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The changing dichotomy between the sacred and the profane: a historical analysis of the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage

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ABSTRACT

In a world where belief systems are constantly evolving, the number of people making a religious pilgrimage has skyrocketed. The Camino (Road) to Santiago (Saint James) de Compostela has been part of this general fervor. The present study looks at the dichotomy within this particular pilgrimage between the sacred and the profane, applying a historical method toward this end. It will demonstrate that at each of the three periods used here as units of analysis (Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Postmodernity), the sacred and the profane have combined in specific ways around the constructs of separation, encapsulation, and hybridization. This categorization justifies pilgrimages’ depiction as societal and commercial phenomena; shows that this particular, mythical pilgrimage has always been associated with markets and consumption behavior; and offers insights into these elements’ development and operationalization in the marketing arena.

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Introduction

Changes in modern society have led to radically individualized modes of belief. The main effect is that people no longer accept normative responses to their demands for meaning. Where the sacred is affirmed, imposed, and dogmatized (“Because this is how things are and they cannot be any other way; Amen”), it becomes very tempting to try to emancipate oneself from faith and develop some kind of nonreligious replacement. The qualifier “sacred” was originally attributed to everything that was untouchable, inviolable, inaccessible, and unalienable. Little by little, the concept was expanded to include power, property, human life, and law (Kolár 2003). The sacred side of power disappeared from the equation when the idea of monarchic charisma faded. As for the desacralization of property, communist thinking sparked this. Nowadays few people miss these forms of sacredness. The question remains, however, whether society can survive and make human life tolerable if nothing is sacred anymore. In turn, this raises questions about the phenomenon of secularization, defined as the elimination of any boundaries between the sacred and the profane. The ultimate question then becomes...
whether a situation could arise where everything ends up being viewed as having a sacred meaning.

In today’s world, the sacralization of the secular pervades consumerism (Rinallo et al., 2013) at many different levels, including the products and services being offered, consumer experiences and practices, branding, and the values that products communicate. All these forms – traditionally considered profane – are now viewed as crystallizing divine energy, with consumption gaining “sacred status in our consumption-oriented and hedonistic society” (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry, Jr. 1989, 9).

With consumption being sacralized on one the hand and the sacred being made profane on the other, religions appear to increasingly call upon economic practices rooted in a management, business, and marketing logic. These practices could, however, alienate religious messages through the way they are communicated. According to Obadia (2013, 201), the “economization” of religiosity risks causing “its symbolic perdition” – in which case, religious institutions end up being no more than “entrepreneurs of sacredness”.

Having said that, it has also long been said that religions function as economic quasi-systems – a prime example being the Christian practice of indulgences during the Middle Ages. Nowadays, whether this involves derivative products (holy water from Lourdes), religious tourism (Meiji Shrine and Sensoji-Temple in Tokyo), pilgrimages (the Hajj to the al-Haram mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia), services (accommodation in monasteries), or foundations and other discussion forums, there is a great deal of crossover between religion and money. To understand this (often denied) connection, Obadia (2013, 203) has suggested the need for “a historical approach to the economics of religion”.

Nowadays, pilgrimage practices can be portrayed as consumption phenomena (Eade and Sallnow 1991; Shaw and Thomson 2013). Often described as religious tourism (Padin, Svensson, and Wood 2016), huge numbers of people partake in pilgrimages nowadays and by doing so generate colossal resources. For instance, nearly two million foreign pilgrims visit the holy city of Mecca every year for the Hajj. The figure is expected to reach 2.7 million by 2020. The Hajj generated around $6 billion in 2016. About 40% of this revenue came from the demand for accommodation, 15% from gifts, 10% from food, and the remainder from other services.

We have always known that religious marketplaces have both sacred and profane elements. The research question, therefore, asks how they coexist with pilgrimage. A historical method will be applied toward this end, where the article’s main goal will be to renew the scrutiny of pilgrimage-related commercial phenomena.

The article starts with a literature review, followed by a methodology section and presentation of the findings. It concludes with a discussion highlighting its contribution to the marketing and consumption of spirituality and religion.

**State of the art**

The literature review looks at the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane and how it applies to religious pilgrimages.

The sacred, derived from the Latin *sacer*, refers to those things associated with God, hence that have been consecrated. The Latin term *profanus* refers to things extracted
from the temple for human use. Sacred things are protected and set apart by prohibitions levied against profane things (which must, therefore, remain distant from their sacred counterparts). Durkheim was one of the first writers to contrast the sacred with the profane, being two distinct terms designating the common classification into two opposing classes found in all known religious belief systems. “Beliefs, myths, dogmas, and legends are either representations or systems of representation that express the nature of sacred things, the virtues and powers attributed to them, their history and their relationships with one another as well as with profane things” (Durkheim [1912] 1995, 34). This discontinuity between the world and the things found in it separates the profane from the sacred.

Contrary to what might naively be seen as an essentially sacralized approach to pilgrimages, literature began speaking about a permanent combination of the sacred and the profane, with the image of the barefoot pilgrim living on charity, and hospitality being seen as nothing more than a caricature. In reality, pilgrimages always had a commercial aspect. A few years ago (2013), The Economist titled an article “Pennies from heaven” asserting that pilgrimages are big business getting bigger; permeated by economic aspects; and attesting to the coexistence, interrelationship, and overlapping of business and religion. In short, it seemed clear that the sacred and the profane had become linked.

