their journey, e.g., taxis, bag-carrying services, and luxurious hotels. Using these services is a controversial topic among pilgrims. There is a consensus that those who need it should be able to use it. As Matteo said, "If you need your bag to be carried because you have problems, it's ok. If you need a better bed because you have back problems, no issue. The problem is really doing the Camino as a cheap vacation." When both the number of services and pilgrims is growing, more people will use the services to "take it easy" and "go under the wire," as Greta said. When interviewed, she was thinking of stopping earlier than she had planned. The way was more kilometres than expected and she felt weaker than expected. When asked about having her luggage carried, she laughed and mentioned that she originally connected that idea to "something very close to cheating".

According to Matteo and Luna, the Camino is changing "from a spiritual Camino to a spiritual business". Due to the number of pilgrims and the offered services, more people will travel the way to Santiago without physically suffering. The future will tell how this affects the link between hardship and modern pilgrimage, altering the practice of the Camino.

4.3.4. The internet as a mediator

Today, in the West, the internet is widely accessible and an increasing number of people become proficient in using it. It is not a tangible thing that is inherently part of the Camino but it certainly influences the practice. Shove (2017) defines it as an "infrastructural relation" (p. 157), things that are necessary but do not directly interact with the practice. The necessity of the internet for the existence of Camino can be argued, as the practice existed long before the invention of electricity. However, while the Camino existed before the internet, today, it influences the way people engage with it.

Before the internet was widely accessible, pilgrims would inform themselves about the Camino through guidebooks, pilgrim centres, and acquaintances. The emergence of the internet widened the pool of information exponentially. For instance, the internet enabled Rick to ask for advice on forums from complete strangers: "I asked questions about [Camino] del Norte. How many folks are there? (…) What's the climate like? I got feedback on that. And they were pretty much right." The internet provides a platform of communication that is used to spread practical information about the Camino.

Not only practical information is communicated online, but also ways of conduct are asked about and shared. For example, pilgrims may inform themselves about 'Camino etiquettes' and ways to behave on their journey. The answers to these questions are not as fixed as answers regarding the route. They are subject to the subjective reflexivity of practitioners of the practice.

The internet facilitates individuals to transmit their reflexivity on the Camino. Previously, one's preconceived idea of the Camino would be shaped by institutionalised instances. Today, what it means to do the Camino becomes more fluid and volatile. The social structure that dictates the actions of practitioners endures a wider diversity of pressure, as a wider diversity of voices is acknowledged.

Concluding, the accessibility to the internet changes the way people inform themselves about the Camino. It also influences the socially constructed, taken-for-granted idea of what it means to do the Camino. While it is not a tangible thing (e.g. the Compostela or a backpack), it does indirectly influence the practice of the Camino and should be acknowledged as an important aspect.

4.4. Connecting elements and meaning-making of the practice

4.4.1. Explanatory narrative

Shove et al. (2012) assume that meaning-making in the social world happens through practices. As mentioned, the current thesis assumes that a practice consists of three elements, which in turn are formed through smaller aspects. The aspects described above cannot be understood in isolation as they are always linked with each other. The links between the aspects are the foundation of the Camino as a social practice. Analysing these links, thus, offers an understanding of the Camino as a practice as well as the social structures reinforcing the practice. The links between the aspects of the elements are not consecutive or hierarchical. They

form complex nodes and should be understood as a whole. The following provides a descriptive account of the nodes which demonstrates the links between the element-forming aspects.

This first example presents how knowledge, as an aspect of competence, and the idea of the Camino as a transformative experience, an aspect of meaning, are linked with experiencing pain and living a simple lifestyle. Before commencing pilgrimage, many pilgrims-to-be are in a liminal state. This person may have finished their education and wants to travel the world before settling, be a recent widow who needs to accept that their life partner will never come back and who needs to organise their thoughts or is someone on the verge of changing jobs. These individuals have a preconceived idea that the Camino will offer them space to think, find answers, or distance themselves from their daily lives. They expect that the Camino will bring them something. This something is different for everyone, e.g., answers to questions or an escape of existing social structures. While its variables are unique, it assists the pilgrim in moving from one liminal space to the next. It is the preconceived knowledge that underlies the notion of a transformative experience.

