



Long-distance hikers and their inner journeys: On motives and pilgrimage to Nidaros, Norway

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ABSTRACT

Several historic pilgrimage routes called Saint Olav Ways terminate at the Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim, Norway. All have status as European Cultural Routes. Most popular is the 643 km *Gudbrandsdal* route from Oslo. The number of pilgrims along this route increases every year, currently totalling a few thousand annually. Our study – the first quantitative analysis of pilgrims in Norway – is based on two years of surveying on-site hikers (using self-registration boxes) and a follow-up, e-mail based, online questionnaire (N = 276). The survey sought information about pilgrims' motives, pilgrimage behaviour and demographics; how they differ from modern pilgrims and pilgrimage elsewhere; and how similar they are to long-distance hikers, and hiking, generally. Drawing from literature on motives for pilgrimage, (thru-) hiking, and certain domains from the Recreation Experience Preference (REP) scales, we used a list of 49 motivational items. An exploratory factor (PCA) analysis revealed eight motivational dimensions. Foreigners dominate, and the “average pilgrim” has little or no previous pilgrim experience, hikes for 22 days and appreciates the simplicity tied to the hiking experience. They walk at a low pace through quiet, natural and unfamiliar environments, reflect on life, develop spirituality, and enjoy contact with local people and heritage. The religious dimension is, on average, not prominent but more evident for those with previous pilgrimage and extensive multi-day hiking experience. The hiking journey is more important than reaching Nidaros. These findings are comparable to studies of modern pilgrimage elsewhere. However, the motives/preferences tie just as well to research findings on long-distance hiking, though the majority (68%) find a great difference in hiking a pilgrimage route compared to other long distance routes. We found this – the knowledge, experience, or image of the SOW route – to be the most influential variable in revealing motivational variation in the studied population.

Management implications

For managers it is important to understand the motivation and the expectation of this specific target group:

- On average, the most important motivational dimensions among the SOW pilgrims are (in descending order) Exercise in nature, Slow travel, Nature – knowledge and joy, The inner me and Meet the locals and local heritage. Somewhat less important are the three last dimensions The religious me, Be in solitude, and Hiking together.
- We find parallels between SOW pilgrims and modern pilgrims elsewhere, like those on their way to Santiago de Compostela: they are

all more motivated by their own journey towards the holy shrine than reaching that holy place.

- Generally, the motives correspond to research findings on thru- or long-distance hikers, and partly with motivation among visitors and hikers in the Scandinavian mountains and national parks.
- Unlike national park visitors the SOW pilgrims lack motivations tied to Adventure and excitement.
- The SOW-pilgrims are clearly interested in the heritage aspects of the pilgrim route, including visiting churches along the way. But we cannot conclude that being attracted to the heritage of the pilgrim route and the wish to visit churches generally reflect a religious engagement.

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1. Introduction

During recent decades, there has been a noticeable increase in the reinvention of pilgrim routes in Europe and other parts of the world. In Europe alone, there are many routes leading to holy places, including the St. James' Way to Santiago de Compostela in Spain (Chemin, 2015; Frey, 1998; Lois-Gonzalez, 2013) and the pilgrimage route to the shrine of Padre Pio in Italy (Di Giovine, 2015). While the motives of pilgrims of the Middle Ages were overwhelmingly religious, research on contemporary pilgrimage shows that motives, experiences and symbolic meanings incorporate pleasure as much as worldly renunciation. Today, the experience of hiking over long distances along a pilgrim route is considered to be more important than reaching the holy site at the end of the route (Amaro et al., 2018; Devereux & Carnegie, 2006; Jensen, 2015, p. 286; Kato & Prozano, 2017; Oviedo et al., 2014). Thus, religious reasons for pilgrimage are in contemporary times not necessarily the dominant factor in making a pilgrimage (Lois-Gonzalez, 2013; Schnell & Pali, 2013). Like any other tourist, the motives of modern pilgrims are manifold, evolving, and shifting as they progress along a route. Pilgrims search for something that differs from everyday life, not only through religious or spiritual experiences, but also by enjoying slow travel (Howard, 2012), contemplating the natural surroundings and landscapes and learning about history and culture (Badone & Roseman, 2004; Lois-González & Santos, 2014).

The main aim of this study is to examine the complexity of the pilgrimage taking place along an increasingly popular route in Northern Europe, the *Gudbrandsdal* route (643 km) leading from Oslo to the *Nidaros* Cathedral in Trondheim, Norway. This route makes part of the St. Olav Ways (SOWs)¹ that are based on the pilgrimages that took place in medieval times, after the canonization of King *Olav Haraldsson* in 1031 AD, until the end of medieval Catholicism under the Reformation in 1537 AD. Many pilgrims hike the entire route, while a substantial number walk segments of the route. Depending on both length and walking speed, a pilgrim journey can last from a few days to more than four weeks. Even among those who hike the entire or most of the route, reaching the end might be subordinate to experiences along the route (see e.g. Mikaelson, 2012). Further, pilgrimage can represent a wide range of practices and identities. Pilgrimage along the *Gudbrandsdal* route involves a long-distance hike on specific roads, ways and paths, through forests, farming landscapes, towns and villages, past churches and historic sites, and over mountains. In these contexts, motives, experiences and practices that are primarily tied to pilgrimage (Damari & Mansfeld, 2016; Margry, 2008) may be similar to those of long-distance hiking as a recreational or nature-based tourism activity (Hitchner, Schelhas, Brosius, & Nibbelink, 2018; Ives, 2018). Indeed, they all may involve spiritual experiences if the physical journey is transformed to an 'inner journey' of reflection on life and self-examination (Bratton, 2012; Canavan, 2017; Frey, 1998; Ives, 2018; Nordbø & Prebensen, 2015). According to Damari and Mansfeld (2016) the interplay between the pilgrim and the actual pilgrimage environment can be very influential on pilgrim identity and role, and in understanding various positions between religious engagement and mundane modernity.