Whereas in the early 1960s, the Compostela Camino was nothing more than a Catholic pilgrimage, by the late twentieth century, it symbolized as United Europe. In parallel to a narrative about Europe’s Christian roots, the European Council began to develop the idea of a European identity based on the construct of a cultural itinerary, with the Santiago de Compostela Camino offering a prime example. Knowledge of the past and the creation of shared memories were supposed to bolster connections between different populations. “As an avenue for intellectual, political and economic exchanges – and a place where populations could mix – the Compostela Camino embodies European life even before Europe existed, proving the antecedents of European identity” (Cerezales 2013, 8).

**Pilgrimages and consumption**

Church representatives were also interested, and viewed pilgrimages as trade opportunities, since the Middle Ages. The economy of religion school (McCleary and Barro 2006; Obadia 2013) concurred with other management research, analyzing religion in market terms. McAlexander et al. (2014) showed, for instance, that when religion no longer performs its structuring role, the market is capable of replacing it at an ideological level by helping consumers construct their own identity. “If a central pillar of identity, such as a traditional religious institution, loses its legitimacy for certain consumers, how do they manage it?” (McAlexander et al. 2014, 859). Religion, all like other constructs, had become an object of consumption due to the congruence between religious and consumption ideologies. Hence it follows the porosity between the sacred (religious) and the profane (commercial), as noted in Cova and Rinallo (2015).

Otherwise, Mittelstaedt (2002) analyzed the connection between markets and religions by asking, to what extent the latter is an opportunity for the former. The idea was to support the notion that “Religion affects the basic parameters of markets, from which
markets and marketing systems develop, and that these effects can be understood by examining the mechanisms by which religion exerts authority over the activities of markets and market actors” (Mittelstaedt 2002, 6).

Iannaccone (1991) conceptualized the idea of a market for religion, featuring a supply of belief; demand from individuals; the presence of competing suppliers (institutions and places of worship); rituals describing religious behavior; and practice costs that condition market access.

Pilgrimages and tourism

Modern religious tourism has structured a range of commercial exchanges, none of which has much to do with sacredness (Nolan and Nolan 1992). Research by Bell and Dale (2011) has shown that the pilgrimage industry was arguably one of Medieval Europe’s most commercial activities. “The network of saints’ shrines, sanctioned by the Pope, can be seen as a business franchise operating under the umbrella brand of the universal Catholic Church” (Bell and Dale 2011, 624).

Pilgrimages can be equated with consumption experiences. An experiential approach offers a multitude of analytical keys here, whether in terms of the experiential context, the sharing of the experience, its design and theatricalization, or the shared emotions. As Husemann et al. (2016) wrote, they are “extraordinary experiences, involving a series of meaningful contacts, human, physical, geographic and emotional” (3362). As an extraordinary experience, a pilgrimage is a unique moment, sometimes qualified as “timeless”. “This collective movement in the company of like-minded pilgrims creates a sense of separation from the mundane world and allows the pilgrim to return home cleansed and renewed” (Husemann et al. 2016, 3362). The pilgrimage creates a temporality characterized by a strong and durable spiritual intensity, one not found in ordinary living patterns and which actually contrasts with the regular ordering of daily observance. This would also make it a zone of liminality in the sense that Turner and Turner (1978) give meaning to this term, as an intermediary space where individuals lose their former status but are yet to achieve their new ones.

Private commercial actors have relied on religious tourism and pilgrims’ consumption to boost the economic activity of the regions that pilgrims traverse. The assets associated with cultural tourism provide an area with a new image. In the words of Cerezales (2013, 9), “The Santiago de Compostela Camino has become a fully-fledged tourist product”.

A pilgrimage economy hosts not only activities relating directly to walkers’ needs (equipment, accommodation, food, healthcare, transport) but also occasional festive events and other more or less religious celebrations (Camhi-Rayer 2012). Holy years, for instance, always involve major religious celebrations being staged. The image of the pilgrim, central to tourist policy, has become an object of promotion. Millions of visitors come to Santiago de Compostela to commemorate the holy year but also for the hundreds of activities organized in their honor by local authorities. Religious festivals are run alongside rock concerts, like Muse in 2010 and even more iconically Bob Dylan in 2004. The city enjoys celebrating its patron saint, making it hard to separate the religious from the nonreligious. Local residents together with tourists and pilgrims attend these events and spend hundreds of Euros.
Hence the importance of portraying the value of cultural and religious elements as a way of renewing European people’s unifying consciousness. Note that this approach also lies at the heart of any social, tourist, cultural, and economic development strategy that seeks to help struggling populations and isolated regions suffering decline. In this way, the sacred and the profane combine to improve the overall balance of the system.

Literature illustrates this dichotomy but there does not seem to be any advanced analysis of the different forms it can assume. The complexity of phenomena characterizing a multitude of actors pursuing different aims (including within a given category) makes it hard to describe and categorize the forms of this dichotomy. All of which justifies further investigation of the facts – such as they have been transcribed in different texts – by pursuing a historical approach.

Methodology

The next section discusses the historical methodology used to answer the article’s research question.

The present article adheres more to Smith and Lux’s interpretive adaptation (1993) in a consumer research context while keeping in mind the notion of situational features addressed by Jonhs (2006, 387), as salient features of an event are common signals of context effect and the research conducted as a result of such events intensifies our sensitivity to the latent contextual effect. Therefore, this article considers the event of Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage as a context. A single event or happening has the tendency to punctuate context (Jonhs 2006). Such events or happenings are often studied by means of qualitative methods. Such as, Apostol (2011) studied the event of Pilgrimage (To Saint Parascheva of Iasi and the pilgrimage to Saint Dumitru cel Nou, Basarabov in Bucharest.) in the context of postcommunist Romanian media by investigating the articles published in newspapers during the period 1990–2010. Moreover, Dowson (2016) also examined Spiritual Pilgrimage in the context of an event, by conducting a Case Study of the “Cherish” Christian Women’s Conference. Hence, this article will take into consideration the historical aspects of all the happenings, rituals and behaviors during the periods of Middle Ages to postmodernity, by differentiating the macro and micro events in the context of Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage. This clearly fits the precepts of the historical approach that takes into account the contextual elements relating to the studied phenomenon.

