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Walking pilgrimages are experiencing a revival, while at the same time a change of character in light of our changing times. Pilgrimage walking is increasingly taking on non-religious dimensions, related to a person's self and health as seen on long-distance walking pilgrimages such as the Camino routes to Santiago. Long-range walking pilgrimages seem to offer a promise and space for 'personal fixing' / 'self-healing', thus attracting people with a variety of motives.

This article is based on an empirical study consisting of qualitative open-ended questionnaires with 53 respondents from 13 countries. It aims to shed light on the motives, expectations and hopes that make people walk the less known and studied Norwegian St. Olav Way and what motivational trends prevail there, compared to others pilgrimage routes such as the more popular Camino de Santiago de Compostela and Japanese Shikoku Henro trail. Motivational categories were generated through an inductive thematic analysis of their answers and explanations were sought, drawing on existing literature as well as meaning-making and motivational theories.

Results indicate that religious motives were not predominant in people's quest with the journey. Instead, contemplation, health, social / solitary, pilgrimage walking / repeating, and nature motives stood out as the most significant, followed by less mentioned motives such as historical / cultural / travel interests, spiritual / religious reasons, a more present / simple / slow life, and life celebrations / crossroads / transitions.

These findings challenge popular assumptions about why people undertake long-term walking pilgrimages. Further research is needed given the emerging trend to seek long-distance pilgrimage walking for self-discovery / development / therapy. This is largely uncovered ground in health care / science, despite the fact that pilgrimages have, throughout time, been sought for betterment and wellbeing.

Key Words: St. Olav Way, motives, long-term pilgrimage, long-distance pilgrimage walking, repeating, contemplation, health, community, fellowship, solitariness, nature, meaning-making, motivational theories, relatedness, self-therapy

Introduction

Walking pilgrimages are usually characterised by a route, a sacred destination and motivation – underlying meanings, intentions, vocations, hopes, even expectations about the walk, that makes the journey extraordinary (Ross, 2014; Stausberg, 2011). Pilgrimages, in general, can also be defined as journeys to particular places (although virtual pilgrimages also exist) that embody religious, cultural and/or personal values containing a meaningful and mystical quality for travellers (Morinis, 1992; Digance,

2006). Pilgrims often believe contact with a sacred site can transform, purify or renew in a significant way. In an increasingly secular world, where many lack religious faith, existential issues often motivate people to search for meaning, self-knowledge and identity (Margry, 2008) – frequently through walking pilgrimages. But,

the picture of why people choose to walk along a pilgrimage route is complex, where everything ultimately rests on the individual pilgrim's justifications and motivation (Vistad 2012: 21).

Among his five categories of ‘tourism experiences’, Cohen (1979) recognises pilgrim motives to belong to the experiential (the quest for meaning through experiences), the experimental (the quest for an alternative spirituality by testing out new lifestyles), and the existential (the quest for truth through reflection and switching between realities). Morinis (1992) mentions six general pilgrim motivation typologies: devotional, instrumental, religious, social, political and economic, whereas Kurrat (2019), concerning the Camino,¹ identifies five more modern motives: the balance, crisis, time-out, transitional and new start pilgrim. These categories illustrate how pilgrim motives have changed over recent decades. However, the motives to go on a walking pilgrimage are far more layered, nuanced and mixed than the traditionally recognised reasons for making a pilgrimage, such as penance (walking to pay for immoral behaviour), piety (walking to give thanks, in memoriam), or a vow (walking in exchange for something).

First century philosopher, Philo of Alexandria, claimed that people went on pilgrimage not only for the traditionally pious reasons, but also for the journey’s many gains: finding support and a safe haven from life pains, hoping for remission of and relief from its weighing worries, getting a break from the mundane, passing a cheerful and uplifting time, being filled with hope, and enjoying the freedom of ‘the most important and necessary vacation’ (Greenstein, 2014:122), consisting of boldness, fellowship and the mutual good-will created *en-route*. This unrestricted freedom or ‘frivolous roaming’ was criticised by both rationalists and the clergy, who complained that people were

[going] *on pilgrimages not out of devotion, but out of mere curiosity and love of novelty* (Jacques de Vitry in Greenstein, 2014: 124).

In the case of the Norwegian St. Olav Way to Trondheim that received only 1101 walking pilgrims in 2018 (Nidaros Pilegrimsgård, 2019) – in contrast to the Camino’s 306,064 walkers (Oficina de Peregrino, 2019)² – it is known that during the Middle Ages, hundreds of thousands

‘pilgrimage’³ to St. Olav’s tomb in Nidaros Cathedral, mainly to seek health and give thanks (Pettersen, 2012), in the belief that images of the saint could bring healing. Olav II Haraldsson, a famous warlord and later king who converted Norway to Christianity and died in the battle of Stiklestad in 1030, was made national saint (Saint Olav) after the exhumation of his intact body. His hair and nails had grown, and his face was still fair – as if he was health (re)incarnated. Not everyone could afford or were allowed⁴ to undertake pilgrimage to his tomb, however, so it was common to beg alms for the journey or for the wealthy to pay beggars (or anyone willing) to do the strenuous and dangerous voyage on their behalf (Luthen, 1992).⁵

While walking pilgrimages flourished in the Middle Ages, Luther discouraged pilgrimages in the Reformed countries, emphasising its common malpractice and clerical corruption (*e.g.* purchasing freedom from sin through pilgrimages, money or both). Luther considered the desire to go elsewhere to pray for God’s help and mercy unnecessary, especially among the peasants, who were needed in the fields instead of roaming around the roads of Europe. Yet, the Scandinavian pilgrim tradition survived in the shadows (Jensen & Løverød, 2017). Now, we turn to the more modern pilgrimage walking motivations of our times.