A motivational spectrum has also been noted at the *Nidaros* Pilgrim Reception Centre (Pilegrimsgård, 2017), based on short interviews with visitors: "While each pilgrim's motivation for beginning the pilgrimage tends to differ, an appreciation for Norway's wide, open, natural spaces and a desire to connect with nature, as well as an opportunity for quiet contemplation and introspection continue to be very important factors in starting the pilgrimage in Norway and Sweden" (p. 3). Our study extends this conclusion by examining the behaviors, motives and meanings of

pilgrims travelling along the *Gudbrandsdal* route to *Nidaros* Cathedral. Do the motives of SOW pilgrims differ from those of pilgrims elsewhere? How similar are these to the motives of other long-distance hikers or visitors to remote nature (often mountainous) destinations like national parks in Norway and Scandinavia?

In contrast to mountain hiking and tourism in Scandinavia (e.g. Garms et al., 2016), the revival of pilgrimage routes along the St. Olav Ways has not been accompanied by quantitative studies of pilgrims and their motives. This study adds to existing literatures, first by attending to factors that make pilgrimage meaningful beyond its religious and spiritual dimensions, in particular within a Norwegian landscape and context, and second by illuminating how the sacred and profane may intersect at the level of motives and experiences. We also evaluate how motives vary with demographic characteristics (geographical origin, education, gender), former pilgrimage and hiking experience, and modes of enacting a pilgrimage (accommodation preferences, length of hiking). To date, the revival of pilgrimage routes in Norway has received only limited examination through qualitative interviews of sub-groups within the pilgrim population (e.g. Chia-chen, 2017; Hafskjold, 2015), so quantitative study is warranted.

1.1. The *Gudbrandsdal* route

In the 1990s, the Norwegian government played a crucial role in designating, managing and marking the traditional St. Olav Ways leading to the *Nidaros* Cathedral in Trondheim and the shrine of St. Olav. The number of pilgrims embarking on the 643 km route through *Gudbrandsdalen* has increased slowly and steadily since its formal opening in 1997, associated with the millennium anniversary of the city of Trondheim that year. According to the official Internet site presenting this pilgrim route, the entire hike from Oslo to Trondheim is estimated to take about 32 days. In 2017, 2670 pilgrims registered at the reception centre in Trondheim (Pilegrimsgård, 2017). These numbers are minimal compared to more centrally located routes in Europe. Approximately 300,000 persons reach the city-shrine of Santiago after having travelled at least the last 100 km on foot, or 200 km by bicycle or on horseback – a criterion for receiving the Compostela certificate of completion (Lois-Gonzalez, 2013). This represents an enormous increase in numbers of pilgrims since the mid-1980s, when only a few thousand received certificates.

Along the *Gudbrandsdal* route, a substantial proportion of the pilgrims are of Norwegian nationality. Yet, the majority of long-distance pilgrims come from abroad, and the number of German long-distance pilgrims now exceeds the number of Norwegians (Pilegrimsgård, 2017).

While a substantial number of tourists travel the entire route on foot, some hike for just a few days along sections of the pathways. The original bridle way was the main public travelling route between Oslo and Trondheim in the Middle Ages. Over hundreds of years, though, many sections of the original route disappeared, with some segments removed, replaced with developments or overgrown. Hence, some parts of the present pilgrim route are re-creations from the historic route. Most of the route consists of pre-existing footpaths and roads, marked by signs with the discernable St. Olav Way emblem (Fig. 1). These extend through forests as well as agricultural and cultural landscapes, farmyards and rural towns, and across remote upland regions – especially the *Dovre* mountain area. While lengthy sections of the route are 'off the beaten track', other sections run more or less parallel to the present highway between Oslo and Trondheim (E6). With references to historical use, the pilgrim route has various local names such as 'The public way' and 'The old kings' way'.

The *Gudbrandsdal* route has been developed gradually in terms of footbridges, adequate marking and signposting, and choices of accommodations. The SOWs have clearly been modeled after El Camino de Santiago de Compostela in Spain, with their own emblem, signposts and pilgrim passports (which can be stamped in churches, council halls and some pilgrim hostels). In Norway, pilgrims can receive a so-called Olav

¹ There are several SOWs, from north, east (Sweden) and from the western coast. This route is one of two coming from south. In 2010, all of these pathways were given status as European Cultural Routes by designation of the Council of Europe's Cultural Route Program.



Fig. 1. The St. Olav Way (SOW) emblem.

Letter (*Olavs brev*), confirming that one has walked at least the last 100 km of the route before reaching Nidaros Cathedral. In 2017, 1040 pilgrims received the Olav Letter (Pilegrimsgård, 2017).

1.2. Literature review

According to Barber (1993:1, in Collins-Kreiner, 2010b) pilgrimage is “A journey resulting from religious causes, externally to a holy site, and internally for spiritual purposes and internal understanding”. But, Collins-Kreiner (op cit.) also state that present understandings of pilgrimage should be broadened to include both traditional religious as well as modern secular journeys. That is, despite being associated with religion or spirituality, pilgrimage is by no means limited to institutionally-sanctioned religious practice. To the extent pilgrim routes are legitimized by reference to ancient practices and bind diverse cultural and religious heritage attractions and destinations together in the same landscapes, they can attract a diversity of interests, perspectives and practices (Collins-Kreiner & Gatrell, 2006; Lois-González & Santos, 2014; Sanchez-Carretero, 2013, 2015).