Pain, which is inherently part of pilgrimage, is connected to the meaning that the Camino is a transformative experience. By overcoming pain, pilgrims learn that they are stronger than expected which nurtures self-confidence and stimulates personal growth. Pain, therefore, enables the pilgrim to move from one liminal space to the next. Furthermore, the aspect of pain is a node in itself which relates to all three elements. Pain always includes the body as an aspect of the material element. When experiencing pain, the bodily apparatus is to some extent malfunctioning. The experience of pain, however, is subjective. It creates physical and mental boundaries for the pilgrim. Pain, hence, is also part of the meaning element of the practice. The Camino offers a microcosm wherein the pilgrim gains experience with and knowledge of their bodies, which falls under competence. They learn what their body's limitations are and how far they can push themselves. The example here shows that the aspect of pain is part of all key elements of the practice depending on the analysing perspective.

The idea of living a simple lifestyle also adds to the meaning of the Camino as a transformative experience. Through living a simple lifestyle, an obvious link between the material and competence elements emerges. Inexperienced pilgrims learn through the Camino that they do not need many 'things' to fare well, often leaving obsolete items behind during their journey. The competence of a pilgrim in terms of practical knowledge (i.e. knowing what to bring and what is obsolete) is connected to the number of things a pilgrim carries. Matteo mentioned in the interview, "You carry your fear and insecurity". He expresses that packing skills and the

number of items carried relate to the meaning of fear and insecurity. This example demonstrates once more that one aspect forms a node which relates to all key elements. Interestingly, the idea of simple living has been shown to transcend the Camino. Zhang et al. (2021) mention that after finishing their Camino, pilgrims continue to uphold the view of not needing much, countering the consumerism that the modern Western world is entangled with.

The idea that the Camino is a transformative experience is reinforced through the internet. Information regarding the Camino is widely accessible through the many websites and forums online. The internet offers a platform for individuals to share their reflexivity regarding the Camino. This means that through the internet people are enabled to share personal stories and offer advice on packing one's bag, how to plan the trip, and how to behave on the trail, all affecting the doxa. The internet as an aspect of the material element of the practice is strongly interwoven with the competence element. It changes the way people inform themselves and establish a doxa concerning the Camino. Most information used to be produced by institutionalised publishers ensuring their hegemonic position over the Bourdieusian field of the Camino. Now, however, everyone is enabled to produce and spread information, asserting pressure on the existing dominant structures.

Pilgrims sharing their stories online is part of the recursive process which affects the links between the practice-forming elements. Through this process, links between authenticity and other aspects are fortified, altered, and dissolved. However, not only pilgrims use the internet. Companies are also online for promotion purposes. I argue that the online presence of businesses influences the perceived authenticity of the Camino. Through advertising, companies encourage pilgrims to make use of their products. For instance, a restaurant or private albergue benefits greatly from the many thousand pilgrims that come by each month. As companies often have a profit motive, they hold different interests in the perceived authenticity of a pilgrimage. They could offer an authentic Camino experience with a luxurious dinner and a fancy hotel to sleep in every day. What they offer as an authentic experience contrasts with what my respondents perceive as authentic. However, as there is an increasing number of businesses offering such experiences, more pilgrims will assume that it is part of an authentic pilgrimage and include it in their reproduction of the pilgrimage. It shows how the internet enables companies to assert pressure on the meaning of the Camino, and by extension, the whole practice.

Companies do not only affect the meaning but also the material element of the practice. With the number of businesses along the Camino steadily increasing, their influence grows. These

businesses change the appearance of the Camino and also the physical route. At multiple locations, pilgrims are offered to take an alternative route. These alternative routes are marked with a sign saying 'route complementario', as opposed to 'route histórico'. These routes are not the historical route of the Camino but lead pilgrims into towns that offer services, e.g., groceries, restaurants, and hotels. Matteo expresses his frustrations regarding this development, "[The Camino] is changing from a spiritual Camino to a spiritual business." It demonstrates how the increasing number of businesses relates to the material element of the practice which then also affects the meaning. When a pilgrim is forced to choose between a historical or an alternative route, they have to actively decide what 'kind' of Camino they want to do. This leads to questioning the authenticity of the Camino and challenging the hegemonic beliefs in the field.

