

The Pilgrimage: An Educational “Route”?

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ABSTRACT

The life of a man is linked to the movement; this is a metaphor of human existence¹. Mobility has an exceptional force in inside with regard to the ability to change the characteristics of a society or an individual, thus becoming a formative and generative experience². The humanity has expressed since the earliest times the need to travel along the establishment of paths that through history and accession have become contemporary pilgrimages. The pilgrimage, as a specific form of travel, is a religious experience, on the other hand it is just as a social event³ with an embryonal formative potential. This apparent redundancy and, indeed, almost tautology, has a subtle meaning. Personal and emotional involvement⁴ of the subject who makes a pilgrimage, has formative consequences, both on a personal level and in the contexts in which it plays a part. It is an eminently social phenomenology, involving people, environments, values, roles, expectations, i.e. cultural as well as organizational models of society. In the light of these considerations you cannot remain amazed if about fifty thousand pilgrims have traveled just in July 2018⁴ one of the most emblematic routes in Europe: The Santiago de Compostela Pilgrim's Way.

Keywords: experience; journey; The Santiago de Compostela Pilgrim's Way; training, (to) walk.

1. Introduction

A human need is to know, to allow imagination and thought to wander, to try different and various forms of individual and social experience. A man, by his nature, is a subject who aspires to freedom

¹ Widmann, C.: *Il Viaggio come metafora dell'esistenza*, Magi, 1999.

² Moscato, M. T.: *Il Viaggio come metafora pedagoga*, La Scuola, 1994.

³ Damari, C.: *Religione e devozione. Epoche e forme del pellegrinaggio*, FrancoAngeli, 2016. ⁴

Buber, M.: *The Way of Man*, Qiqajon, 1948.

⁴ <https://oficinadelperegrino.com/estadisticas/>

and who, therefore, must set out on his journey, must try to overcome every constraint that prevents him from expressing in a natural way.

In the light of these considerations you cannot remain amazed if the official estimates tell us that about fifty thousand pilgrims have traveled just in July 2018⁵ one of the most emblematic routes in Europe: The Santiago de Compostela Pilgrim's Way.

Having known that and having traveled regularly since the Middle Ages - defined in 2004 by Prince Felipe de Asturias - as the "Calle Mayor of Europe", it was declared as World Heritage Site by UNESCO, and a European Cultural Route by the Council of Europe.

There are many itineraries that, throughout history, have been structured to reach the tomb of St. James the Greater, as varied as the motivations and the origins of those who have decided in history to travel along these routes.

The phenomenon is therefore a very current reality that represents a variegated universe, whilst remaining an event that has always characterized the history of Europe and therefore with very evident historical roots that can express, in the multidisciplinary nature in which it can be taken into consideration, an emblematic training opportunity.

2. The pilgrimage of a pilgrim

The life of a man is always linked to the movement, which is at the origin of life; this is a metaphor of human existence⁶. Mobility has an exceptional force in inside with regard to the ability to change the characteristics of a society or an individual, thus becoming a formative and generative experience⁷. Different forms of travel have taken place in history and each type of journey reflects the problems, desires, fears of men and their times. It can be said that the very need to travel was born and developed with human beings. Basically, the same story of mankind is made up of journeys, explorations, conquests, Nomadism and especially pilgrimages. In the light of this intrinsic necessity that has expressed since the earliest times, the need to travel along the establishment of paths that through history and accession have become contemporary pilgrimages.

The pilgrimage, as a specific form of travel, is evidently a religious experience, on the other hand it is just as certainly a social event⁸ with an embryonical formative potential. This apparent redundancy and, indeed, almost tautology, has a subtle meaning. Personal and emotional involvement¹⁰ of the subject who makes a pilgrimage, has formative consequences, both on a personal

⁵ <https://oficinadelperegrino.com/estadisticas/>

⁶ Widmann, C.: *Il Viaggio come metafora dell'esistenza*, Magi, 1999.

⁷ Moscato, M. T.: *Il Viaggio come metafora pedagogica*, La Scuola, 1994.

⁸ Damari, C.: *Religione e devozione. Epoche e forme del pellegrinaggio*, FrancoAngeli, 2016. ¹⁰

Buber, M.: *The Way of Man*, Qiqajon, 1948.

level and in the contexts in which it plays a part; at the same time, it becomes a historical and cultural element endowed with autonomy.