Contemporary pilgrims tend to incorporate complex combinations of cultural, spiritual, recreational, athletic, and personal reasons in their motives and experiences (Chemin, 2015; Doi, 2011; Frey, 1998). This polysemy (Lois-Gonzalez, 2013) is sometimes integrated into an idea of the physical journey as a metaphor for the experiences of an ‘inner journey’ (Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Frey, 1998; Graburn, 2016; Mikaelsson, 2011, 2012). The ‘inner journey’ refers to how the movement along the route generates experiences associated with emotional and cognitive shifts or changes that, at least in part, are interpreted and given meaning by cultural and moral notions (Graburn, 2016; Picard, 2016). In this sense, pilgrimage is also performed within a *post-secular* context (Lois-Gonzalez, 2013). Post-secularity refers to processes reclaiming faith, religion and spirituality in secular spaces (Nilsson & Tesfahuney, 2016) through individualized articulations of faith (Bracke, 2008; Ziebreit & Riegel, 2009), or implicit religiosity (Schnell & Pali, 2013).

There are also obvious similarities between pilgrimage and thru-hiking or long-distance hiking as a recreational or nature-based tourism activity (e.g. Crowley, 2018; Hitchner et al., 2018). Ives (2018: 54) suggests that, “Like hiking, pilgrimages nudge us to let go”. Pilgrim routes should be seen as cultural phenomena in which the religious focus and meanings of pilgrimage are accompanied by secular experiences, motives and goals, partly influenced by stakeholders involved in the management and uses of routes and shrines (Di Giovine, 2013; Lois-Gonzalez, 2013; Lois-González & Santos, 2014; Nilsson & Tesfahuney, 2016).

Amaro et al. (2018) reviewed the literature on pilgrimage, selecting empirical studies that focus on pilgrim’s motivations for taking the journey (by foot, horse or bike) to reach the holy site – not motivations for visiting the holy place itself. They found only seven articles meeting their criteria, all of which focused on the pilgrim routes to Santiago (not a study criterion). Several researchers have described motives and

benefits from long-distance hiking and nature visitation that appear quite similar to modern pilgrimage. These include both physical and mental benefits like introspection, environmental awareness, exploration, remoteness, simple living, contact with nature, shared solitude, connectedness/spiritual, and self-discovery (Collins-Kreiner & Kliot, 2017; Crowley, 2018; Garms et al., 2016; Hill et al., 2009; Hitchner et al., 2018; Ives, 2018; Nordbø & Prebensen, 2015; Raadik et al., 2010). Canavan (2017) identifies several existential aspects of hiking that raise connotations to pilgrimage.

Pilgrimage and pilgrims bear other obvious similarities to long distance hiking and backpackers. Most pilgrims carry their own backpack and often walk for several weeks over long distances. Cohen (2003: 95) discusses backpacking as “a relatively little studied form of tourism (...) a rapidly expanding phenomenon”, and describes the great variation (style, motives, practice, etc.) within this type of tourism. Further, like long-distance hiking, pilgrimage can include elements of recreational or nature-based tourism activity (e.g. Hitchner et al., 2018), just as long-distance hiking is characterised by motives associated with pilgrimage (Collins-Kreiner & Kliot, 2017; Hafskjold, 2015). Both activities involve protracted and physically arduous mobility on foot through the landscapes. Both types of mobility practices are temporary releases from the fast-paced tempo of everyday life, perhaps with an aim of revitalizing the relation between self and world through experiences of spiritual transformation (Howard, 2012). In addition, Hitchner et al. (2019) hint at another facet of long-term immersive experiences: the embodied practices of accomplishing daily tasks take on a spiritual quality – such that the journey produces patterns of thought and practice not unlike that of meditation.

The multifaceted nature of today’s pilgrimage, as well as the difficulties of distinguishing pilgrimage as a distinctive form of mobility or tourism, is relevant for understanding the relationships between pilgrimage and other forms of hiking in Norway and Scandinavia. Hence, comparing motives of pilgrims with motives of long-distance hikers can reveal the extent to which long distance hiking is a substantial part of pilgrimage, and also consider the extent to which secular aspects may intersect with religious or spiritual motives and experiences.

1.3. Pilgrimage and thru-hiking: on motivation and meaning

Two useful studies on pilgrimage and motivation are Oviedo et al.’s (2014) large study (N = 470) testing specific pilgrimage motives, and Amaro et al.’s (2018) review of empirical studies on motivations, both of which study pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. Oviedo et al. (op cit.) listed 48 possible motivations (items) of interviewed pilgrims, then used an exploratory factor analysis to identify six factors (involving 35 of the items) explaining 54% of the variation in the motivation material. Their factors (in descending importance, measured on a scale from 6 to 1) included *Spiritual growth* (mean 4.0), *Sensation seeking* (3.9), *Seeking life direction* (3.2), *Religious growth* (3.1), *Community* (2.7) and *Religious devotion* (1.9). The authors highlight several items under three factors: *Spiritual growth* (Expand my consciousness, Find my deeper self); *Sensation seeking* (Testing my limits, Proving myself, Search of adventure); and *Religious growth* (Grow in faith, Strengthen my religious/spiritual beliefs, Be closer to God). Schnell and Pali (2013) took a somewhat different approach asking: why does this ancient Christian ritual (pilgrimage) give meaning to people of today, when many claim they are not or only moderately religious? Their answers (from pilgrims on the road to Santiago) are connected to meaningfulness, facing crises of meaning, need for clarification, religiosity and spirituality (mainly among religious pilgrims), and purely secular reasons like physical challenge.