Review of modern pilgrimage walking motivations

Slavin (2003) argues that religious motives such as penance and remorse are minimal among today’s walking pilgrims. Recent qualitative and quantitative empirical research, reveals a wide range of factors among walkers on the various Camino paths, considered ‘multi-motivational, not only attending to religious motivations’ (Gomes *et al.*, 2019:31):

existential meaning and answers; reflection, self-search, personal or spiritual change; time-out and life-distancing, silence, simplicity; community,

1 Although referred to as the Way or one way, like the Camino de Santiago, the St. Olav Way consists of many variants – see: <https://www.gronze.com/#todos> for the Camino (the Camino Frances variant being the most popular, and <https://pilegrimsleden.no/en/kart> for the St. Olav Way (the Gudbrandsdalsleden variant being most frequented).
2 At the moment of writing this article, none of the Norwegian or Spanish 2019 pilgrim statistics were ready.

3 To do a pilgrimage exists as a verb in the Norwegian language, pilgrimage being an act / performance, as also used in English by Shultz (2019: 53), describing a pilgrim ‘who essentially pilgrimages himself to death’.

4 One had to ask the clergy for permission, and one had to have paid up for all one’s earthly loans in advance (Luthen, 1992).

5 As an anecdote, Queen Margaret I of Denmark-Norway-Sweden sent 85 ‘vicarious pilgrims’ on her behalf to a total of 48 name-given places of Christian importance in 1405 (Luthen, 1992).

walking for oneself or others; semi-religious motives; crisis, self-help, better mental or physical health, emotional and mental healing (Jørgensen, 2008; 2017);
 self-therapy (Mikaelsson, 2012);
 life improvement (Blom *et al.*, 2016);
 adventure and partying, affordable holidays (Gamper & Reuter, 2012);
 clarification (Schnell & Pali, 2013);
 spiritual growth, sensation seeking, life direction (Oviedo *et al.*, 2014);
 life evaluation, meaning, self-discovery (Nilsson & Tesfahuney, 2016);
 spirituality, nature, sports, cultural-historical interests, new people and places, escaping routine, fulfilling a promise (Amaro, Antunes & Henriques, 2018);
 leisure, recreation (Fernandes *et al.*, 2012);
 the countryside and gastronomy (Lois-González & Santos, 2015);
 fun and relish (Moulin-Stožek, 2019) and even;
 prestige (Gomes *et al.* 2019).

As for the European Via Francigena, cultural curiosity is mentioned as the most stated motive (Lucarno, 2016). While Japanese Shikoku pilgrims mention these motives: spiritual escapism, lifestyle stress, pilgrimage addiction, sickness or repetition and competition (Shultz, 2019), self-discovery, asceticism, cultural landscapes, fitness, challenge of and sharing the journey, despair, unemployment, problem-solving, making a vow, walking in memory of / for a better afterlife for dear and deceased ones, seeking a cure or consolation (for broken hearts / grief), continuity, as well as change in a time of crisis (meaning) (Mendel, 2006; Reader, 2005).

Many criticize the Santiago de Compostela cathedral's Camino statistics as being unrepresentative of people's motives since many non-religious or spiritual pilgrims state their motive as 'religious and *other*' (48%) and not '*non-religious*' (9%) in order to receive the decorative Latin version of the pilgrim certificate.⁶ This means that less than half walk for strictly 'religious reasons' (43%) (Nilsson and Tesfahuney, 2016). The quantitative

6 i.e. the '*Compostela*' ('*The star/burial field*' of St. James) for the Camino pilgrimage, '*Olavsbrevet*' ('*The Olav's Letter*') for the St. Olav Way, and '*四国八十八ヶ所遍路大使任命書*' / '*Shikokuhachijūhakkasho henro taishi ninmei-sho*' ('*The Shikoku 88 Pilgrimage Ambassador Appointment*') for the Shikoku trail.

Camino study by Gamper and Reuter (2012) shows that only 23% of the respondents walked for religious reasons, whereas 52% for more self-oriented reasons (primarily to find themselves), to escape everyday life (40.2%), enjoy the calm (40%), the spiritual atmosphere (35%), nature (34%) and out of more social motives such as meeting international people (24%), being with family (22%) and a part of the pilgrim fellowship (19%).

There are few empirical studies about the St. Olav Way, and even fewer concerning people's motives to walk it. Nidaros Pilegrimsgård (2019) states that while everyone has their individual motives, the appreciation of Norway's wide-open spaces, the desire to connect with nature, the opportunity for quiet contemplation and introspection are among the most important reasons for walking the Way. The Norwegian Institute of Natural Research's quantitative survey among 404 St. Olav pilgrims (approx. half of the walking pilgrims in 2014) from 22 countries (40% Norwegian, 35% German and 25% other nationals) revealed that religious motives and meeting others scored lowest, whereas long-distance walking, cultural landscapes and nature experiences counted highest (Vistad, 2015). Uddu's (2018) national pilgrim report states that the Way is also about spirituality, health, wellbeing and a reaction to a frantic life, while Norwegian pilgrim leaflets add curiosity, historical / cultural interests and a wish for a different life, personal growth, adventure, exercise, fellowship or solitude, and respite as typical motives (Pettersen, 2012).

Paulsen's (2005) study in archaeology, involving questionnaires and interviews with 10 Norwegians during a short walk or straight after the journey, touches upon motives. Her results revealed that many emphasised they were not pilgrims in the 'traditional sense', *i.e.* not doing penance, but had specific 'justifications' and motives to walk, *e.g.* gratitude, recovering from convalescence, having overcome a crisis. Olsen's (2011) study from a religious studies perspective drawing on 10 interviews with Norwegians and Germans arriving at Trondheim, addresses their motives for walking the St. Olav Way. He derived six motivational categories: 1) time, reflection, spirituality 2) social aspects 3) nature, walking 4) religious aspects 5) history, tradition, culture 6) the destination and journey (the religious aspects figuring lowest). Hafskjold's (2015) study in environmental science, based on eight interviews, examined how people's faith influenced their motives to walk. She found that motives varied, and that religious belief was

not echoed in their replies. Instead, coping / challenge, nature experiences, company or to walk for someone, celebration of self / a life event, lifestyle-change, time-out, insight, reflection, spirituality, meaningful presence through motion and nature came forth as the main motives, while religious reasons were not stressed. The most recent and quantitative study on the Way (Vistad *et al.*, 2020) based on a two-year survey of 276 self-registered walkers and an email follow-up questionnaire, explored their motives, behaviour and demographics; how they differ from other modern pilgrims and pilgrimages and how similar they are to long-distance hikers and hiking. Their main motives were outdoor exercise; slow travel; nature, knowledge and joy, the inner journey, meeting the locals and local heritage. Their less important motives were religion, solitude, and social hiking.