Research process when mobilizing a historical approach

The inspiration here has been the historical research process (see Figure 1) that Smith and Lux (1993) developed. This is comprised of two successive phases, describing five levels of analysis: question framing, research procedures, investigation, synthesis, and interpretation.

(1) Question framing

The present article initially focused on the secularization of religious practice and a dual transition involving a sacralization of the profane and a desacralization of religion
Hence it questions commercialism’s role in religious pilgrimages (Bell and Dale 2011; Cova and Rinallo 2015). This approach can be justified at two levels:

- The secularization of religious practices and elimination of boundaries between the sacred and the profane. The more a society modernizes (higher standards of living, democratization, pluralization, and individualization), the more it secularizes, sparking a tendency to attribute sacred meaning to all things. This form of universalized sacredness can be equated with the elimination thereof — saying that everything is sacred means that nothing is, with Durkheimian principles teaching the sacred and the profane are only intelligible insofar as they oppose one another. In this context, it became legitimate to ask about the religious – hence sacred – aspects of pilgrimages, themselves traditionally viewed as a religious practice.

- Three sanctuaries stood out during the Middle Ages as pilgrimage destinations: Jerusalem, Rome, and Santiago de Compostela. The latter continues to attract extraordinary crowds today, with thousands of pilgrims “Walking the Camino”

(Rinallo et al, 2013).
every year (nearly 278,000 in 2016 vs. 2500 in the mid-1980s). It is a timeless adventure appealing to men and women of all ages but also from different religions, following a request from a variety of actors including the Catholic Church, national institutions, nongovernmental organizations, and civil society actors. The end result has been to imbue the very idea of pilgrimage with rich meaning, federating different stakeholders and range of political and economic interests.

(2) Research procedures

The Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage has been covered in many texts (narratives, scripture, scientific production, etc.) for many years, enabling analysis of different epochs spread across several centuries of history. The historical method seems like the obvious choice, as long as certain prerequisites are satisfied (Nevett, 1991):

- Sufficient (written) data to account for most of an event’s history;
- Time periods with enough rich data to treat each correctly;
- Collection of data targeted toward the actual research question.

After much reading and discussion, the choice was made here to mobilize data from both secondary sources (articles) and primary ones (original historical archives). In the historical approach, the term “primary” refers to original instead of collected data, since the latter does not exist in the methodological sense, hence usually attributed to management studies.

The decision was made to focus on three very distinct periods (see Figure 2) marking the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage since its existence of almost 12 centuries: Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Postmodernity. This breakdown helps to monitor how the relationship between the sacred and the profane has evolved over time.

The three periods replicate an analytical framework used by Jean-François Lyotard (1984), who broke his thinking down into premodern (Middle Ages), modern (from the Renaissance to the year 2000), and postmodern (2001 and beyond).

The Middle Ages were characterized inter alia by the feudal system established since Charlemagne’s Carolingian empire and which acted to decentralize his kingdom. Christian belief steadily took root in France during the Middle Ages, overcoming alternatives such as sorcery and the occult. Starting with the baptism of Clovis, royalty regularly used religion as a pretext for action: Crusades, pilgrimages, conflicts, Inquisition, etc. Growing trade at that time also supported the rise of a merchant

Figure 2. Timeline of the three periods under study.
class that progressively took power in the cities. Commercial trade was consolidated through the organization of guilds and markets, in an era witnessing the proliferation of means of communication on land and at sea.

With the Renaissance came the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire and the discovery of the Americas, sparking a veritable renewal of civilization. Alongside the rise of science, the arts became the springboard for a variety of innovative ideas progressively detaching humans from the sense that they were unalienably tied to God. Having said that, the period also witnessed several wars of religion as well as royal absolutism, which came to an end in France with the 1789 revolution.

The more recent postmodern era has again reshuffled the cards. Societal changes have included growing mistrust of all institutions, the preeminence of the present moment (instantaneousness), despair about the future, the fading of reason, a fragmentation in values and a return of religion.

Contrasting these three very different historical periods, there are sufficient variations in their salient events or facts to sustain the diachronic analysis that the present article adopts in its periodic comparisons.

(3) Investigation (data collection)

The sources, documents, and proofs used in historical analyses generally differ from the traditional instruments used in marketing studies. Researcher objectivity remains an important part of the way information is compiled and treated. The present article has paid special attention to sources’ qualification by distinguishing original (primary) ones from the (secondary) documents they inspired.

The Codex Calixtinus and Petrarch are the two primary sources used here. Many historians and specialists have scrutinized them carefully since the nineteenth century, offering systematic criticism of the sources’ authenticity. The secondary sources used here are comprised of a variety of historiographic documents crossing pilgrim experience narratives from different periods with the different types of pilgrims involved, each set in their own context.

It is also worth noting that many French-language historians have published and translated primary data in French alone. Hence the large number of references in this language, which has the merits of avoiding over-translation but the associated risk of a loss of information.

To optimize the data collection process, the article follows Smith and Lux’s insights (1993) about improving the classification and discrimination of any facts or events being described. By splitting categories between micro (individual) events and macro (community, societal or structural) ones, it becomes easier to compile data and link certain events, with macro events influencing micro events in certain cases.

For each period, the events emerging from the data sources have been ranked to facilitate and systematize the ensuing (comparative) diachronic approach.