Similarities between pilgrimage and long-distance hiking are discussed by various authors. Hitchner et al. (2018) observed religious dimensions in their study of travel blogs of thru-hikers on the John Muir Trail, giving special attention to spirituality. Ives (2018: 16) reflected on

“hiking as a form of pilgrimage ... my main focus is on the spirituality of hiking”. Collins-Kreiner and Kliot (2017) consider universal motivations and experiences among hikers, suggesting that *strenuous walking* is an inseparable part of the religious and spiritual aspects of pilgrimage. They also tie it to personal *achievement* and *mastering* challenging conditions. Other important factors are *curiosity* (to meet new people and places), *escapism* (the desire to flee something dominating our daily lives), and *social proximity* or *communitas* related to social relations developing around a common, mutual meaning (e.g., long-distance hiking). Chia-chen (2017) highlight the positive relations between the pilgrims and local people, while Hitchner et al. (op cit.) found “a distinctive combination of comradery and solitude”.

In studying German visitors to Fulufjället national park (in Sweden), Raadik et al. (2010) and later Garms et al. (2016) chose items from selected REP (Recreation Experience Preference) domains based on studies in US wilderness areas. Garms et al. (op cit.) identified five relevant factors: *Focus on self*, *Focus on nature*, *Focus on freedom*, *Focus on others* and *Focus on experiences*. Among these five motive factors the two most important appeared to be *Focus on nature* and *Focus on experiences*. The two least important were *Focus on others* and *Focus on self*.

2. Methods

Because we surveyed pilgrims *after* their pilgrimage, there is a methodological question as to whether we actually measure *motivation*. In assessing variance in pre- and post-course REP scale scores of participants in two to four week long National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) courses, Williams et al. (1988: 63) found that “*time of administration of the REP scales appears to have little effect on average but varies somewhat with subjects.*” Rice et al. (2020) drew a similar conclusion from a national park study in Wyoming, using a pre-survey (motivation) and post-survey (outcome) approach. Taken together, a reasonable interpretation is that we are capturing the *meaning, reflection or experience* aspects of pilgrimage.

2.1. Data collection

We collected data in 2015 and 2016, preceded by a pre-study in 2014, since modern pilgrimage in Norway is a relatively recent phenomenon, and no quantitative study of pilgrimage in Norway existed. A two-step approach was chosen for data collection: self-registration boxes along the route, with a follow-up e-mail-based study. The self-registration method has been used for decades with success, along trails in places such as national parks and other outdoor recreation areas (e.g. Petersen, 1985; Vistad, 1995). We placed three boxes along the Gudbrandsdal route in 2014. A poster on the front hatch encouraged pilgrims/walkers to open the box and complete a short questionnaire. Based on the 2014 experience, we revised the questionnaire slightly in 2015, kept two of the registration locations and added two more. In 2015, 427 people completed questionnaires. Using e-mail addresses (N = 207), we sent out a more comprehensive online follow-up questionnaire. Though the email effort produced a very satisfying response-rate (70.5%), the number of completed questionnaires was only 146. Thus, we repeated the procedure in 2016 using only one self-registration box. We had learned during 2014–2015 that the average pilgrim walked for about three weeks and that one well-located registration box would reach most of the long-distance pilgrims (the dominant group of pilgrims, and the most relevant for our study of motives). In 2016, we collected 310 questionnaires and 179 correct e-mail addresses in the registration box north of Lillehammer, achieving a response rate in the on-line follow-up of 72.6% (N = 130). Hence, the total sample size for electronic questionnaires distributed in 2015 and 2016 was 386, and the total number completed was 276 (response rate 71.5%).

2.2. The questionnaire and REP-scales

This paper reports on the follow-up online questionnaire. We partly based our study on the experiences from Garms et al. (2016) and their use of REP scales. These scales were initially developed to study outdoor recreation participation and to help understand how specific activities yield various benefits and experiences (e.g. Driver & Tocher, 1970; Driver & Brown, 1975)². Garms et al. (2016) adapted and expanded Raadik et al.’s (op cit.) initial REP item list (ten domains and 40 items). Based on reliability analysis, initial testing and factor analysis, they ended up with a five-factor solution based on 35 items. Their result replaced the original ten domains. We used these five domains, initially selecting the most relevant items within each domain (related to pilgrimage and the SOW, see Table 1). This list of items was extended with 23 items based on documented experiences from previous studies on pilgrimage (especially Amaro et al., 2018; Oviedo et al., 2014) and long-distance hiking (Collins-Kreiner & Kliot, 2017; Hitchner, Schelhas, Brosius, & Nibbelink, 2018). These items covered potentially relevant motives tied to cultural heritage, slow travel, experience of time, physical exertion, social and personal aspects, religion and beliefs, and spirituality, see Table 2. The response format was a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (Not important at all) to 7 (Extremely important).

2.3. Statistical procedures

We used factor analysis to test for any meaningful pattern of underlying domains or dimensions among the 49 motivational items.

Table 1

The five determined domains, and 26 corresponding items that we found most relevant (from Garms et al., 2016).

1. Focus on self – Introspection
Reflect on life
Obtain a deeper connection in life
Opportunity for self-discovery
Get in touch with true self
Find inspiration in natural surroundings
Chance to think/solve problems
Stimulate creativity
Develop a sense of self confidence
2. Focus on Nature – Awareness & Sensation
Recreate in a primitive environment
Observe and appreciate the ecosystem
Explore the natural environment
Experience nature’s magic and mysticism
Develop a oneness with nature
Experience the scenic quality of nature
Feel connected to a place that is important
3. Focus on Freedom – Escape & Balance
Being alone/solitude
Free from observation from all other people
Get away from daily routines
Tranquility and peace
Simplify daily priorities
Physical health/and exercise
4. Focus on Others – Relationships
Feel a special closeness with others in my group
A small intimate group
Feel a connection with others who value wilderness
5. Focus on experiences – Exciting Setting
Having a sense of discovery
Having an adventure

² The full set of REP scales included 328 items grouped into 19 domains (Driver, 1983). In general, only certain subsets of domains are used, depending on research questions, population, activities or the actual setting studied (Murray & Graham, 1997).