Given the existing literature's shortcomings concerning people's motives for walking the St. Olav Way (especially in English), this article seeks to provide a snapshot of the diverse motives, expectations and hopes behind this less known and studied Norwegian pilgrim route, compared to the more popular Spanish and Japanese pilgrim trails. This knowledge can give valuable insight into universal motivations and / or differences in modern pilgrimage walking.

Methods and Analysis

This article draws on an empirical study based on three qualitative open-ended questionnaires, that investigated people's 1) *prior* motives, 2) *ongoing* processes and 3) *after-effects* and therapeutic mechanisms involved in walking the St. Olav Way, and will here deal with the first aspect (the two latter aspects are addressed in Jørgensen, Eade, Ekland and Lorentzen, 2020).

The questionnaires were available at all pilgrim shelters along the Oslo-Trondheim trails from May to October 2017. In order to include international pilgrims, questionnaires were supplied in seven languages (Norwegian, English, Spanish, French, Italian, Polish and German) to be filled out by hand (with respondents posting, MMSing, or scanning their answers) or by email. The first questionnaire was answered where it was picked up, the second during or straight after the journey and the third three months after the walk. Apart from their prime motive, pilgrims were asked about their expectations, hopes, reasons, decision and story behind the journey (as people usually answer more thoroughly about a topic when asked a question in a variety of ways).

In total, 53 people replied, meaning 5% of the 1004 walkers in 2017 (Nidaros Pilegrimsgård, 2018). They were 30 women and 23 men with an average age of 52 years (the youngest 24, the oldest 75), and represented 13 nationalities: German (19), Norwegian (14), Swiss (5), American (3), Swedish (2), Dutch (2), Spanish (2), and Brazilian, French, Austrian, Belgian, Hungarian and Mexican (6). People's occupations ranged from students to designers (20) with the largest category being retired (12), teachers (8), health professionals (8) and humanists (5). Respondents described their faith affiliation in a variety of ways: Roman Catholic (10), Protestant / Evangelist / Reformed / Baptist / Norwegian State Church (15), Christian (8), Buddhist (1), Atheist (4), Agnostic / spiritual / humanistic / universal (7), None (6) and Non-Practising (2).

Answers were translated into English, anonymised by numbers, and grouped under the respective questions for iterative thematic text analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) by generating theme units inductively and categorising them by emerging topics (gathering related topics into more chief categories). Motive categories were then interpreted, drawing on existing literature. To avoid recognition as so few walk this route (and people may still hear tales about each other without having met), pilgrim quotes are marked with their anonymised number (e.g. 'pil.37').

Main motives for walking the St. Olav Way

There are people from different walks of life who for various reasons decide to undertake such a journey:

there are as many reasons for walking a pilgrimage as there are pilgrims on the road (pil.52).

The six main categories, presented from the most to the least reported, were contemplation, health, social and solitary, long term pilgrimage walking, pilgrimage repeating, and nature motives. Historical / cultural / travel interests, spirituality, religiousness, a present / simple / slow life, and life celebrations / crossroads / transitions were the four least mentioned reasons.

1. Contemplation

The largest motive category (67%) belonged to self- / life-reflection and -examination away from ordinary life to see clearer and improve / readjust life, and the inner

journey for personal growth, existential answers, greater self-knowledge, and a re-evaluation of life / needs / values.

Time to think, clarity and time-out

A handful expected 'silence, time for meditation, contemplation in nature, and a distance to normal life' (pil.22), away from other people. Whereas 20% sought the Way to have 'enough time to reflect about life, family, work and future visions' (pil.15), to figure out life challenges and arrive at their solutions, 'see things anew with the necessary distance' (pil.27) and 'gain a new and better view of life' (pil.28). As put by a German carpenter: 'Being a pilgrim is a ... good form of contemplation and transformation' (pil.34).

A predominant hope for 33% of the respondents was greater clarity of mind / thoughts, personal life and goals: 'I hoped to sort out thoughts; simply to get more in touch with myself' (pil.47), 'make my doubts regarding personal matters disappear' (pil.18), 'experience clarity of what my thoughts / standpoints are, and then reflect about things' (pil.2). As a musician and teacher explains: 'My life is busy, and a few weeks on my own helps me reorganise my thoughts and feelings' (pil.23). Whereas a few sought the opposite: time-out from thinking and a hectic life; 'freedom of thought without duties and appointments' (pil.28); 'Roaming around allows me to break with routine and detach from my everyday problems' (pil.19).

The inner journey

Around 25% of the people wished to make 'an interior journey of being' (pil.18); 'to grow as a human being' (pil.36) or to learn about themselves / others; 'to discover what I have inside of me' (pil.18) as a Spanish woman says. A handful hoped for greater self-awareness regarding inner needs and values: 'to become more aware of my needs, that it's ok to think of myself from time to time' (pil.17); 'to find out what's important to me ... and have a broader view' (pil.24). Finally, 17% hoped to find answers to existential questions or figure out and reconsider their life: 'I hope to find an answer to my calling in life' (pil.34), while others sought to be open to new experiences, get new impressions, learn something new and make plans for the future.

