

Geoheritage Literary Narratives. The Camino de Santiago (Spain).

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The Camino de Santiago is one of the major Christian pilgrimages in the middle Ages. Still today it is a unique itinerary representing the foundations of the European identity that has been reinforced throughout history thanks to different international appointments. As a matter of fact, in 1987 it was declaration by the European Council as the first European Cultural Route (1987). Years later, in 1993, the French Route was recognized as a WHS. This Holy Year has been the turnpoint in the history of the Camino, as it marked the beginning of mass pilgrimages (Lois and Lopez, 2012).

At the present, the creative economy has become an engine of an immaterial economy that introduces an aesthetic and semiotic dimension and feeds the desire to consume culture (Liefoghe, 2015). Following this trend, cultural and creative productions are making a growing use of the space of the Camino. Indeed, its consolidation in the cultural and creative economy is due to the uniqueness and attractiveness of this territory rich in material and immaterial geoheritage, that nourishes and inspires creative productions (such as literary or filmic ones) (Lopez, 2019; Lopez, Santomil and Lois, 2015). Among the different literary genres, travel diaries are contributing to transform the production and representation of

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“spaces” (Laing and Crouch, 2011; McWha, Frost and Laing, 2018). As a matter of fact, travel diaries, novels and comics are renegotiating the space of the Camino through self-produced contents and narratives.

Due to these recent trends, the present research aims at pointing out the “use” of its (immaterial and material) geoheritage by exploring the pilgrims’ travel diaries. To do this, the proposal analyses, interprets and presents the content of the travel diaries assuming geoheritage as interpretative key. The richness in geoheritage makes up the plots of the narrations and communicates the singularity, history, memory and identity of such an historical cultural route. Indeed, heritage is engaged in the construction, continuity and persistence of collective identity and symbolic domains (Graham, Ashworth and Tunbridge, 2000; Castro Fernández, 2007). It is the result of the interrelations of an historical, artistic and architectural identity of the territory of reference.

From a methodological point of view, the proposal introduces an innovative perspective to explore pilgrims’ travel diaries in order to underline the dynamics and knowledge that can emerge when comparing sources of authors with different origins and affinities. This qualitative and academic reading regards an election of bottom-up narratives of non-local authors.

Results show how the rich geoheritage of the Camino is inevitably connected to past and to memories (legends, myths, histories, etc.) that reinforce the attractiveness of the territory. In this sense, cultural assets, as part of the territorial culture, work as connective links between the present and the past. This is alive within travel diaries; in these pages, the numerous monuments along the Camino (among which the most common are churches, monasteries, bridges, etc.) shape a certain territorial representation.

In conclusion, pilgrim-authors are producing place-based narratives on the Camino that communicate and represent its unique identity. Contemporary travel literature on the Camino still provides interesting territorial information and characterization, making the pilgrimage experience an interesting topic for the contemporary literary cultural industry.

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