Table 2
Added items, based on review of probable and potential relevance for SOW.

Physical challenge
Develop my religious values
Meet local non-pilgrims along the route
Have a story to tell
Religious experiences
Experience places that I have read or been told about
The religious heritage of the trail
Visit churches or other religious buildings
Travel in slow pace
Reach the holy shrine of St. Olav
Getting to know with foreign places and landscapes
Travel in an environment-friendly way
Spiritual experiences
Buying/consuming local products (like foods or crafts)
Visit local communities
The medieval heritage of the trail
Heritage sites along the trail (churches, old farm buildings, burial mounds etc.)
Develop my spiritual values
Meditative experiences
Be in the present
Follow the rhythms of nature and landscape
Feel free to take my time
Discover my inner time

Factor analysis is a collective term for a variety of statistical techniques aiming at revealing (hypothetical) underlying variables or dimensions in complex material (Kim & Mueller, 1994; Lewis-Beck, 1994). We used Principal Component Analysis (with Varimax rotation), a technique that transforms a set of variables into a smaller set of uncorrelated variables (dimensions), while still maintaining most of the information from the original variables (Dunteman, 1994; Kinnear & Gray, 2000).

The test of internal consistency in the five initial REP scales (Garms et al., 2016, adapted to pilgrimage and SOW), showed a satisfying result (Cronbach's Alpha (α) > 0.66) for four of the five domains: *Focus on self* (8 items, item mean = 4.7 and α = 0.88), *Focus on nature* (7 items, item mean = 5.0 and α = 0.74), *Focus on freedom* (6 items, item mean = 4.8 and α = 0.66), *Focus on others* (3 items, item mean = 3.7 and α = 0.75) and *Focus on experiences* (2 items, item mean = 4.7 and α = 0.38). This illustrates the relevance of testing both selected and adapted REP-domains on pilgrims. To the 26 items in the 5 initial REP scales (Table 1), we added 23 items (Table 2) covering a broader potential range of motives. Because some of these items can fit into the tested REP-domains, we entered all 49 items into a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to reveal a simpler set of factors that illustrate the dimensionality of the pilgrimage towards Nidaros.

To follow-up the factorial findings we tested (one-way ANOVA, *t*-test) how the various motivational factors vary demographically, according to personal pilgrim and hiking experience, and how the pilgrimage was conducted. ANOVA was followed by a LSD post-hoc test showing which sub-groups differ in their mean score on various motivational dimensions. We only report significant differences ($p < 0.05$).

3. Results

3.1. Demographics and prior pilgrimage and hiking experiences

Very few local people registered in our self-registration boxes - probably because they didn't regard themselves as pilgrims or part of the target group. Hence, our study is comprised of long-distance hikers. Two nationalities dominate: Germans (40%) and Norwegians (24%). The rest arrive primarily from other European countries (30%), with only 6% from outside Europe. There is a gender balance, with 48% male, and a wide variation in age, from 17 to 77 (average 44 years). Most pilgrims are highly educated, with 46% having completed more than four years of university; another 28% have 4 years or less from a university, 17% completed High school, and 9% have a Secondary/Middle school education.

Many respondents were inexperienced in pilgrimage; half the sample (49%) had never walked a pilgrim route before, and 82% had never walked this SOW. Their experiences of prior multi-day hiking/skiing trips (with overnight stays) varied: 15% had completed one or no such trips; 50% three to ten trips; and 35% have considerable experience (more than 10 trips).

3.2. The conduct of a pilgrimage

Most pilgrims hike either in pairs (42%) or alone (44%, many of whom are not Norwegians); only 7% are in organized groups. The average time spent on this pilgrimage is 22 days (a two-day hike ($n = 1$) is the shortest reported trip), with foreigners taking the longest trips. In general, the farther a visitor has travelled to reach this SOW, the longer the pilgrimage. On average, Norwegians hike for 19 days, Germans for 21 days, other Europeans for 26 days, and those from outside Europe 30 days. According to the official SOW Internet site an average pilgrim walks about 20 km each day (<https://pilegrimsleden.no/en/trails/gudbrandsdalsleden>). There is no gender difference in average trip-length. Very few pilgrims stay overnight at hotels. There are three dominant accommodation preferences: pilgrim hostels, in tents (or otherwise outdoors), or a combination of each. When asked how important the accommodation-style is for their total hiking experience, most pilgrims reported that it is very important (average score 5.3, on a scale from 1 to 7).

3.3. Pilgrim motives

We implemented a PCA three times, each time reviewing the findings and excluding items with a low factor loading (<0.500) on any of the factors, or when only one item made up a factor, or items with a medium score on more than one factor. The final solution reveals 8 dimensions/factors, based on Eigen values > 1 from among 35 items (Table 3). These eight factors explain 68.7% of the variance. Our qualitative judgement of the items making up each factor guides the naming of the factor.

From Table 3 we observed that the item 'Develop my spiritual values' loads above 0.500 on both 'The inner me' (0.599) and 'The religious me' (0.546). Our interpretation is that some pilgrims tie a non-religious understanding to the term 'spiritual' while other pilgrims regard it a religious phenomenon.