2. Health motives

People were asked about their mental and physical health, to see if their pilgrimage could be health-motivated. While one pilgrim reported excellent health and one barred the question, half of the respondents stated their mental and physical health was 'good', while 25% replied 'very good', 'quite well' or 'currently good / stable / ok'. Some said they felt 'mentally good / ok' but physically worse due to 'physical ailments / disease', whereas others felt 'mentally well' despite physical illness or had 'very / good mental health' with minor walking ailments'. Finally, five replied they were 'physically ok / well /

Figure 1. The Way leading across mountains and along the fjords



Photo by Michael Shildmann, 2010

good / healthy', but 'mentally troubled / vulnerable / tired / sad / overworked' and explicitly sought healing through the Way.

A pilgrim struggling with mental health issues was very open about the reasons for walking the route: 'to improve health: this is a better life than the one I live. I want a better life', and disclosed: 'pilgrimages have prolonged my life' (pil.36). In fact, more than half of the respondents' motives deal with health (spiritual, mental, physical, social, holistic), general wellbeing and existential meaning, or 'to recover a balance between the body and soul' (pil.48). A Swedish woman expressed the beneficial relationship between walking and health: 'physical effort = health' (pil.50). While a Hungarian physician added nature and psyche into the equation: 'I wanted to gain physical condition and enjoy nature (and consequently a firmer mental state)' (pil.33), as if knowing physical activity in nature fosters mental health. Interestingly, the main subcategory turned out to deal with process and therapy motives.

Processual and therapeutic motives

For 20% of the people, the stimulus for their journey was their life situation: 'myself and my circumstances' (pil.18) as a Spanish woman puts it. Some hoped to face, process and overcome different fears and anxieties or difficult emotions (*i.e.* loneliness, mortality, retirement, burnout, mental stress, depression, grief). As a Norwegian widow says: 'quietness to process sorrow and get more insight how my life path alone will be' (pil.46). While others came to seek comfort, process or learn how to cope with sudden and straining life ordeals (*i.e.* illness, losing someone to death, divorce, break-ups). As a young woman writes: 'I suffered a lot, and needed time on my own to think and give this space' (pil.24). A German mother describes:

Last year was hard ... I lost my child, and after that a longstanding relationship ended. Consequently, I decided to do something for myself, something that benefits me ... Hiking an old pilgrim trail had something comforting, although I'm not a religious person. I wanted time for myself ... a bit of 'self-therapy' (pil.9).

Another woman explained her story behind the Way in terms of a continuous existential crisis:

My story begins with an existential crisis that had been dragging for a long time but that

reached its peak when I divorced my husband. Then, after my divorce, I felt very worried inside. I was in a deep sea of emotions, very upset. So, I decided I needed to go far to make a change in my life. Pilgrimages have helped me close and bless past stages of my life, let me flow and open up to new beginnings with enthusiasm and gratitude (pil.18).

Some say their reason for walking the Way was 'therapeutic' in light of their knowledge of what pilgrimage walking can do to them (often based on past walking pilgrimages such as the Camino): 'To go for long walks I know gives peace of mind' (pil.40); 'I know that a pilgrimage contributes to my wellbeing' (pil.13). A handful of women came to experience restitution, find themselves and their original life pace again, and do something beneficial for them: 'I believed it would do me good, psychically and physically' (pil.37). As a Norwegian woman describes:

I believed this was the best help I could give myself, the tired brain, to rest and come back to my own pace of life; to see if I could find [my way] back to the joy over the immediate and earthly. It was as if my body and soul had not fully gone back to its normal condition after having walked in the life pace of others, assisting them on the road of completing their life, over the past three years. It was as though my soul had 'advanced' whereas my body was just tired and hadn't quite followed. I had mourned ... sorrow had accumulated inside me and [I] was on the verge of slipping into depression ... I also knew, from my walk in 2014, how transformative it can be to just walk one step at a time (pil.48).

Mental strength, balance, trust and test

Around 17% hoped to find 'inner', 'mental' or 'self-strength': 'I hope to gather strength and arrive at the realisation that I'm able to achieve things' (pil.14); 'get more trust in myself and my own strength' (pil.9), and; 'go home stronger' (pil.24). While 15% say their motive was a curiosity or personal test of mental strengths, boundaries or capabilities to see how they would psychically 'tackle such a challenge' (pil.47), cope with stress and the unexpected of the Way: 'I wanted to mentally challenge my own patience, endurance' (pil.39).

Figure 2. The joy of sharing a meal and making new friendships



Photo by Sigrun Andenæs, 2017

Physical challenge, bliss, rebirth and shape

To another 17%, the physical challenge of doing and accomplishing the journey, or to spend a new, different, creative, more adventurous or physically active / sportive holiday (partly the impact it has on the body) was central: ‘The reason was sportive. It’s exceptionally ‘uplifting’ to feel the body at work from morning to evening’ (pil.44); ‘it’s a party / celebration of the body’ (pil.46). Whereas the fact of losing some kilos, regenerating or rejuvenating physically, gaining a better condition and keeping in physical shape was important to a handful of pilgrims.

3. Social and solitary motives

Coming close to the health motives, a little over half of the people walked the St. Olav Way for social reasons (51%): to have time to be with, share or introduce the Way with / to their social others (partners, family members, friends), hoping for fellowship and ‘positive encounters with positive people’ (pil.44) or to make new friends. Whereas others preferred to walk alone (33%).

Different forms of social walking

When it comes to walking in company, a dozen walked with their *partner* to share the experience or the same interest, to get closer / find themselves as a couple, or not wanting to be or walk alone: ‘I travelled with my boyfriend ... I didn’t want to travel alone ... I wanted to experience this as a couple’ (pil.19). A Hungarian woman reveals: ‘I walk with my husband as I’m not happy travelling with foreigners’ (pil.33). A Swedish

woman, walking with her partner, responded that ‘there are very few people on the way’ (pil.50), implying some women may feel intimidated walking this less frequented way alone. While her partner said: ‘I walk with my life mate ... I enjoy walking with my love, and here we had an alternative where we could have all the paths ‘to ourselves’ (pil.51), underlining also the route’s romantic feel.