The growing number of businesses is due to an increasing number of pilgrims on the Camino, reciprocally influencing each other. Physical bodies, as an aspect of the material element, affect the practice of the Camino in multiple ways. As aforementioned, the increasing number of people interests businesses to establish along the way. The number of people also affects the perceived authenticity of the journey and of other pilgrims. It leads to contemporary pilgrims differentiating between real *peregrinos* and *turigrinos*, a development which occurred in the last decade. They distinguish the 'authentic' way of pilgrimage from an apparent 'inauthentic' or 'touristic' way. Many of the respondents agree that, for example, sleeping in hotels is not something a real pilgrim would do. However, when all albergues in a town are full due to reaching their capacity, pilgrims are forced to either stay in a hotel or take a taxi to the next town where an albergue is still taking pilgrims. It shows that in some cases a pilgrim is forced to deviate from reenacting an authentic journey due to the increasing number of bodies on the Camino. It pressures the perceived notion of authenticity. This example shows the intricacy of and the tension that some links between the aspects of the practice endure.

The number of bodies on the Camino also reveals issues regarding the Compostela. Ever since the Camino gained popularity in the ninth century, the Compostela has been issued to pilgrims who travelled the way to Santiago. As it has been part of the Camino for ages, the Compostela is an inextricable aspect of it. However, the number of pilgrims who finish the Camino each day renders it impossible for the Compostela issuing instance to handwrite each certificate. The pilgrim's office resorts to printing the certificates after having the pilgrim fill in their travel details (e.g. name of the pilgrim, starting point of the journey, days travelled) on the computer themselves. The Compostela is of arguable significance to the Camino due to its historical relevance. I say arguably because, historically, its purpose has not changed in hundreds of years.

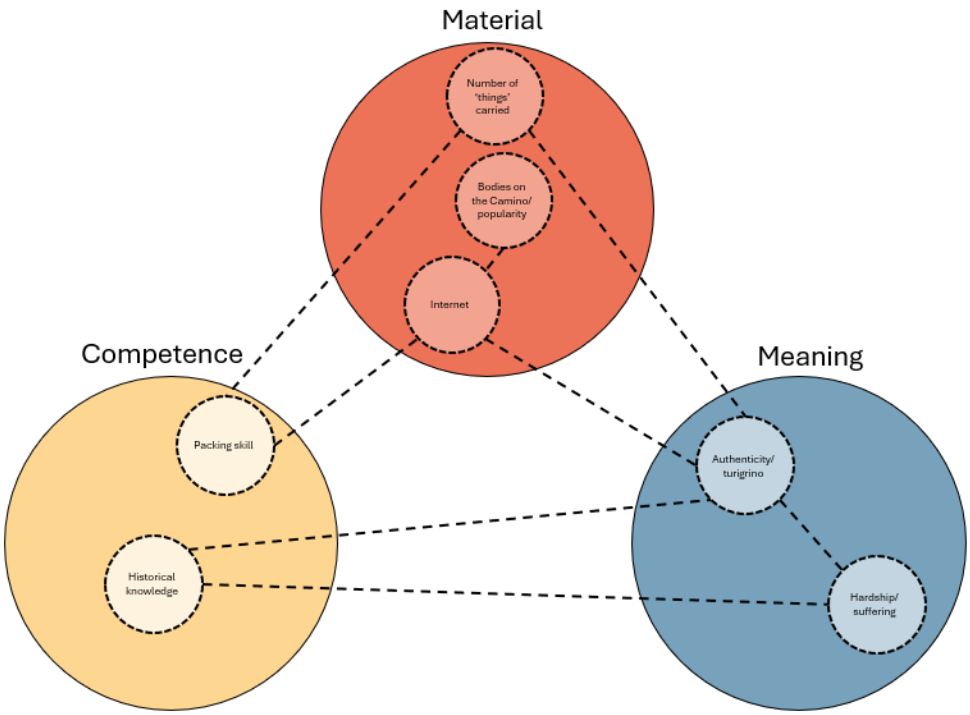
However, as my respondents mention, the subjective value of modern Compostela's is dwindling due to the effort put into making the certifications. It potentially weakens the link between the Compostela as part of the material element of the practice and authenticity as an aspect of meaning.

Many pilgrims look for an authentic experience when starting the Camino. Pilgrims share stories of their authentic journey online and companies market the pilgrimage as authentic too. Based on personal experiences and the interviews in this research, I understand, that the perceived authenticity draws significance from the long and rich history of the Camino. Respondents mentioned how they felt about taking part in something greater. The subjective feeling pilgrims experience of partaking in an ancient ritual is rooted in the historical knowledge of the practice. Pilgrims embody the awareness of walking the same way millions of others did before them, exposing another link between different elements of the practice of the Camino.