Several items do not co-vary with other variables in the PCA. Four of these items/variables represent especially important motives or qualities for the majority of pilgrims (high average item scores): *Tranquillity and Peace* (5.8), *Recreate in a primitive environment* (5.5), *Getting to know with foreign places and landscapes* (5.5), and *Be in the present* (5.5). Another single and less important key-item/motive was "Reach the holy shrine of St. Olav" (3.9).

3.4. Demographics – motivational subgroups

To be in solitude (factor 8) is more important for men than women ($F(1, 247) = 11.08, p < 0.001$), and similarly men are more in favour of *Meeting the locals/local heritage* (factor 3) ($F(1, 247) = 4.26, p < 0.05$). There is no motivational difference based on level of education. Homeland/region³ influences some motivational dimensions: *Nature – knowledge and joy* (factor 5) is more important for 'Other European' than Norwegian pilgrims ($F(2, 231) = 3.37, p < 0.05$), while *Be in solitude* (factor 8) is more important for both German and Other European pilgrims, compared to Norwegians ($F(2, 232) = 6.22, p < 0.01$).

³ Due to sample size we have only used three categories: Norway, Germany and Rest of Europe.

Table 3

The eight motive factors. Items within each factor are sorted by factor loading (>0.500). Items in parentheses have a lower score but might still indicate how the factor should be interpreted. Scale for mean factor score ranges from 1 = Not important at all, to 7 = Extremely important. (N = 253).

Factor name (Item numbers, minimum item factor loading)	Items	Cronbach's α (internal factor consistency)	Mean score	Average ranking (Motivational importance)
1 The inner me (11 items, >.566)	Opportunity for self-discovery Get in touch with my true self Reflect on life Obtain a deeper connection in life Develop a sense of self-confidence Discover my inner time Chance to think/solve problems Meditative experience Develop my spiritual values Stimulate creativity Be in the present	0.913	4.7	4
2 The religious me (5 items, >.710)	Develop my religious values Religious experiences The religious heritage of the trail Visit churches or other religious buildings Develop my spiritual values (Heritage sites along the trail (churches, old farm- buildings, burial mounds etc))	0.902	3.8	6
3 Meet the locales and local heritage (6 items, >.586)	Visit local communities The medieval heritage of the trail Experience places I have read or been told about Buying/ consuming local products (like food or crafts) Heritage sites along the trail (churches, old farm- buildings, burial mounds etc)	0.834	4.2	5
4 Slow travel	Meet local, non-pilgrims along the route Travel in a slow pace Feel free to take my time	0.786	5.3	2

Table 3 (continued)

Factor name (Item numbers, minimum item factor loading)	Items	Cronbach's α (internal factor consistency)	Mean score	Average ranking (Motivational importance)
5 Nature – knowledge and joy (4 items, >.604)	Follow the rhythms of nature and landscape (Discover my inner time) (Be in the present) Explore the natural environment Observe and appreciate the ecosystem Travel in an environment-friendly way Enjoy the scenic quality of nature (Follow the rhythms of nature and landscape)	0.760	5.2	3
6 Exercise in nature (2 items, >.814)	Physical health and exercise Physical challenge (Enjoy the scenic quality of nature)	0.756	5.4	1
7 Hiking together (3 items, >.686)	Be in a small intimate group Feel a connection with others who values remote places Experience a sense of community with other pilgrims	0.749	3.7	8
8 Be in solitude (2 items, >.730)	Free from observation from all other people Be alone/solitude	0.531	3.7	7

3.5. Experience in pilgrimage and hiking – motivational subgroups

Half the sample had no previous experience in pilgrimage; these pilgrims scored lower on *The religious me* (factor 2; $t(251) = -2.76, p < 0.05$), and are more motivated to *Exercise in nature* (factor 6; $t(255) = 0.80, p < 0.05$), compared to those with earlier pilgrimage experience.

The religious me also varied depending on former multiday hiking/skiing experience ($F(2, 249) = 4.02, p < 0.05$). The post-hoc test shows that the most experienced group (>10 previous trips) exhibits stronger religious motivation than the least experienced (one or no trips). The other dimension showing a difference is *Be in solitude* (factor 8: $F(2, 249) = 8.40, p < 0.001$), though this in the opposite direction: Solitude is far more important for the inexperienced.

3.6. Pilgrimage conduct and services – motivational subgroups

When we categorize pilgrims by hiking duration (2–5 days, 6–10 days, 11–14 days, 2–3 weeks, 3–4 weeks, 4–5 weeks, more than 5 weeks), only one motivational dimension was significantly different: *Slow travel* (factor 4: $F(6, 215) = 2.79, p < 0.05$). According to the post-hoc analysis it is primarily the “short-trip-hikers” (2–5 days) that score

lower than the 3–4 and 4–5 week pilgrims. How they regard a hike along a pilgrim route seems to be more influential than the length of the hike. From our question, “Do you find it different to walk along a pilgrimage route compared to any other marked long hiking route?” (7-point scale, 1 = No difference, to 7 = Very big difference), we created three response categories: 1–3 (21%), 4 (11%), 5–7 (68%)⁴). ANOVA shows significant differences between these three categories for 5 of 8 motive factors: *The inner me* ($F(2, 218) = 7.16, p < 0.001$), *The religious me* ($F(2, 218) = 15.22, p < 0.001$), *Meet the locals/local heritage* ($F(2, 218) = 6.15, p < 0.01$), *Slow travel* ($F(2, 218) = 8.08, p < 0.001$), and *Hiking together* ($F(2, 218) = 9.71, p < 0.001$). According to the post-hoc analysis, the pattern is similar for all five factors: those who see a clear difference between a pilgrim route and other long-distance routes have higher motivational scores on all five dimensions.