A handful of pilgrims walked with a *family member* to grow closer or spend holidays together: ‘First, my intention was to start the trail alone and then join my cousin. Finally, we did it together since my cousin didn’t have all the necessary camping gear’ (pil.24), showing that people sometimes stick together for pragmatic reasons. While a dozen pilgrims walked with a *friend* to share the passion for walking, or for safety reasons: ‘I hike together with my friend – alone I don’t feel secure’ (pil.6) as an Austrian woman admits.

A handful walked in a group of friends to talk and share experiences, fellowship and support: ‘I walk with three girlfriends. The conversations about life and the fellowship underway is one of the focal points’ (pil.45); ‘I walk with two friends to have someone to lean on’ (pil.42). A Norwegian student discloses how sharing the experience also made it easier to overcome the journey: ‘I walked with my big brother and my best mate ... To pull the lot together made the walk easier’ (pil.47). Finally, a dozen people walked in an organized group, some of them being pilgrim guides / priests or partially impaired: ‘I can’t walk alone due to my vision’ (pil.40).

Inspirational encounters and supportive fellowship

A handful of pilgrims expected or hoped to meet friendly and interesting people and locals. Yet others reveal that they hoped to become more sociable, or that they would benefit from the social aspect of the Way – ‘the encounters with people that are doing good’ (pil.8).

Some state they walked to feel joy, community, good conversations with and acceptance from other pilgrims; the so-called ‘pilgrim spirit’. As stated by a Spanish woman: ‘Pilgrimages ... make me open my heart and be more empathic, feel the warmth of and connection with others – the unity’ (pil.18). While others walk to learn from these social encounters, ‘be inspired by other ways of looking at the world’ (pil.19), get new impressions and support.

Figure 3 & 4. Encounters with wild animals such as foxes and elks along the Way

Photos by Sigrun Andenæs, 2017

Solitary walking

Out of all respondents, 33% walked alone, including a few (who would otherwise not walk without company) ending up walking alone involuntarily: 'I started walking with a friend who had inspired me, but after 70 km he gave up due to problems with his feet. I therefore have to continue alone' (pil.28). Whereas others chose solitary walking for a number of reasons:

I like to be alone in nature. I can control how fast and how long I want to walk. I focus more on nature and the walking experience if I'm alone. I can stop to take pictures or write when and as often as I want ... I started a kind of journey with myself when I got sick, and to walk on this trail was a sort of continuation of this journey (pil.49).

Some walked alone to free or be alone with their thoughts in an otherwise frantic life: 'I love to be alone with my thoughts .. As a social worker, I have communication 'around the clock' ... I looked for silence' (pil.26) a German man explains. Others said their motivation was to try out being and learning from being alone: 'I walk alone, because I want to experience it on my own. I have

never travelled alone. I think one learns quite a lot about oneself when travelling alone' (pil.9); 'I believe you are supposed to do something like this on your own' (pil.17).

A handful stress the importance of walking alone to find a way back to their original life-rhythm and be independent: 'The whole point was to walk alone, have only my own pace to follow, find back to my rhythm and slow down the speed. And ... find the way on my own' (pil.48); 'be independent on all levels' (pil.23). Solitary walking seems also socially 'less complicated': 'I often do much longer distances per day than others. So, I enjoy my hike without anyone complaining. But I very much enjoyed the encounters with other hikers along the trail' (pil.11).

4. Walking long-term long-distance pilgrimages

Almost half of the people stated their motivation was to walk a pilgrimage for a suitably long distance and time, knowing what miracles long-term, long-distance pilgrimage walking can do: 'much can happen to the spirit just by walking far enough' (pil.48).

20% of the respondents decided to walk the journey because they simply like long hikes, but also for pilgrimage walking's meaningful dimension: 'I'm fond of pilgrimage walking – it's a different, meaningful, way of walking' (pil.45). Others walked the Way because they had a dream or wish to do it, some of which had been prevented to do it earlier due to e.g. work: 'I had this dream, and now that I'm retired, I can realise it' (pil.10) (which partly explains the large number of retired pilgrims). Finally, a few walked for sportive reasons, the challenge of doing and completing such a demanding journey, or to spend a more creative, adventurous and active holiday.

5. Pilgrimage existence on repeat

Knowing how transformative a walking pilgrimage can be, 33% of the people were motivated to repeat or relive a pilgrimage or walking existence, being inspired by past walking pilgrimages, especially the Camino: 'My Camino experience was exceptional' (pil.32). Like a German woman says: 'I've walked the Camino 5 times. The Camino / St. Olav Way is doing me good and has a deeper meaning to me, because I become more aware of my needs' (pil.17). A Spanish woman adds: 'I needed a readjustment in my life. Thus, it was better to make another pilgrimage to clarify my ideas' (pil.18).

Out of the total, 33% were walking the Way for the first time, out of which everyone had undertaken the Camino,

while two had also done desert walking in the Holy Land and Egypt. Few mention their reason for having done the Camino before, however, some chose the St. Olav Way as an alternative to the Spanish route. For a handful, the motive was existential, for some, sportive or adventurous, while to most it was about re-experiencing 'the positive energy that the past walks had induced: to re-experience the extraordinary relaxation of walking and of being a pilgrim. The adventure and people excite me' (pil.13).

For a few it was their second time or more, having done the Camino *and* other pilgrimages before. They also noted the beneficial walking and social aspects as their reason for repeating the Way and other pilgrimages: 'I feel I matter in this community ... that I can challenge the people I want, discuss and simply be me' (pil.36). Eight had repeated *only* the St. Olav Way for the second time or more, out of which five had done parts of it before out of the love for 'Norwegian nature, the peace and calm, the beauty and roughness of the landscape' (pil.29), the 'great experience' (pil.45), or because: 'the Way does me equally good each time' (pil.37).