The narrative above shows how different elements of the practice are interlinked. Without one aspect, another would have a different meaning. Figure 5 provides a simple sketch visualizing links between element-forming aspects. According Shove et al. (2012), the links between the elements is where meaning to the practice is attributed. Figure 5 demonstrates the complex web of meaning-making that happens within the practice. It shows how aspects are directly influencing each other and indirectly others. Assuming that social significance is created within the links between the aspects, Figure 5 exemplifies the complexity of the social world within one practice. Nicolini (2012) suggest zooming out of a practice to understand its relationality with other practices. Zooming out would result in aspects of the Camino overlapping with other practices allowing a comprehensive understanding of how the Camino as a practice is embedded in the social world. This is beyond the scope of the current thesis and will not be discussed further. The diagram serves as an example and does not include all aspects of the practice for pragmatic reasons.

Figure 5

Conceptualization of the links between the aspects constituting the elements that form the practice of the Camino

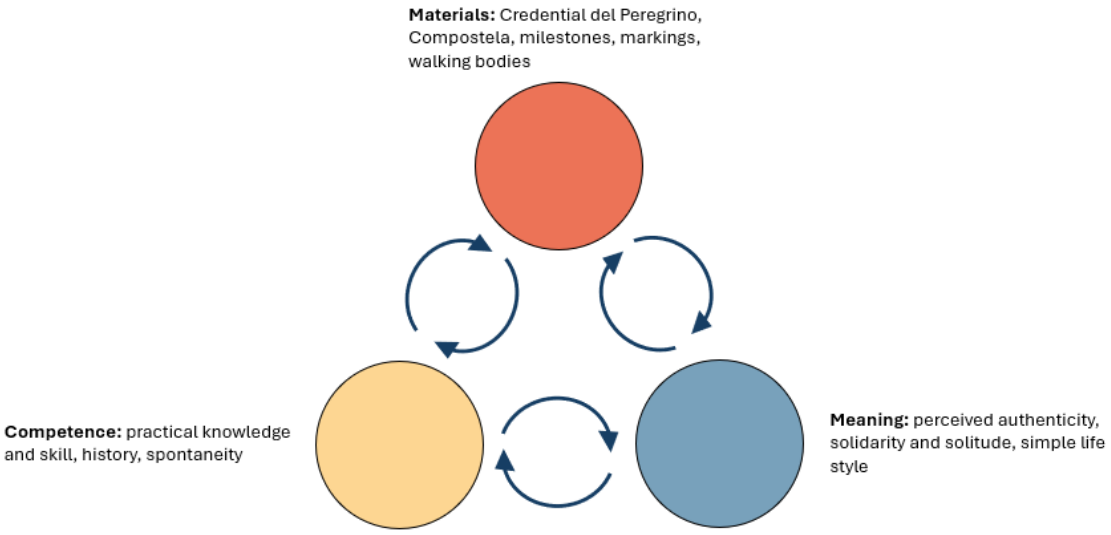


4.4.2. Understanding fluidity of practice

The previous section demonstrated how different aspects of the practice are interlinked and would have different meanings when embedded in a different constellation. The elements cannot be understood in isolation and should always be analysed in relation to each other. However, the elements and their constituent aspects are not fixed and change over time. When elements change, the connecting links alter and dissolve, and new ones appear, all affecting the Camino as a practice (see Figure 6). Figure 6 visualises that links between the three key elements are constantly in a recursive, mutually affecting process.

Figure 6

Elements of the Camino interact with and influence each other. Based on Shove et al. (2012).



Practices are reinforced in the world by reproducing links between the elements. Bourdieu (2010) states that social structures become more fortified in the world the more they get reproduced. A practice, thus, manifests through the recursive reproduction of the elements that form the practice by its practitioners. To elaborate on this, I use the aspect of authenticity as an example. Pilgrims reenact the Camino based on their interpretation of an authentic journey. What they perceive as authentic is established through information from online forums and web pages, as well as marketing strategies from companies and institutions. Information out there constitutes the doxa of the Camino. In other words, people construct doxa through the information they consume. When pilgrims engage with the authentic Camino but take an alternative route or use a service that originally was not there, they recreate the practice with a small variation. If these pilgrims assume that their journey is authentic, they actively include the shift in the perceived authenticity in their transmission of the practice to future pilgrims. When this process is repeated multiple times, it alters the generally accepted notion of authenticity and doxa of the Camino. Along these lines, the social construct 'authenticity' changes based on the reflexivity of practitioners as well as strategies from institutions and businesses. This exemplifies how an alteration of one aspect changes another through the reproduction of the practice by their carriers.