Certainly the choice of the man to walk is identifiable with a rational action in relation to the value, put in place for reasons of faith or belief in higher or transcendent entities; it is a rational action in relation to the purpose, where one seeks aid or a relief from their sufferings or miseries; it is a traditional behavior, which has its roots in historicity and repeats itself by tradition, and equally it is an affective act capable of making a synthesis between sentiment and devotion, memory and remembrance⁹.

It is an eminently social phenomenology, involving people, environments, values, roles, expectations, i.e. cultural as well as organizational models of society.

Every journey, every pilgrimage, has subjective characteristics, moreover it is possible to grasp the typical elements to each pilgrimage.

The first element necessary for a journey to take place is, of course, the subject. To understand this statement more clearly it is necessary to move to the level of symbolism and to capture in the traveler the image of the person engaged in a process of evolution. From this point of view not all those who are on the way are making a pilgrimage, but only those who have the dispositions which enable them to become the protagonist of the story. The traveler is sometimes fleeing from an unsatisfactory reality: sometimes he is leaning towards a goal that seems impossible to reach and finds himself fatally involved into a destination that remains obscure and nebula; Sometimes they are more powerful forces that make him travel. However, it is almost madly projected forward, filled with curiosity, leaning towards the new and open to identification with it. This seems to suggest that, in order to make a journey, it is not enough to cross a series of places and accumulate encounters, but that the discriminant is precisely in the attitude with which it is realized.

If the presence of pilgrims is the condition without which one cannot speak of travel, the other indispensable element that supports the figure of the subject is the departure. Very often this first step constitutes an independent event in the journey and is characterized by the subjectivity of the protagonist. The departure takes place in ways that are consistent with the evolutionary situation of the individual and sometimes contains, in a nutshell, the development of the future experience¹². The structural category of the departure is characterized by a lived experience of separation, of detachment, of distancing from the pre-existing situation, or rather, from places, people, values and attitudes.

Another constitutive element of the journey is the itinerary. In it, the very substance of the pilgrim's journey, is resolved. However, reading any travel narrative, it is clear that the countries visited, and the events experienced don't have an intrinsic value, but an experiential value, that are valid in the

⁹ Xodo, C.: *Capitani di se stessi. L'educazione come costruzione di identità personale*, La Scuola 2003, p. 241. ¹² Mazzarella, A.: *Alla ricerca di Beatrice*, In.out 1991, p. 91.

way they are lived. Every pilgrimage, every journey, makes the pilgrim questions about the ability or inability to go through contexts of the world, that became an experience and opportunity to change their own personality. The big question of every protagonist is whether when he returns home, he is confirmed in his own identity, despite everything, and having experienced even in the most tragic vicissitudes of an existence full of meaning.

Every pilgrimage has a goal, however it can be explicitly meaningless, but in its most intimate experience can have hidden ones: this makes the goal a constituent element. The goal can be fixed from the start, be more than one, or have the need to be defined each time during the journey. In this regard the writer Paulo Coelho says that «when you go towards a goal, it is very important to pay attention to the path. It is the path that always teaches us the best way to arrive, enriches us as we travel it»¹⁰. Another important element of the journey is the return, which becomes a central and vital question. The capacity to return from a pilgrimage indicates and also implies the ability to re-elaborate what has been lived by internalizing and making their own experiences and encounters are formation foundations for the traveler.

The «journey» appears to be a symbolic moment of initiation into the maturity of the subject, into its wisdom, into the vitality of values and at the same time as a place that saves and reintegrates the pilgrim, through a dialectic in which the key role is played by the escape from a structural horizon - so that each journey is personal and has its own form - but that in any case, respectively, to the period in which it is lived, throws in the open space of the «world», of the encounter, of the involvement, of the risk and of the unexpected. The pilgrim presents himself as a subject endowed with his own particular and intense vocation and already for this personal commitment, he separates himself from those who evidently do not wish to be such. In any case it is really difficult to find a single definition to define of a pilgrim, this in the light of the same difficulty of synthesizing the set of psycho-social motivations of every subject that decides to undertake a journey¹¹.