(4) Synthesis

This phase of historical analysis entails integrating all chosen macro and micro events – categorized during the preceding investigation phase – in a way that produces a
descriptive narrative for each target period. To ensure the relevance of the events the article has chosen, it follows advice from Smith and Lux (1993, 604) that

A valid historical narrative must satisfy three criteria of (1) containing all the facts relevant to the question under investigation, (2) containing no facts that are not relevant to that question, and (3) adequately explaining the change that is the question’s subject.

For the three specific periods in question here (Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Postmodernity), the narrative produced has adhered meticulously to these three criteria in the chosen events.

Once a narrative has been developed for each period, diachronic analysis compared the three periods described and analyzed the changes in the relationship between the sacred and the profane across time within the context of the Compostela Camino. The emphasis here is placed on how events change from one period to the next. The intra- and extra-period comparison reflect on how certain events evolved; which new ones arose; and which old ones disappeared.

(5) Interpretation

By its very nature, historical research does not seek to predict but instead to observe and describe. Hence, any of the findings cannot be generalized to other pilgrimages. Instead, the focus is on a discussion testing current theory. Having said that,

The answer to the research question constructed at this stage of historical analysis ties the research to one of the historian’s three interpretative ends – developing a theory of change, testing or corroborating an existing theory, or explaining anomalies unaccounted under current theory. These interpretative outcomes exhibit a cyclical relationship that can be illustrated by the example of historical research. (Smith and Lux 1993, 605)

This historical analysis responds to a specific suggestion that a new view is taken based on the connection that exists between the sacred and the profane. In turn, this should enhance understanding of consumption phenomena and help develop new patterns of meaning.

Findings

To repeat, the present analysis looks at the changes in the relationship between the sacred and the profane in people’s experience of the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage across the three periods identified here as being crucial: the Middle Ages (from the year 1000 to the twelfth century); the Italian Renaissance (fifteenth and sixteenth centuries); and today’s Postmodernity era (from the nineteenth century to today).

The grand seminal narratives underlying Western collective imagination include the tales of Gilgamesh (seventeenth and eighteenth centuries BC) and Homer’s Odyssey (eighth century BC). Both evoke different forms of human and spiritual quests akin to pilgrimages (Hentsch, [2002] 2004). Western collective imagination is heavily influenced by these narratives, some of which would reappear in the foundations of the three great monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). In the time of prophets, personal pilgrimages were central to narratives about the human condition. Still, it was the founders of the Christian Church – Saint Augustine (354–430) and Saint Gregory I
(540–604) – who formulated the basic rules of the Christian pilgrimage, with Jerusalem being instituted as a destination in the fourth century, about the same time as Rome. The Compostela pilgrimage – which took shape between 788 and 838 – was constrained from the very outset by three simultaneous phenomena: the development of commercial routes; the Crusades, which began with Pope Urban II in 1095 when obstacles arose on the pilgrimage to Jerusalem pilgrimage; and the lasting effects of the year 1000 (Duby 1982).

**Middle Ages (tenth to twelfth centuries)**

The second millennium sparked a purification of medieval societies that included pogroms, witch hunts, expiatory processions by all orders of sects and – less dramatically – an affluence of pilgrims with a wide range of motives. As demonstrated by Duby, these phenomena were largely a reflection of reactions to the brutal changes that societies were experiencing. The decline of France’s Carolingian dynasty led to the birth of feudalism. It was in response to all these changes lasting more than a century that some individuals’ social despair and others’ hope in a “new spring for the world” sparked mass traveling by mendicant orders, the sick, migratory peasants, poets, writers, sects, Tournament nobility, Crusaders, and merchants. Texts are clear that from the very outset, the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage experience was a real mix of the sacred and the profane. It is also clear that neither the Catholic Church nor the Papacy had any real control over these practices, in part because they were so tied up by the wars of religion. This was also a time when Europe was engaged in the Crusades (1095–1291), a context unconducive to the invention and development of a Santiago de Compostela Camino tradition. Nor does it particularly matter whether this tradition was real, imagined, or invented. The strength of a tradition does not derive from its authenticity but from its duration (Ranger and Hobsbawm 1983). A melting pot from the very outset, Compostela pilgrims were always a mix of the sacred and the profane. A further interpretive layer stems from changes in the seventeenth century Church, i.e., the Gregorian Reform. Patrick Boucheron (2016), a Medievalist specializing in the history of religious power, recently reinterpreted this reform in light of the separation that it created. In his words, the reform “was not only caused by religious history relating to the Church’s defense of its material goods and prerogatives but a general re-ordering of all powers, a structuring of the world around ecclesiastic dominion” (Boucheron 2016, 37). Ecclesia separated the material from the spiritual, the heretic from the believer and the clergy from the layperson, thereby instituting two kinds of population and power. Because no one really knew what each body was capable of, this created a new need for a Regimen capable of governing people’s hearts and minds. In the end, however, the reform failed.

The key figure in this triumphant Roman and Gothic Christianity between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries was Francis of Assisi (1182 –1226), founder of the Franciscan order that came to play such a decisive role in the rise of new mendicant orders embodying a community of destiny and ultimately erasing the differences between laypersons and clergy (Le Goff 2003, 210). These were the people who founded Franciscan monasteries and churches along the Compostela Camino. Their actions
revealed the emerging shape of a Christianity whose triumph was based on superstition (Schmitt 1999). Recent scientific critiques of the authenticity and level of erudition in Francis of Assisi’s texts reveal the intentions, motives, and collective imagination of the diverse crowds found on the Compostela Camino. Francis of Assisi’s “Two Rules” and “Testament” spoke of this shared experience of communion with nature, a vision of salvation accessible to humble individuals living in communitarian and penitential conditions on the Compostela Camino.