5. Conclusion

For this thesis, I investigated the Camino from a social practice perspective. Using the Camino as a case study allowed me to operationalise the conceptual framework offered by Shove et al. (2012), contributing to the body of literature in the still-developing field of practice theory.

This thesis presented how the Camino as a practice can be analysed and dissected into three elements: meaning, competence, and materials – and showed how these elements are interlinked through their constituent aspects. By zooming in on the Camino as a practice, I found how a single aspect of an element holds the ability to change other aspects and, by extension, the whole practice. Without repeating each aspect as they are thoroughly described in the analysis chapter, I found that they can be described individually but cannot be understood in isolation as they are part of a complex network of connections. The connections between the elements constitute the meaning of the practice. For example, the Camino entails prolonged walking. The activity of walking itself, placing one foot in front of the other does not mean anything in its own right. It is merely a meaningless, bodily activity. When the walking activity gets linked with a rich history, the meaning of being part of something greater, and a certain type of milestones along the way, the activity acquires a socially constructed meaning that only applies to the Camino. The specific building blocks or aspects that befit the Camino, are only understood relationally for the links between the aspects are what gives legitimacy to what it means to do the Camino. On the other hand, when an individual chooses to walk for multiple days in the wilderness, it may be considered camping. Adding another aspect to it either transforms the meaning of engaging with that practice or the practice itself.

The results of this research show that the long and rich history of the Camino is an important aspect of the competence element of the practice as it relates to perceived authenticity. Historically, the Camino is a Christian practice, however, contemporary pilgrims often commence the pilgrimage for secular reasons. The meaning of an authentic pilgrimage, thus, evolved from an inherently religious activity to something godless individuals can do too. Through practice theory, the current research provides insight into the process that underlies this dynamicity of practices. Namely, that of recursive reproduction of the practice which carriers of the practice enact. During this process 'mutations' of elements are introduced through, e.g., marketing, technological developments, and more bodies on the trail. These mutations become part of the reflexivity of the carriers, affecting the links between the element-forming aspects, and thus, changing the practice. Herein, the role of the internet as part of infrastructure gains significance. On the internet, virtually anyone is enabled to share their

experiences of the Camino. The reflexivity of carriers underlies alterations and dissolvement of the links between the elements and it establishes new connections that shape the practice. The availability of the internet and the increasing number of people proficient in using it, therefore, strongly influence the meaning of the Camino.

Based on the findings of this research, I conclude that the Camino as practice is currently in a transitional phase. Its growing popularity strongly affects the practice through its pressure on other aspects, e.g., perceived authenticity. The results show that authenticity is a major aspect of the Camino. Authenticity is something pilgrims look for when commencing the Camino, recreating and taking part in an ancient ritual that resembles the historical journeys of significant figures. The Camino is promoted (and protected by UNESCO) as a cultural-historical journey. However, the surging popularity pressures the practice of the Camino but also affects the surrounding area through which the several routes lie. In some cases, the surging popularity brings welfare to hamlets which can completely change the appearance of the town. For instance, an agricultural town may consist of a few farms and twice as many cafés, mutually shaping the perceived authenticity of the Camino. Thus, understanding that the meaning of authenticity is created through its interlinkage with other aspects of the practice offers policymakers and management theorists a foothold that assists in governing the practice. The Camino is gaining popularity based on the premise of an authentic journey. However, through commodifying the Camino by business entrepreneurs and the government, I argue, that it falls prey to the unsustainable trap and destructive nature of mass tourism. While this study cannot make future predictions, it proclaims that hegemonic forces have the capacity to manipulate the perceived authenticity by exerting pressure on the currently existing practice-forming elements. By reason of the magnitude of the Camino and the strain it asserts on its surroundings, this study assists in preserving the historic value which grants the Camino its significance and raison d'être.

The overlap between tourism and pilgrimage makes this thesis a relevant piece within the field of tourism too. The current study offers a contrast to individualist psychological approaches to comprehending tourist experiences. It provides a framework for future tourism research to be developed further to analyse different tourism practices without giving primacy to the structure or the agent. By offering an in-depth understanding of the Camino through a dissection of its components, this thesis supports researchers analysing similar walking practices (e.g. thru-hiking). Its framework can be reused to juxtapose the Camino with other practices, offering insight into similarities and differences, which accumulate into a more comprehensive

understanding of walking tourism in general and assist in developing sustainable management strategies.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Interview guide

Interview guide

Note: Due to characteristics of a semi-structured interview, the order in which the questions are asked differs per interviewee and is therefore not similar to the order below. This guide only shows possible pre-designed questions, but during the interview spontaneous follow-up questions may be asked as well (depending on the answers of the interviewees). On the right of this guide is a list of themes. This serves as a guide when an interviewee's answer is not rich in data.