It is clear, however, that every pilgrim is a “bearer” of movement: the subject moves in the direction of his personal goal and therefore projects himself into an itinerary, follows it, and finally completes it. He also deepens himself into a walk that gives a sense regardless of his motivation. In the individuality of the journey others are consumed; and the traveler’s narrative is a transcendent narrative. In light of this consideration, that even when the journey is experienced as a choral operation, where the group participates in the endemic pilgrimage experience, the individual personalities speak to the others in a mutual process of self-identification.

A man becomes more human if he walks the path of solidarity in authenticity, having to recognize that no man can exist for himself alone, but he finds his complete identity by linking himself to the others and acting responsibly towards them and more important for them. The more we open our self

¹⁰ Coelho, P.: *Il cammino di Santiago*, Bompiani 2010, p. 53.

¹¹ Lavarini, R.: *Il pellegrinaggio cristiano. Dalle sue origini al turismo religioso del XX secolo*, Marinetti 1997.

to others, the more we deepen our interiority. There is an open way to the exterior that interiorizes us, that this is precisely, like for man, endowed with interiority and subjectivity¹².

We cannot forget that a man, in addition to the need to preserve and to expand himself, also manifests, in the context of a social life, a considerable need of others, which translates into an irrepressible inner need for any contact, exchange and communication, support, protection, sympathy and self-giving.

Being open and welcoming to the others them «consists in nothing other than being and becoming oneself, not already constrained within the narrow limits of an individual and isolated self, but according to the expansive potential of a I integrated into the world of men and the Absolute»¹⁶. According to M. Buber ¹⁷ is it possible to give a real answer to the question “*how is a man?*” only considering the human person in the totality of his relationships.

So the pilgrimage becomes a sought-after state of a man in search of a meaning and of himself. Whether he is aware of it or whether he does not want to become aware of it, those who travel are moved by a research. The journey is therefore an authentic path of research and knowledge that finds in the other – maybe a person, a culture, a place or a need - the answer that he sought and the authentic knowledge of himself that perhaps no speculative research can give. In addition to formation and selfawareness, perhaps the pilgrimage then has to do with the truth of us and of the world.

Aware of these considerations, the attempt was made to reread the emblematic experience of the Santiago de Compostela Pilgrim's Way that an Italian Christian community of 139 people experienced in August 2018.

Analyzing the theme of travel from a pedagogical point of view means examining explicit educational values, both at a symbolic and real planning level, because - to use the words of M. Laeng - «traveling means becoming an expert in the world, according to the expression of Dante's Ulysses, who had made the journey his way of life. It means changing places and habits, entering other dimensions, having contact with other people, at the limit with other people and countries»¹³.

To avoid any generalization and exclusively theoretical conclusions on the meaning, motive and formative characteristics of the pilgrimage, a questionnaire was submitted to the whole group of pilgrims. In several ways the questions tried to underline the importance that the personal reworking of the experience assumes in order to give meaning to what happened. The goal is to link the different events of the lived journey, to give shape to our own identity and to be able to deduce pedagogicaleducational considerations based on the answers and feedback received. Considering on our lifes we learn to identify the connections that structure them, the more or less explicit finalism that directs them, the selection underlying between memory and memento¹⁴.

¹² De Finance, J.: *Atti del sesto convegno di studi filosofici cristiani*, Gallarate 1950, p. 228.

¹⁶ Nuttin, J.: *Psicanalisi e personalità*, Paoline 1967, p. 321. ¹⁷ Buber, M.: *The Way of Man*, Qiqajon, 1948.

¹³ Laeng, M.: “*Viaggio culturale*”, in *Enciclopedia pedagogica*, vol. VI, La Scuola 1994.

¹⁴ Xodo, C.: *Capitani di se stessi. L'educazione come costruzione di identità personale*, La Scuola 2003, p. 241.

3. Community on the way to Santiago

Ever since the news of the discover of the tomb of St. James the Greater in Galicia, a north-western region of Spain, spread in the early 9th century, the pilgrimage to it has never been interrupted. It is said that, having fulfilled the earthly life of Jesus, he devoted himself to the work of evangelization on the Iberian Peninsula and that, after his martyrdom in Palestine, his disciples brought his body back there¹⁵.