Middle Ages (tenth to eleventh centuries) is characterized by “separation” when the sacred and the profane were mutually exclusive. This situation consolidated with the Gregorian Reform establishing an independent clergy. Neither the Church nor the Papacy controlled pilgrimage practices. A diverse crowd (including beggars, the sick, migratory peasants, the religious, troubadours, destitute nobility, Crusaders, and merchants) would undertake the pilgrimage irrespective of the conditions they faced, including wars, severe weather and/or highway robbery. All hoped to save their souls and seeking redemption for their sins. This was the time when Saint James pilgrims believed in miracles and would fall in ecstasy when visiting holy places. Even so, business was always booming (Bell and Dale 2011), be it the trade in relics and indulgences or else monetary transfers associated with the trip itself (licenses and fees, room and board, festivities).

**Italian Renaissance (fourteenth to sixteenth centuries)**

The Italian Renaissance witnessed this same phenomenon of half-sacred half-profane pilgrimages. Secularization, individualism, humanism, commercial capitalism (Kocka, 2016), the rise of scientific thinking – these great discoveries meant that the timid tradition of Medieval travel narratives soon transformed into authentic travel literature (Prud’homme, 2009). Many great names launched this genre, starting with Eustache Deschamps (1340–1404), Michault Taillevent (1390–1448), Jean Froissart (1337–1405), Jean Régnier (1392–1468) – and above all, Petrarch, who in 1335 wrote an account of his pilgrimage to the Mont Ventoux. Influenced by “The Confessions of Saint-Augustin”, Petrarch’s text became a long spiritual meditation, a highly personal account celebrating the beauty of the landscape, affection for the countryside, and the spiritual (albeit not very religious) questions this raised (Petrarch [1948] 1336). At the end of his quest, Petrarch felt he was now able to rediscover who he was and where he was going. His writings focused on the individual and became one of the first major texts in travel literature and humanist thinking. It was a genre that would flourish in a growing and diverse corpus composed of travelogues, geographic literature, missionary reports, merchant correspondence, and peddled booklets, all of which encompassed both the sacred and the profane as well as the commercial and noncommercial. Having said that, the genre did not spread particularly widely and would ultimately have a very little effect on European religious practices pre-seventeenth century (Darnton, 1982; Chartier 1994). Sporadic controls by the Catholic Church and the Papacy, the failure of the Gregorian Reform, and the mediocre diffusion of Italian Renaissance ideas, all combined to ensure that the sacred and the profane would continue to mix on the Santiago de Compostela Camino.
The same phenomenon occurred within the Church and in the host cities dotting the Camino. Research by Esther Cohen (1976) relating to trade in statues, holy images, insignia (jewels or sculpted metal), relics, reliquaries, and representations of holy places sold on the Santiago de Compostela Camino found that during the later Middle Ages, the development of a whole souvenir industry for pilgrims reflected the change in popular attitudes towards pilgrimages. The pilgrimage ceased to be a purely religious undertaking of someone who had severed himself from secular society for the duration of the journey. It became a social event which combined piety with tourism. (Cohen 1976, 193)

Here Cohen was demonstrating the dual nature of these items’ value because they were part of the pilgrimage itself but also because they offered souvenirs from the experience.

Once home, the pilgrim who wished to join the local confraternity devoted to the shrine had to produce the badge as proof of his pilgrimage. If the pilgrimage was of a judicial rather than devotional nature, the badge was not considered sufficient evidence, but it was still an essential part of it. (Cohen 1976, 194)

Archeological accounts studied by the author show how this trade generalized between the twelfth and nineteenth centuries. There is also ample evidence about its economic and financial aspects (Bell and Dale 2011). Archeological and financial evidence merge perfectly to support this interpretation of the pilgrimage as something akin to a business opportunity. And there is just as much evidence about the types of pilgrims involved and what their motives were.

The Renaissance witnessed the rise of penitential and stipendiary pilgrims doing the Camino pilgrimage on other people’s behalf (Péricard-Méa 2001), often royalty or other members of high society. Otherwise, there were also “professional pilgrims” who made the trip as they were dying (or after they died), seeking Saint James’s help with their final journey. Examples include Charles V who sent one of his knights in his stead, or Jacques Cœur who while in prison had one of his sons to go to Compostela on his behalf. Throughout the Renaissance, a whole pool of stipendiary pilgrims was available for hire to meet the demand for surrogate pilgrimage from testators and those too ill to travel (Bell and Dale 2011). Some stipendiary pilgrims were “professionalized” and did the journey on behalf of different clients, who would pay them for their efforts. In short, instead of seeking repentance, some people hired others to do this on their behalf – or in the case of a postmortem pilgrimage, to ask Saint James’s help in saving a deceased person’s soul.

Studies by Maillot (2005) have described how aldermen from the city of Lille used enforced (or judicial) pilgrimages as a way of expunging criminal sentences. Fifteenth- and sixteenth-century registers are full of such accounts, so are numerous municipal archives. Some guilty parties were not required to do the pilgrimage, if they paid their lord instead or did some kind of barter deal with him (i.e., working to fortify his land, pave roads or craft leather water buckets that could be used to put out fires) – all of which attests to the fact that pilgrimages were attributed a specific monetary value.