For seven, it was their first time to do a pilgrimage, but had walked shorter 1-day or week long walks / hikes in other parts of Europe or as part of their training / preparation for the St. Olav Way. Two of these had been on many and even longer hikes before. A German retiree states he however walked for the same reasons: 'the joy

Figure 5 & 6. Deep forests to bathe in and long pathways to contemplate along



Photos by Michael Schildmann, 2010

Figure 7. Gudbrandsdalsleden
The most frequented St.Olav variant



Photo by Jorund Levorstad, 2019

of the outdoors, nature ... to shut out the daily stress ... be one with nature ... find myself in tranquillity, and reconsider my life path' (pil.4).

6. Nature (Nature-bathing, self-immersion, mental rest and alone-time)

As many as 33% of the pilgrims expected to see beautiful nature, and sought specifically the 'Norwegian splendid, untouched landscapes' (pil.6), hoping for good experiences and memories. For 20%, the main motive was 'nature-bathing': to have time to enjoy, explore, experience and be one with nature, 'to immerse myself in nature, find myself' (pil.5); 'give the body a real chance to catch up with itself, discharge completely and recharge by 'bathing' in nature and being off-line' (pil.48); 'giving energy for the future' (pil.15).

Some indicate a healing anticipation towards nature, to which they assign a curative quality:

At work, we had a lecture on the therapeutic use of sensory gardens and the positive effects horticulture can have on depression. The best thing I could do, in my condition, was to give myself a long time in nature, to rest and come back to my own pace of life, my old self (pil.48).

Indeed, 20% of the respondents hoped for tranquillity and time-out to relax and find mental rest, inner peace, balance, calm and silence in nature.

Others emphasise the importance of alone-time in the

quietness of nature: 'time on my own, with myself and my body' (pil.28); 'time to be alone with myself in the peace of nature and experience inspiration' (pil.27). Whereas others were concerned with not walking alone in too remote nature for safety reasons and to be able to keep in touch with family.

Minor motives for walking the St. Olav Way

The four less stated themes belong to historical / cultural / travel interests, spiritual or religious motives, living the moment and a simpler and slower life, and celebrations or crossroads.

7. Historical, cultural and itinerary interests

A dozen people mentioned historical curiosity and cultural interest for this old, traditional pilgrim path, for Norway and Sweden, The Middle Ages and Vikings; 'to discover a country and its culture' (pil.19); people and places, and 'get a better knowledge about St. Olav and the Norwegian Church' (pil.22). Others revealed they went on the pilgrimage to 'see more of the most important parts of Norway' (pil.50). People wanted to see the landscape afoot or out of itinerary convenience, doing sections of the trail as part of their travel in or through Norway: 'In 2012, I decided to walk to the North Cape. ... I'm doing the Olav Way as part of my travel to the North Cape' (pil.11).

8. Spiritual and religious motives

For some, faith was part of their motives, but did not constitute the main reason for walking the Way. Some underlined they were Christian, but not practicing or searching for their faith. Still, there did not seem to be any ambivalence about lack of faith and doing the pilgrimage.

A handful of respondents say their motives were personal, existential and spiritual – not religious, but to have 'spiritual experiences' (pil.27) or to 'become more spiritual' (pil.49), distinguishing and emphasizing the difference between individual and institutional spirituality, and between a pilgrimage and an ordinary walk: 'To walk a pilgrimage, which carries a more explicit spiritual dimension than ordinary hiking trails, became a natural choice' (pil.48).

Figure 8. The simple life, sleeping in a ‘stabbur’

Photo by Sigrun Andenæs, 2017

Another handful of pilgrims did the Way for religious or Godly reasons: faith interest, the religious experience, the search for God, to deepen their faith in and relationship to, or be on a journey with God. Some expected to learn about and ‘dialogue with God and find answers to essential questions’ (pil.18); to ‘become wiser, more merciful and knowledgeable in the sense of God’ (pil.28). While others hoped to get ‘closer to themselves, fellow pilgrims, nature and God’ (pil.37), and creation.

9. Living the moment and a simpler and slower existence

A handful walked to experience a simpler and slower life: a break from everyday chores, to experience more depth and presence through an existence reduced to essentials. As a female therapist describes: ‘to cut with my regular and sedentary life, leave the comfort zone, feel alive and in accordance with my desires, to live the moment without any constraints ... and cope with barely nothing’ (pil.19). Some searched for the right way of life, even life pace, hoping to become more modest and happier with basics. Like a male hiking guide puts it: ‘It’s a good compensation for daily life, dealing with less abstract needs like food, water, shelter’ (pil.11).

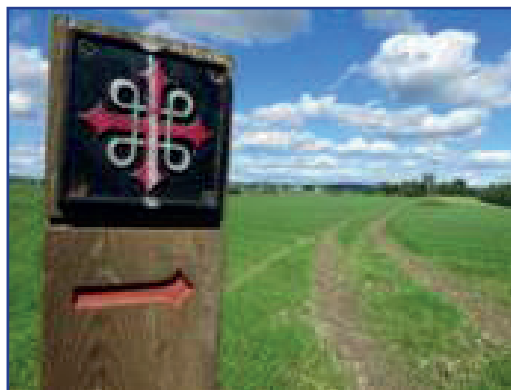
Figure 9. The St. Olav Cross and Way symbol
Often with a red arrow

Photo by Michael Schildmann, 2010

10. Celebrations and Crossroads

A few walked the St. Olav path as a way of turning a life page or celebrating a life event such as a degree, birthday or retirement, or before it is too late due to a crossroad: ‘When I got cancer, I decided I shouldn’t postpone the way, but walk it the summer after treatment’ (pil.49).