Through this pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, the Christian community decided to enter the history of the Way, following in the footsteps of the apostle James, starting from Saint Jean de Port, alternating the walk on foot with transport means, crossing the suggestive lands of Navarra, from Rioja, from Castile-León, to finally reach Galicia at the gates of the "Campus Stellae" City to pay homage to the apostle's tomb.

In addition to some general questions, some specific questions have been asked to pilgrims and have allowed a pedagogical-formative rereading, aimed at underlining the need to know how pilgrimage can be an experience of transformative value.

3.1 The results

The journey as a transformative experience crosses the different periods and historical contexts to call into question men and women of all times, therefore our contemporaries who have lived the experience of Santiago. All members (139) have been proposed a questionnaire and only some of the questions have been analysed, just to make it possible to let emerge how the experience of the pilgrimage is an opportunity for personal formation. Of 139 shared questionnaires, a total of 27 people responded. In addition to some general questions such as age and sex, they were asked "How did you feel when you decided to make the Santiago de Compostela Pilgrim's Way?", asking them to choose three options listed. As shown in Figure 1, it emerges how curiosity, being motivated and the relative joy were the prevailing sentiments.

¹⁵ Charpentier, L.: *Il mistero di Compostela. Una via iniziatica che attraversa i millenni*, L'Età dell'Acquario 2006.

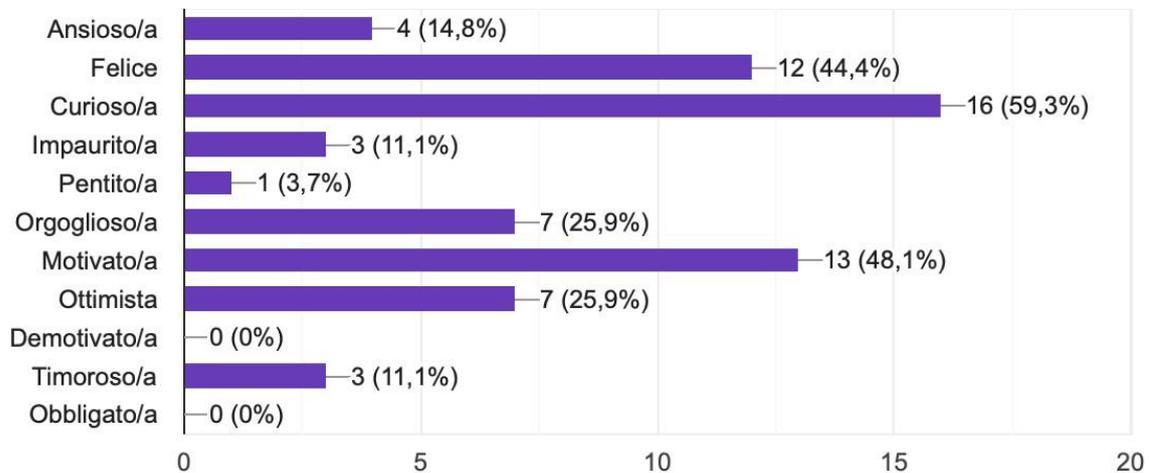


Figure 1

These feelings allow us to understand how the pilgrimage was ideally thought of as a positive experience.

In regard to the exercise of doubt, dictated by having to discern and make a choice, that is, the parenthesis of the immediacy and the ease of defining a feeling, allows to wonder about their authenticity, that is, on the sphere of their interest¹⁶. The Life of these risks the inauthenticity where the will loads its desireful intention of a normative meaning, that is, of a strong component of duty and interest, in which ethical and theoretical motives upset its purity.

At the same time, however, the feeling is authentic if labyrinthine, if its original aesthetic expressiveness is accompanied by large and dialogical motivational and spiritual spheres²². Therefore, along the passage of the re-elaboration of the story of the subject was called to determine motivations that prompted him to make the pilgrimage. He must be faithful to the choice or ethical certification of himself. In Figure 2 the motivations emerge and also in this case they were asked to indicate three opinions.

¹⁶ Franzini, L.: *Philosophy of Feelings*, Mondadori, 1997. ²² Valéry, P.: *Oeuvres*, Gallimard, 1957.