Péricard-Méa (2001) describes Santiago as a promising marketplace where commercial pilgrims are happy to outsource their pilgrimage mission, one example being Countess Mahaut d’Artois’s furrier who during the fourteenth century did pilgrimages specifically to do business. Besides selling their goods all the way up and down the
Camino, commercial pilgrims would also trade information that people were happy to pay for. Municipal leaders found it quite natural to ask pilgrims to carry messages, communicate local rumors, or even collect news from enemy territories (in which case they would be acting as ambassadors to a foreign monarch). Otherwise, they often had the job of officially announcing news deemed to be of general importance. In short, pilgrims played an undeniable role in the propagation of news and rumors. Circulating news from village to village also meant they would regularly be offered free room and board. In short, everything had a price – even on the Compostela Camino.

Renaissance (fourteenth to fifteenth centuries) is characterized by “encapsulage”, when the sacred lost its shine and the profane spread rapidly. With the rise of secularization – the process where institutions and some religious thinking and practice loses social importance – science began dominating religion, with primitive beliefs being overrun by logic and objective knowledge. Pilgrimages started to resemble other kinds of travel or attempt to discover nature. The individual became central to human existence, dethroning God and all the saints. Penitentiary and stipendiary pilgrims instrumentalized the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage as the punishment for some misdemeanors and even as a source of income, thereby undermining its sacred dimension. Noble-born pilgrims saw it as a kind of fashionable travel describing forms of micro-sociality driven by a sense of challenge and adventure. What had once been a journey of faith became a market where different products were sold and traded, alongside information, services, and ideas.

Postmodernity (nineteenth to twenty-first centuries)

Since the late nineteenth century – the so-called Postmodern era – the Compostela pilgrimage has consolidated, reaching an unprecedented level of popularity and witnessing the significant development of its convent amenities. Paradoxically, it was at this time that a scientific critique started demolishing Santiago de Compostela’s historical claims one by one. During the nineteenth century, the authenticity of the Codex Calixtinus (attributed to Pope Calixtus II, 1119–1124) would be severely criticized by professional historians, with the five volumes of this largely hagiographic Codex coming under severe scrutiny, possibly for the first time. Relics also came under historical scrutiny, as did the 1879 discovery of Saint James’s body. Even more significantly, evidence would be provided that the Compostela Camino duplicated Roman or commercial roads dating back to the Antiquity. Despite this, it appears that many believers and pilgrims would pay little notice to this scientific critique of dogmatic texts or to the immense and erudite work accomplished by scientists and theologians alike.

To offset these doubts, the Pope began recognizing Compostella relics. Alongside this, the Codex and Le guide du Pelerin were published in 1884 (Hogarth 1992) – the same year that Leon XIII first recognized Saint James’s body. Believers and ecclesiastic authorities would henceforth view the five volumes of the Codex as the official history of Santiago de Compostela. These fables, legends, myths, and hagiography – and the questionable authenticity of the body of Saint James and of Santiago de Compostela relics – had a curiously little effect, however, on the popularity of this pilgrimage, something that remains true to this day. In an era marked by science, Compostela’s triumph is very strange indeed. Jean-Paul II’s August 1989 pilgrimage to celebrate the
Fourth World Youth Day contributed to the popularity of the Camino, which now incarnates a sort of religious renewal. Not only have ecclesiastic authorities diversified but also the pilgrims, ranging nowadays from mystics to simple tourists, devoted ramblers, and athletes.

In conclusion, the penitentiary aspect of pilgrimages dominated during the Middle Ages because the Church saw this as a way of redeeming sin. During the Renaissance, pilgrimages came to be viewed as a penitence that was proportionate to certain crimes. Today, some pilgrims continue to perform the ritual as a kind of indulgence, purification, sacrifice, and sometimes even mortification. However, this is no longer because of the requirement by the Church or some other institution – rather, it is their own initiative. The Postmodern combat against religious sacralization, often associated with religious obscurantism, has requalified the pilgrimage as a travel route while maintaining some of its sacredness. Religion today is part of something enormous. The changing profile of twenty-first century pilgrims seeking spirituality, an internal journey, a happy life, sport, travel, and good food is a clear reflection of the cultural and religious mixing of the dichotomy that otherwise separates the material from the immaterial, the commercial from the noncommercial, the spirit from the body, the spiritual from the secular, and hence the sacred from the profane. The sacredness of pilgrimages has been in question since the nineteenth century. During the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, local, European, and international institutions confirmed pilgrimages’ profane nature by labeling them as such. If sacredness survives the decline of religious institutions and more globally the fading of modernity’s seminal myths, it will only be because the concept has moved into the social sphere, focusing solely on the construct of sociality and demanding, in turn, the new forms of coexistence.

Postmodernity (nineteenth to twenty-first centuries) is characterized by “hybridization” when the sacred revived and began to mix with the profane. Post-secularization followed secularization, manifested in the revival of religious references within a framework defined by nascent Postmodernity. “The revival of pilgrimage routes has helped to create a post-secularism logic according to which spirituality and religiosity maintain their prominence and take on new interpretations of the environment” (Lopez, González, and Fernández 2017).

The Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage would institutionalize. These and other such events were accompanied by myriad federations, associations, and other Saint James friendly societies that would then organize, structure, maintain, and develop the Camino, making it a focus for all kinds of political, civic, and commercial organizations. Everything would be commercialized, starting with pilgrimage costs (equipment, room and board, etc.) and generating monetary flows that benefit public and private sector actors alike, even as they create a new spiritual dynamic that galvanizes the entire system. Modern thinking had previously conveyed a utopian project circumscribed by theorems of progress and rationality, but Postmodernity responded with great lucidity as to the tragedy of the present, being an era when humanity has entered into a quasi-mystical resonance with the surrounding world. With hybridization, the sacred and the profane have come to be viewed as two extremes on a continuum.