Discussion

The results reveal a range of reasons why people walk the St. Olav Way, out of which the main categories will be discussed in the following. Contemplation, health, social / solitary, long-term long-distance pilgrimage walking, repeating the pilgrimage existence, and nature motives, all appear more significant than religious ones, which coincides with the aforementioned studies of the Camino, Shikoku and St. Olav Ways. As Kraft (2007) says, a spiritual search or quest culture with self-development and -reflection related to fellowship, nature experiences and physical activity seems to be at the core of contemporary pilgrimage performance. Stausberg (2011) notes that religious motives may co-exist *alongside* other motives. This was only the case among five of our respondents. Most reveal a need or search for meaning and a longing for relatedness. At the same time, some motives express an existential dissonance that the walkers seek to solve or put behind them. People’s motives are thus, closely linked to mental health, existential / relational meaning; people’s innate need to meaningfully connect with themselves, social others and nature and seek harmony through walking (Jørgensen, Eade, Ekeland & Lorentzen, 2020). This encourages us to explore the main motivational trends of walking the St. Olav Way by drawing on related motivational theories, and then meaning-making literature.

Conscious and unconscious motivations

The motives for embarking on a walking pilgrimage reflect complex human factors composed of many interrelated and overlapping aspects, and are thus best explained in an interdisciplinary way (Morinis, 1992). Motives are related to a need, expectation, hope, wish or desired outcome, which moves us to act (Martinsen, 2004). While most motives are conscious, some may be less evident, run deeper than the surface – or become blurred (Slavin, 2003). People may be ambivalent about what ritual they are taking part in or what they are experiencing (Coleman, 2013). Some may even be unable to clearly define or articulate their motives. As Reader (2005:106) points out:

One should not assume that pilgrim's motivations are necessarily determined only prior to a departure, for it is often through the process of doing [the pilgrimage] that participants can gain any realization of why they are pilgrims.

The unclear motivations of some pilgrims are often overlooked in research according to Kristensen (2017), but can nonetheless become apparent or significant *while* walking, or first in the different life changes *after* the walk (Saunders, Laing & Weiler, 2014), arguing that meaning grows out of our process of walking, doing, becoming and understanding. So, while our participants were answering the survey questionnaire, a self-interpretation, a meaning-making (hermeneutic process) evolved.

Dilthey (in Bulhof, 1980) distinguished between the natural and human sciences, claiming that nature can be explained (*Erklären*), whereas people must be understood (*Verstehen*). Thus, by interpreting the respondents' self-interpretations, a double hermeneutic takes place. *Verstehen* refers to understanding the meaning of human actions from an individual's subjective stance rather than from objective observations. Our actions are not mere products of push and pull factors – we create and give meaning to our lifeworld by organising our understanding of it. This brings us to the meaning-making and motivational theories.

Meaning through relatedness

The meaning of life has long been a key human concern. Meaning-making is a fundamental human need, although it appears last in Maslow's (1943) influential hierarchy of needs. His self-actualization theory, focussing on growth vs. deficit, claims that people seek fulfilment and change

through intrinsic personal growth. Pilgrims have been interpreted as oriented intrinsically (inner need), rather than extrinsically (outer stimuli) (Gallegos *et al.*, 2007). Frankl (1963), on the other hand, posited that the primary human motivation is to *discover* meaning, whereas Kegan (1980) equated human being *with* meaning. George and Park's (2016) meaning-making theory seeks to explain life meaning through *comprehension* (a sense of coherence and understanding of one's life), *purpose* (a directed and motivated life by valued goals) and *mattering* (the feeling of importance, significance and value in the world). They distinguish life meaning from meaning frameworks (how things are / should be), which can either be reinforced by the former aspects, experienced as stable or be *e.g.* violated by a stressful life event, producing disharmony. Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) suggests that people seek to reduce disharmony by altering their attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, values and meaning framework to obtain cognitive consonance or homeostasis (Cummins, 2013). This is often seen in the context of walking pilgrimages, where some are motivated to gain mental balance after experiencing crisis (such as the mother having lost her child), and come home with a reframed meaning (Jørgensen, 2017).

People

The St. Olav pilgrims seem to seek meaning in the social conversations along the Way, that serve as a system of beliefs and worldviews (Jensen & Løverød, 2017). Alderfer (1969) further classified Maslow's needs into his theory of *existence needs* (physiological / safety needs, required for survival), *relatedness needs* (social needs establishing interpersonal relationships) and *growth needs* (self-actualization needs exploring the maximum potential of one's being), where he argued that we are also motivated by meaningful relationships.

This would accord with this study's findings where relatedness / social (and solitary) motives come third among the most important motivational categories. People's solitary motives can be understood as a need to (re)establish a relationship, connection, dialogue or inner voice with one's self. To walk in the footsteps of a collective tradition can also grow into a community experience of a metaphysical dimension. The social dimension of pilgrimage walking is an important motive for the journey: to experience authenticity, fellowship, recognition, belonging, direction and meaning along the Way (while at the same time, time-out from everything

and everyone at home); and to return home with new insights, change and life improvement (Johansen, 2005). Social contact / acceptance, especially for those starved of it, can also be therapeutic, even healing (Maddrell, 2013). Thus, pilgrimage walking has a deeper, preventative, meaningful and relational character; a longing for existential wholeness in relationships and life (Hafskjold, 2015; Kolbjørnrud, 2012).