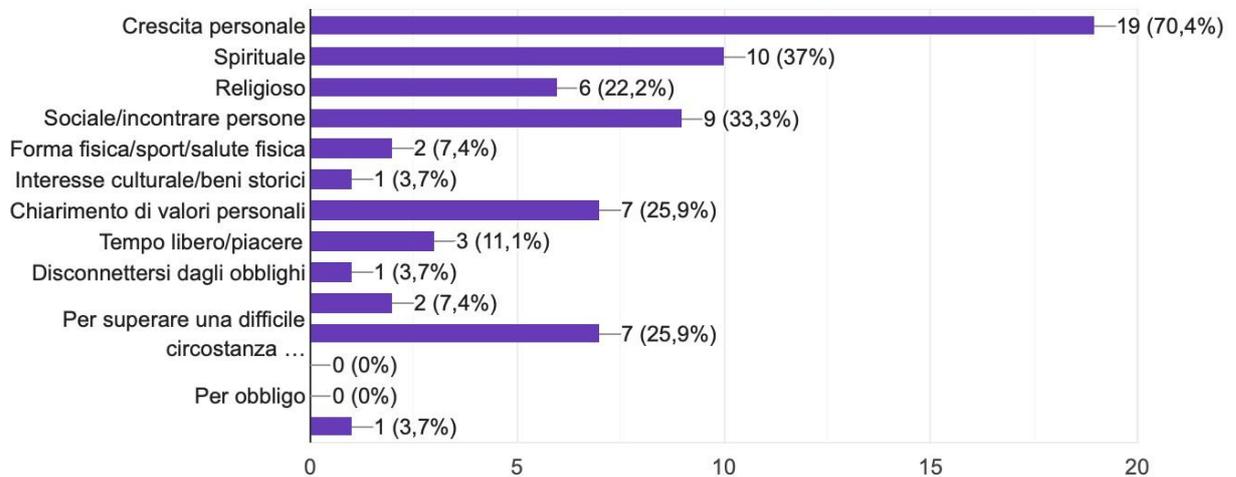


Figure 2

The figure of duty, not understood as obligation but as an intimate desire, during lifetime, of the lived promise, implies that with freedom the subject assume to remain faithful to the word elaborated and to the promise regardless of whether its feeling or attitude change; keeping faith is therefore starting to discover the necessity of witnessing the openness to availability. The term availability can be understood, as G. Marcel says¹⁷, like the "fidelity of the response to the other", to another by itself that becomes the fruit of the initial motivation. In the light of these considerations we understand how many have identified the reason for personal growth, loading the pilgrimage of an expectation of formation.

The journey itself in all its forms can educate, moreover, to the essential, to the dialogue, to the exchange, to the reception of the different and causes strong inner transformations: it is, in short, bearer of a change as it changes the same identity of the traveller and it brings him in relation to the other, and but above all to another. First of all, they were asked whether they were changing during the course of the journey, and how it emerges that 77.8% (Figure 3) gave an affirmative answer.

¹⁷ Marcel, G.: *Être et avoir*, Aubier, 1935, p. 70.

Mentre camminavi ti sentivi "cambiare"?

27 risposte

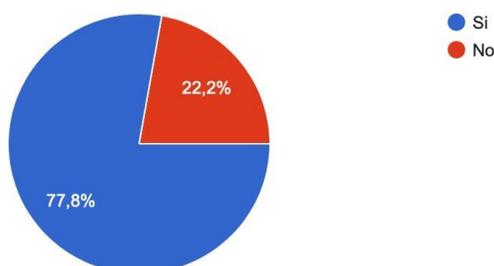


Figure 3

For this reasons they were then asked «Do you think the Path has brought changes to following aspects of your life?», giving three options (Figure 4).