In conclusion, it is clear that the Compostela pilgrimage represents a mixture of the sacred and the profane during each of the three periods covered in this article.
Discussion

The present study confirms that the sacred/profane dichotomy has evolved and been reconfigured over time without ever really disappearing. If the idea of sacredness has been able to survive the decline of religious institutions (and more broadly, the erosion of modernity’s seminal myths), it is only because the concept has shifted and now applies solely to sociality, requiring, in turn, new forms of human coexistence.

The analysis here shows that the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage has never been entirely sacred; that is, there has always been a combination of sacred and profane elements whether this relates to the walkers themselves, the Church, or other actors (sponsors, room and board providers, judicial and police officers, etc.). Moreover, this combination has always featured both consumption- and market-related aspects.

The three forms are not independent, however. A historical approach reveals their inter-connections and indeed interdependencies, as Figure 3 shows.

Choosing these three periods of history artificially glosses over everything that happened in between. Separation, encapsulation, and hybridization were incrementally constructed after a transformation process lasting several centuries. Intermediary phases between two periods have enabled the transition from one form of dichotomy

![Figure 3](https://example.com/figure3.png)

**Figure 3.** Comparison of the periods under the study of the three dichotomies in the Compostela pilgrimage between the sacred and the profane.
to another while combining the characteristics of two forms in a way that would create three intersecting zones:

- The intersection between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: traditional religious beliefs (including superstitions) surviving alongside scientific logic
- The intersection between the Renaissance and Postmodernity: commercial capitalism arriving in the journey’s bucolic landscape and joining the narrative about Saint James pilgrims’ reborn through their special access to Mother Nature
- The intersection between Postmodernity and the Middle Ages: without any control over institutions, Saint James pilgrims coming from all parts of society, nations, and confessions, featuring extremely varied motives – but only hearing the call of the beyond, be it on the Camino or somewhere else.

Lastly, a joint three-form zone (at the center of Figure 1) groups the timeless invariables characterizing the sacred/profane dichotomy within the framework formed by the Compostela pilgrimage. Three elements compose this last zone:

**A specific and intensive relationship with nature**

The route that pilgrims follow immerses them in a natural environment. Following in predecessors’ footsteps, they cross forests and fields, cities and villages, and sites and sanctuaries – in a setting of greater or lesser wilderness – all bearing witness to the holy life. It is in this way that the Camino has remained a special space. Despite changes and arrangements over time, it still embodies a mythical connection linking different sacred spaces to one another. As noted by Castro-Fernandez (2015), the Camino has changed continuously throughout history, with its symbolic importance also varying in line with political vagaries. Indeed, the actual itinerary has also changed on occasion, depending upon the influences exerted by commercial interests, businesses, religious fashions, and secular enthusiasms. The sites dotting the Camino have continually competed to attract pilgrims and by so doing forged alternative byways and diversions. All throughout, however, pilgrims’ relationship to nature has remained a key element of the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage.

Religious tourism studies (Collins-Kreiner 2010; Blom, Nilsson, and Santos 2016) have tried to develop models and tools capable of managing experiences of immersion into the wild. Research by Amaro, Antunes, and Henriques (2018, 278), for instance, has proposed eight types of motives driving Saint James pilgrims before concluding that “pilgrims are mostly motivated by spiritual aspects, new experiences, nature, and sports experience”. The idea here is that the beauty of the physical environment is a strong pilgrimage value. According to Kim, Kim, and King (2016, 150), the fact that the Compostela pilgrimage experience is realized in a natural environment contributes to the pilgrim’s personal happiness:

The most strongly linked association was natural environment (appreciation for the beauty of nature) and personal happiness. This finding resonates with the Camino’s trekking opportunities along with a naturally tracked route with spectacular landscapes and opportunities to appreciate nature, avoiding man-made transportation.
In managerial terms, nature can be considered central to the pilgrimage offer, hence a key factor of success. As a result, it is in the interest of economic actors (room and board providers, tourist agencies) not only to highlight and exploit the experiential context in their communications but also to portray it as a resource capable of ensuring pilgrims’ happiness. Similarly, institutional organizations must focus quite specifically on the Camino itself (route, maintenance) to enhance people’s experience of the specific landscape and of nature in general.

**Various rituals**

Like all such practices (religious or other), pilgrimages are full of rituals that all the pilgrims have respected across time. Rather than opposing the spirituality associated with the pilgrimage, they cherish it, thereby creating closer ties within their pilgrim community. One example is the ritual gesture they make upon arrival at the Santiago basilica, inserting their right hand into the traces of fingers left in the Portico of Glory’s central arch, and leaving it there while saying five Pater Nosters in the hope that Providence will gift them five blessings in return.

These rituals require pilgrims to be in the presence of marker objects, badges, and other material items that cannot be dissociated from the Saint James journey. Many last for centuries without ever losing their relevance: clothing like capes (which identified Saint James pilgrims in Medieval engravings but have been replaced in recent years by Gore-Tex), duffle bags (replaced by rucksacks), gourds (replaced by Camelback bottles), or wooden walking sticks (replaced today by carbon sticks); or documents like save-conducts, authorizations, and faith attestations, all of which once enabled Saint James pilgrims to circulate freely before being replaced a century ago by identity cards and other such credentials. These marker objects sometimes come from the commercial world, one example being “Miam Miam Dodo”, a veritable nonreligious bible and Camino reference guide offering itinerary details and listing places to stay or eat as well as other services that pilgrims find indispensable. As for the scallop shell, it remains the signature insignia of everyone walking the Compostela Camino.