Introductory questions

- Have you hiked the Camino (or long distances) before?
  - How is the Camino different from other long-distance hikes?
  - Have you noticed any changes since the last time you hiked it?
- Prior to starting the Camino, what did you expect?
  - How is the Camino different than you expected it to be?
  - How is it the same?
- How do you experience the Camino?
- Why are you doing the Camino?
  - What is the eventual goal?
  - How does the Camino help you achieve this goal?
- How would you describe a typical day on the Camino?
  - What makes the Camino the Camino (without it, it wouldn't be the same)?

Themes
Atmosphere
Natural environment
Physical challenge
Spiritual

Material

- What did you bring on the Camino?
  - Can you tell me something about what you brought?
  - How did you decide what to bring?
  - What is invaluable? What can be missed?
  - Do you miss anything?
- How would you describe the Camino landscape?
  - How do you interact with the landscape?
  - Which services are you making use of? (cafés, hotels, albergues, etc.)
- What are you looking at during your Camino? What catches your attention?
- Can you describe your breaks?

Meaning

- What does the Camino mean to you?
- What is a 'real' pilgrim?
  - When is someone not a pilgrim?
  - What is different between a historical and a contemporary pilgrim?
  - Are you a pilgrim?
- What are unwritten rules of the Camino?

Competence

- How did you prepare for the Camino?
    - How did you pack your backpack?
    - Where did you get your information from? (if someone hiked the Camino before the internet age, how did you get your information back then?)
    - Did you talk to people who hiked the Camino before?
        - How did they describe it?
        - How is your experience different or the same from theirs?
- How does/did your idea of the Camino change? (to compare before and during/after)
- What do you learn from the Camino?
- What prerequisites does one need for the Camino? (e.g. prior knowledge, needed materials)
- Do you think everyone can hike the Camino?
    - Why yes/no?

Additional questions

- How is it to walk every day?
- What do you talk about with other pilgrims/long-distance hikers?
- Did you ever expect to do the Camino?
- Do you want to share anything else or put an emphasis on something you mentioned?

Appendix B. Sikt Approval

Sikt

Assessment of processing of personal data

Reference number	Assessment type	Date
632063	Standard	15.01.2024

Title
Master Thesis: Understanding long-distance hiking

Institution responsible for the project
Universitetet i Sørøst-Norge / Fakultet for humaniora, idrett- og utdanningsvitenskap / Institutt for friluftsliv, idrett og kroppsøving

Project leader
Kirsten Wielandt Houe

Student
Peter Kop

Project period
21.01.2024 - 16.05.2024

Categories of personal data
General

Legal basis
Consent (General Data Protection Regulation art. 6 nr. 1 a)

The processing of personal data is lawful, so long as it is carried out as stated in the notification form. The legal basis is valid until 16.05.2024.

Notification Form

Comment
ABOUT OUR ASSESSMENT
Data Protection Services has an agreement with the institution where you are a student or a researcher. As part of this agreement, we provide guidance so that the processing of personal data in your project is lawful and complies with data protection legislation. We have now assessed that you have legal basis to process the personal data.

FOLLOW YOUR INSTITUTION'S GUIDELINES
You must store, send and secure the collected data in accordance with your institution's guidelines. This means that you must use data processors (and the like) that your institution has an agreement with (i.e. cloud storage, online survey, and video conferencing providers).

Our assessment presupposes that the project will meet the requirements of accuracy (art. 5.1 d), integrity and confidentiality (art. 5.1 f) and security (art. 32) when processing personal data.

NOTIFY CHANGES
If you intend to make changes to the processing of personal data in this project, it may be necessary to notify us. This is done by updating the information registered in the Notification Form. On our website we explain which changes must be notified. Wait until you receive an answer from us before you carry out the changes: https://sikt.no/en/notify-changes-notification-form

FOLLOW-UP OF THE PROJECT
We will follow up the progress of the project at the planned end date in order to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded.

Good luck with the project!