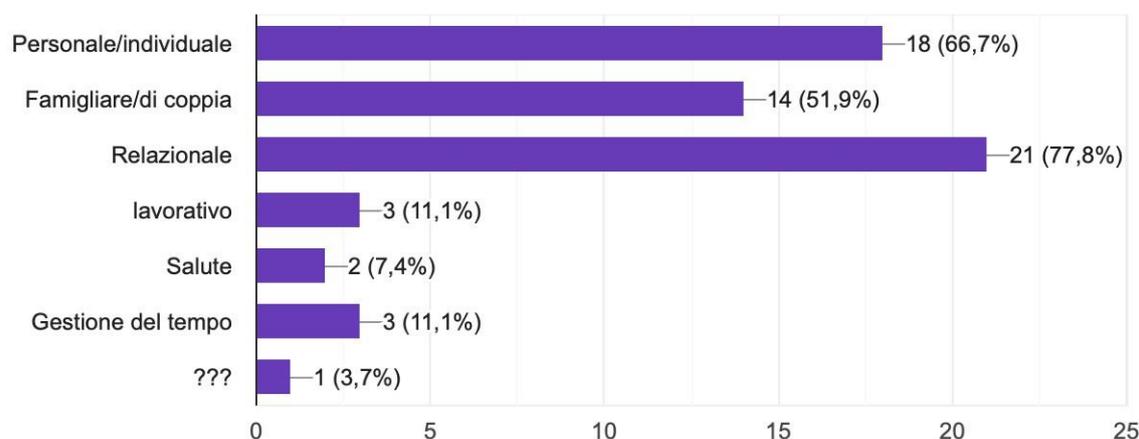


Figure 4

In all the variants of the journey/transformation of the adult, the characterizing element is the typical "spiral" structure, which provides, as a result of the journey, an actual return to the starting point (to be understood as returning home), but the traveler who returns is no longer the same person who left. This is because the outcome of the journey is always a substantial transformation, internal, and not a

material acquisition or a new *Status*: a transformation connected to the trials and adventures that the hero faces, thanks to which he confronts himself and the world; a transformation connected to the new knowledge that is acquired through the experience of the Pilgrimage.

This is a pilgrimage which has brought about changes perceived in the areas above all of personal and relational type. To be open to the other is a permanent and constitutive state of a man, prior to any action or social relationship: a constitutive openness and, as such, neutral.

Whether you want it or you deny it, in the depths of every human being there is a feeling of forced solidarity with others.

The questionnaire allowed the pilgrims to re-read the experience, give meaning and reflect on what experienced. The narrative content that allows the subjects to re-think their experiences, their lives and their actions by rebuilding the meaning and showing the possible perspectives of development, brings to light what are the intentions, motivations latent and obvious, ethical choices and values, placing them within a network of sense shared culturally and endowed with unity and continuity. Therefore, they have finally been asked if they think they can do it again in the future. Emblematic is how the 92.6% gave affirmative response (Figure 5).

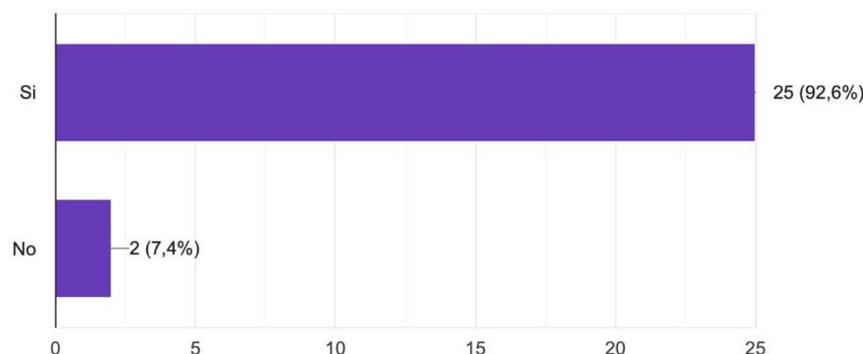


Figure 5

4. Conclusion

Therefore, the pilgrimage-beyond the symbolic and the archetypal, the narration or the experience, or perhaps thanks to them-is one of the most effective forms of knowledge for a man, of oneself, of the

other and of the world. A knowledge that, unlike the cognitive one, is primarily and originally performative because it transforms our vision of things¹⁸.

What emerges from the re-reading of the experience of the Camino de Santiago is that in reality the pilgrimage can be considered as an important means and a great opportunity to open ourselves to the greatness of the world, to the truth about existence and, therefore, to our own Existential truth. An Educational and Formative tool.

¹⁸ Raccagni, D.: *Il viaggio adulto come esperienza trasformativa*. Consultori Familiari Oggi, 24, Ancora, 2016, p. 119.