Nature

Concerning walking, 'bathing' or being 'off-line' in nature, nature is known for its restorative health qualities (Kaplan, 1995), creating a sense of coherence, meaning, relation and belonging to one's surroundings, 'being-in-the-world' (Merleau-Ponty 1994; Lipowski *et al.*, 2019). A lot of people in Japan seek 'shinrin-yoku' (nature-bathing) for peace, contemplation and mental restitution, especially in burnout and as a means to prevent '*karoshi*' (overwork death) (Hansen, Jones and Tocchini, 2017; CNN, 2019), among others by walking the Shikoku or the shorter routes of the Kumano and Kii mountain pilgrimage. 'Vitamin G(reen)' (contact with verdant areas) has shown to diminish stress and yield well-being, self-esteem, and a stronger connectedness to nature (Groenewegen *et al.*, 2006). In terms of connectedness and meaning, Svarstad (2010) investigated what meaning Norwegian 'nature hikers' assign their trips, and identified three trends: nature hiking as means of mental and physical recreation to go on performing socially (living / working); a way of living out a social critique or an alternative to modern society; and to heal alienation and establish a sense of belonging and continuity in relation to nature, culture, history and identity. Thus, nature walking creates a deeper relationship not only with nature, but also with oneself in a wider omnipotent connection with the world, giving a sense of meaning and belonging, coherence and continuity that the St. Olav pilgrims seem to (sub)consciously seek.

Walking

To many, the possibility to walk, repeat, re-experience, contemplate and be on a slow, long-term journey towards oneself and with social others in nature, becomes the actual meaning or goal with the journey, less so the destination or rituals (Østergaard & Christensen, 2010). According to Giddens (1991), self-reflection is key for the development of our identity and reference frames for our actions and life anchorage. He believes the flood of self-help books expresses our modern need for 'self-therapy'

in the form of self-observation / thought-awareness, mindful presence and bodily experience leading to meaning, as sought and similarly performed through 'mindful walking' along walking pilgrimages such as the St. Olav Way. The need for time-out to contemplate and experience slowly is to Østergaard and Christensen (2010) an expression of the postmodern 'self-religion' – or 'contemporary religiosity' (Kraft, 2007). It ought to be understood as a reaction or revolution to our capitalistic, consumerist society that is by many experienced as high-speed, shallow and fragmented (Reader, 2005). To walk in the liminal or 'liminoid' (Turner, 1996) existence of a walking pilgrimage thus becomes a strategy to find room for reflection, personal development and change, a simpler lifestyle, spiritual depth, relatedness and meaning. And people seem to be positively reinforced and motivated to repeat what appears to work, such as harvesting and relishing the fruits from a walking pilgrimage, like the St. Olav Way.

Conclusion

Traditionally, pilgrimage has been a means by which people could seek life meaning in a religious context, taking on greater importance today. According to Reader (2005), modern-age technology and materialism have left many unhappy and alienated in a time when religion (a source of meaning) is decreasing or adapting to contemporary change. Many see pilgrimage as a way to cope with life challenges, find existential meaning, obtain better health and wellbeing. The main motives involved in walking the St. Olav Way have a relational and meaning-making character – with regard to oneself, one's life, health, social liaisons, 'being-in-the-world' through walking / bodily activity, and nature, confirmed by past motivational findings along the Spanish Camino and Japanese Shikoku routes. Contemporary walking pilgrimages appear to express a universal spiritual longing and 'an individual search for existential anchorage, meaning and fulfillment in life' (Nilsson & Tesfahuney, 2016:22), identity, relatedness, coherence and continuity (Blom *et al.*, 2016).

Camino and Shikoku walking pilgrims rarely have just *one* motive for their journey (Reader, 2005), which also applies to the current St. Olav findings. Walking pilgrimages provide an arena where motives and meanings vary widely and can even conflict (Eade & Sallnow, 1991). Today's pilgrims engage in 'mobile performativity' along ancient trails laden with religious

meanings, spiritual mysticisms, pilgrim traditions, collective memories, attributes, symbolisms, authenticity and meaning, from which people can 'shop' and shape their own journey as they wish (Nilsson & Tesfahuney, 2016). Thus, one can say that people's motivations are 'relativized as well as ritualized' (Coleman, 2013:305), reflecting Lévi-Strauss' 'self-bricolage' or the 'pick and mix' of post-modernity as well as 'the complexity of meaning-making processes and contradictions of the lived world' (Rogers, 2012:4), and the pursuit or realisation of the self through unique, subjective experiences.

It is crucial, therefore, to explore the complex nuances of people's motives for undertaking walking pilgrimages. The St. Olav case study has revealed a spectrum of reasons that has been analysed by drawing on meaning-making and motivational literature and theories. Hopefully, future motivational research of other walking pilgrimages will look beyond the mere distinction between religious and non-religious / institutional and spiritual, pilgrim vs. tourist motives – or even pilgrimage walking vs. thru-hiking (targeted long-distance hiking along an end-to-end trail) – and rather focus on the meaning-bearing dimensions behind such journeys.

Reflections and recommendations for future studies

The validity of the St. Olav motivations is supported by similar results produced by the aforementioned pilgrimage motivation studies and the meaning-making and motivation literature and theories outlined above. The study could to a larger extent explore people's motivational differences, using demographic data like gender, age, education / profession, nationality, belief system, even marital status, etc. Participants were not asked about their motives three months after the journey: whether the motives changed or clarified *during* the walk or turned out different or more apparent *after* the walk. These questions are left unanswered; a follow-up study is therefore needed. Future research is encouraged to examine the unclear and unarticulated motives of walking pilgrims (Reader, 2005), how they are shaped while doing or realised after the journey. This would to a larger degree illustrate the dynamic character of motives; how they can also be a result of people's pilgrimage walking processes and effects. Finally, future research could explore whether the same initial motivations apply along other long-distance walking pilgrimages and also more secular, non-religious long-term end-to-

end paths (Bader, 2018). In this way, the same way it seems possible to draw universal therapeutic lessons about pilgrimage walking (Jørgensen, Eade, Egeland & Lorentzen, 2020) – we can speak of motivational universals involved in undertaking walking pilgrimages. More motivational studies of other walking pilgrimages, such as the European Via Francigena (Lucarno, 2016), the Middle East's Abraham Path (Bonder, 2010) and Korea's Baekdu-daegan (Sheperd, 2011), are thus needed to assess the validity of this claim.

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