Accommodation is an essential part of the pilgrimage experience. When we compared the three dominant accommodation preferences (hostel, tent, or combination of the two), four of the motivational dimensions differed on importance for the three pilgrim categories: *The religious me* ($F(2, 233) = 3.85, p < 0.05$), *Meet the locals/local heritage* ($F(2, 233) = 5.45, p < 0.05$), *Hiking together* ($F(2, 233) = 3.12, p < 0.05$), and *Be in solitude* ($F(2, 233) = 3.67, p < 0.05$). The first three motive dimensions (*Religious me*, *Meet the locals*, *Hiking together*) were more important for hostel users, while *Be in solitude* was more important for outdoor campers.

Regarding services, pilgrims were presented lists of new possible services along the route, and possible improvements to the route itself (rating scales from 1 (very negative) to 7 (very positive)). The most desired services were more ‘open churches’ (5.8), more shelter huts or lean-to roofs (5.2) and more water posts (5.0). Concerning measures about the trail itself, they desired: more board walks across bogs (5.3) and improved marking and signposting of the route (5.0).

4. Discussion

Foreign pilgrims dominate along the *Gudbrandsdal* route (only 24% of pilgrims were Norwegian). This is similar to patterns observed on the Camino de Santiago where Amaro et al. (2018) and Oviedo et al. (2014) sampled, respectively, 18% and 30% domestic (Spanish) pilgrims. German pilgrims are the largest group of foreign nationals in all three studies.

4.1. Conducting the SOW pilgrimage

The majority of pilgrims hike for more than three weeks, and the most distant visitors take the longest pilgrimages. The average of 22 days hiking corresponds approximately with 440 km length. This is not especially long as a pilgrimage (Schnell and Pali (2013) report an average of 646 km walking in their sample), but compared to mountain or walking tourists more generally in Scandinavia, 440 km is a very long distance. However, among long-distance hiking trails like the ones we have cited, the Israel national trail exceeds 1000 km (Collins-Kreiner & Kliot, 2017), and the John Muir trail is about 350 km (Hitchner et al., 2018). However, more important than duration and length is probably the approach used by hikers or pilgrims to their trip and the route. The data reveal, for instance, that SOW pilgrims prefer quite simple accommodation (tent or hostel, not hotel). Amaro et al. (2018) report greater variation in use of accommodations along the Caminos to Santiago (e.g. 4% at campsites, 25% hotels, and 80% pilgrim hostels). Only half of our sample has previous experience with pilgrimage, while the entire sample of Amaro et al. (op cit.) had travelled the Camino at least once before. However, among SOW pilgrims, there are many with experiences of multi-day hiking excursions. Most pilgrims hike either as

couples or alone, but our sampling method (individual self-registration) might have dis-favoured larger groups. This pattern is quite similar to the findings of Schnell and Pali (op cit.), though they report even more pilgrims walking alone.

4.2. Motives – the average pilgrim

On average, the four most important pilgrimage-motives (score 5.5 or higher) are the single items *Tranquillity and Peace*, *Recreate in a primitive environment*, *Getting to know with foreign places and landscapes*, and to *Be in the present*. The PCA (see Table 3) identifies eight motivational factors with the dimension *Exercise in nature* (average 5.4) as the most important, on average, and especially for those without previous pilgrimage experience. Sorted by average importance, the dimension list continues: *Slow travel* (5.3), *Nature – knowledge and joy* (5.2), *The inner me* (4.7), *Meet the locals and local heritage* (4.2), *The religious me* (3.8), *Be in solitude* (3.7) and *Hiking together* (3.7). The medium low importance (3.9) of reaching *The holy shrine of St. Olav* clearly indicates what other studies have shown (Amaro et al., 2018; Devereux & Carnegie, 2006; Kato & Prozano, 2017; Oviedo et al., 2014): the experience along the SOW is more important than reaching the Nidaros Cathedral.

Hence, the average pilgrim is a foreigner who appreciates the simplicity tied to the hiking experience. He or she walks for a long time through quiet, natural and unfamiliar environments, reflects on life, develops their own spirituality, and enjoys contact with local people and heritage. Though we call this person a pilgrim, this pattern is consistent with the mentioned preferences/motives/experiences of other long-distance and thru-hikers who like peace and quiet, nature experience, physical strain, low pace, to be in the present, self-reflection and spirituality (e.g. Collins-Kreiner & Kliot 2016; Hitchner et al., 2018; Ives, 2018). Based on our findings of the most important motives, it would be difficult to distinguish between contemporary pilgrimage and other kinds of long-distance hiking.

Religious motives are less common for the “average pilgrim”. An indication of faith might be the broad appreciation of open churches and even demand for more open churches along the route. But whether these sentiments are based on historical and heritage interests (or rituals tied to pilgrimage authenticity) or more to religious reasons is unknown. Our PCA-analysis indicates that some interpret ‘spiritual values’ as a religious dimension while others tie it to self-reflection and meditative experiences. In their investigation of pilgrims towards Santiago de Compostela, Oviedo et al. (2014: 440) wondered whether the new pilgrimage movement was ‘a religious revival’, a secular expression of nature travel, or “part of a wider movement of eclectic and ‘fuzzy’ spirituality?” They rule out ‘religious revival’, but observe that even contrasting motivations and expectations walk side-by-side on the pilgrim route. Schnell and Pali (2013: 900) also conclude that “many of today’s pilgrims embark on the journey not for religious motives, but with a need for clarification. Like their religious co-ritualists, they experience the transformative and meaning-making power of pilgrimage.”