Rituals might also involve other artifacts (cult words, prayers, ritual practices), illustrated by the cry that today’s Saint James pilgrims use to recognize one another, “Ultreia!” (from the Latin *ultra* [beyond] and *eia* [over there]) – a motto and expression of joy dating from the Middle Ages, which again became popular last century as the words to a song. Otherwise, there is the possibility of washing up in the town of Lavacolla (with its evocative name), located a mere six miles from Santiago de Compostela and someplace where pilgrims can purify themselves by laundering and changing their clothes before entering the holy city.

**A specific kind of sociality**

Pilgrimages support a specific kind of sociality. In addition to the diversity of religious and nonreligious motives (Kim, Kim, and King 2016; Amaro, Antunes, and Henriques 2018) and walkers’ varied profiles (pilgrims, tourists, penitents, mercenaries, ramblers, those who believe themselves to be martyrs or the chosen, warriors or adventurers), pilgrim practice defines a specific kind of sociability anchored in tradition. Whether intentional or not,
individual or collective, optional or mandatory, modulable or exceptional, this sociability always involves mobility and is quite different from other more traditional forms of religious practice (Way of the Cross) and secular practice (trekking) (Hervieu-Léger 2002). Saint James associations, virtual groups, forums, blogs, and informal networks support and galvanize exchanges between former, present, and current pilgrims. Each constructs a pilgrim identity, recognized by the community and enabling all members to feel solidarity with other members while remaining different from nonmembers. Pilgrims’ sociality amongst themselves and vis-à-vis public or private sector actors (whether religious or not) produces a tribal phenomenon (Cova and Cova 2002). The community of pilgrims has its own rituals and practices that the shared experience of the Camino reinforces and renders unique. These pilgrim communities meet online, exchanging information and plans, selling and reselling objects and services while rating the economic stakeholders involved (hospitality providers, restaurants, chemists, etc.). Pilgrims’ communities also impact brands (clothing, equipment, hospitality) by sharing reviews and advice based on their own experiences. The buzz, which can be either positive or negative, can cause the success or failure of any brand image.

Other forms of sociability are expressed through the hospitality relationships that exist between hosts and guests, i.e., those who provide shelter and those who receive it. These social exchanges fit the words of Saint Mathew (10:40): “He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me”. Of course, this might also be viewed as a manifestation of tourist practices whose aim is to satisfy walkers through competitive differentiation. Religious and commercial dimensions organize these relations and sustain the pilgrimage’s social aspects.

This sociality is part of the construct of rebirth. Recently, Lopez, González, and Fernández (2017) have analyzed this break with normal life as something conducive to a new spirituality, with the pilgrimage even being considered a rite of passage that generates change (rebirth). Some economic actors (travel agencies, service providers, personal assistants) will look at these transformations and offer to coach pilgrims in terms of their sporting (training), organizational (packing, overnight reservations, rucksack haulage), financial (credit, savings accounts), and even psychological needs. This rebirth then becomes a business opportunity for all actors who take advantage of it to enjoy and generate profit.

The relationship with nature, the presence of rituals (and their foundations) plus a very particular kind of sociality are found in all three periods of analysis and permeated by both the sacred and the profane. Their persistence across the centuries imbues them with great significance. The idea put forward in the present article is that they should be considered as a point, past which the marketplace becomes legitimized.

We believe that this article contributes to a better understanding of the interrelationships between the sacred and the profane and their evolutions in consumption. The proposed schema (Figure 3) suggests that it would be easy to apply this logic to other forms of consumption and marketing contexts, as for example in tourism and cultural marketing.

**Conclusion**

The present study’s historical approach to the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane has highlighted the interrelationships that exist between the three forms
mentioned here. Today, religious pilgrimages are considered consumption experiences (Higgins and Hamilton 2016; Husemann et al. 2016) that are partially rooted in the Middle Ages – given the heterogeneous nature of pilgrims traveling in a context that is multidimensional (economic, spiritual, institutional) hence open – but also in the Renaissance, given the commercial dimension characterizing the ideology of travel and discovery. This experience presents the particularity of being a sacred/profane hybridization intimating that sacredness might never have disappeared in its entirety. Indeed, sacredness’s apparent revival during the Postmodernity era may reflect nothing other than a new interpretation thereof. In line with Anttonen (2000, 281), the idea supported here is that sacredness constitutes a category-boundary to set things with non-negotiable value apart from things whose value is based on continuous transactions. (. . .). People participate in sacred-making activities and processes of signification according to paradigms given by the belief systems to which they are committed, whether they are religious, national or ideological.

As a category boundary, the sacred is neither limited to the religious arena nor to its secular counterpart. It works on both sides of the divide or continuum and by so doing contributes to post-secularity. As Blom, Nilsson, and Santos (2016) have noted, the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage is a prime example of the post-secular tendency toward spiritual destinations.

With the global increase in walking tourism and the multiplication of copycats, the sacred meaning of the Way to Compostella incurs the risk of shifting. However, a sense of the historical sacredness of the Way persists, and this is as an important backdrop for the spiritual experience of the contemporary pilgrim.

This enables a possible rehabilitation of market and consumption phenomena. Commercial trade is both an emanation of religiosity and a product of secularity. Freed from the false idea that the sacred cannot coexist with the profane (or the religious with the commercial or the spiritual with the economic), the post-secular thinking of today’s postmodern society allows for plurality. In other words, the proposition here is that the secularization process is viewed both as an emancipation of public space from religion but without the latter disappearing in any way. In sum, the religious and civil worlds may be dissociated but each continues to evolve in its own way. “The shift from religion to spirituality and the progressive significance of the spiritual-secular dimension also reinforces the inclusiveness of The Way from an economic point of view, opening doors to further expansion” (Lopez, González, and Fernández 2017, 6).

Notes


Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.
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