According to Schnell and Pali (2013), a lasting physical challenge in a natural environment was an important aspect of the authentic Catholic pilgrimage ritual. Our findings show that self-denial is also true for contemporary pilgrims along the SOW – they walk for three weeks or more, and choose simple accommodation.

4.3. Motivational variation – on demography, experience and pilgrimage performance

Nature – knowledge and joy is less important for Norwegian pilgrims, especially compared to ‘other Europeans’. *Meet the locals and local heritage* is generally more important for male pilgrims, and those who prefer hostel accommodation. The hostels are of course important nodes where pilgrims meet local people and establish a spirit of community, a point also made by Hafskjold (2015). On average *The religious me* is a moderate motivator, but is more important for those with previous pilgrim

⁴ The answer category ‘Do not know’ (N = 32) was excluded from the analysis.

experience, those with most hiking experience, and hostel users. The two last dimensions *Solitude* and *Hiking together* are nearly opposing motives, reflecting that close to half the sample walk alone and the other half as pairs (in addition to a few in groups). Hence, the average scores for both are quite low, but the additional patterns are that *Solitude* appeals more to men, German and other European pilgrims, inexperienced hikers/skiers, and those who prefer to sleep in a tent. Hostel accommodation appeals more to those who like *Hiking together*. So far, though, international media attention uses its marketing power to direct attention to possibilities for solitude, or at least absence of crowding, along the SOWs, as shown by this heading in AFAR (Kehoe, 2019): “*The world’s northernmost pilgrimage route is in Norway – and almost no one’s heard of it.*”⁵

Slow travel is especially important for those hiking for 3–5 weeks, while *Exercise in nature* is especially important for 2–5 day pilgrims (and *Slow travel* least important for them). However, *Exercise in nature* is probably the most universal motivational dimension within outdoor recreation, nature-based tourism, (long-distance) hiking and most pilgrimages, independent of past experience, demography, etc. These results likely reflect a known pattern where motive intensity and diversification are associated with greater experience, specialization, and longer duration hikes. That is, novices may be motivated by opportunities for nature exercise and experiencing something new, while those with more experience or who have devoted more time and energy to an activity (specialists) have stronger overall motives and often more diverse motives such as experiencing local culture, local people and self-reflection or religiosity (Williams et al., 1990). One finding challenges this pattern: *Solitude* is especially important for European men, inexperienced in hiking, walking alone and sleeping in tents. Why? Perhaps this group can be related to Schnell and Pali’s (2013: 900f) ideas that many post-modern pilgrims (compared to the average population) have ‘crises of meaning’, and their pilgrimage is based on a ‘need for clarification’. These authors found (among pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela), from two post-pilgrimage surveys that they “... *experience the transformative and meaning-making power of pilgrimage ... (their) request is answered.*”

4.4. Motivational variation – and the image of the route

The Inner me is quite important for all respondents, but this dimension is especially important for those who find hiking a pilgrim route to be different from hiking other long trails. This is somewhat difficult to interpret, but maybe it indicates that a pilgrim route (or the image of a pilgrim route) has a more profound quality than a “general long-distance trail”, when it comes to trail or route heritage, personal suffering, contact with “one’s true self” and spirituality?

Generally, the experienced difference between a pilgrim route and other hiking routes seems to be a key distinguishing variable concerning motives and meanings, and always in this same direction. Together, *Slow travel*, *The religious me*, *Meet the locals and local heritage*, and *Hiking together* are more important factors for those identifying pilgrim routes as special experiences. Only the two *Nature*-dimensions and *Solitude* are equally important for those who distinguish walking route experiences and those who do not – supporting motivational variations between experienced pilgrims (or hikers) and novices. Hafskiold (2015), in her qualitative study among quite different pilgrims (concerning experience, nationality, faith, age etc.) along the same SOW, found a similar pattern: most informants found it a unique experience to walk a pilgrim route compared to an “ordinary” long trail. This seems partly related to one’s approach when starting the hike: you *know* you are walking a pilgrim route. Her informants also emphasize ‘*reaching the pilgrim mode*’ – a process that starts immediately for experienced pilgrims, but takes

more time for novices.

4.5. On motivational dimensions – pilgrims and mountain visitors

When comparing the five REP-based domains from the Garms et al. (2016) findings of German visitors to Sweden’s Fulufjället national park (Table 1) with our eight motivational dimensions (Table 3), we find both clear overlaps and one irrelevant REP-domain – corresponding to our earlier internal consistency test of the five REP-scales. The domain *Focus on experience – Exciting setting* is not present in our final factor solution. This was not an obvious finding, since Oviedo et al. (2014) found *Sensation seeking* as one of the most important dimensions among pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela, and among the Germans in Fulufjället, this was one of the two most important domains. *Focus on self* is the REP-domain with best item-overlap (7 items) with our *The inner me*, but our dimension is an extended version with additional 4 items. Four of the five REP domains generally item-overlap with five (of eight) SOW-dimensions, but with various motivational importance, especially concerning *Focus on self* (not so important for mountain visitors) and our corresponding *The inner me* (important for pilgrims). Using REP as we did was useful in showing motivational differences between international, short trip tourists in a Swedish mountainous national park and SOW pilgrims. The three last SOW-dimensions are *Slow travel* (5.3), *Meet the locals and local heritage* (4.2) and *The religious me* (3.8), which were all formed by items from the ‘free list’ (Table 2).

4.6. On methodological issues

Drawing our sample from self-registration boxes was based on long experience with this method. The key advantage is that with the relative low number of pilgrims along this SOW it would be very time consuming (and expensive) to have staff on site through the season. On the other hand, it is hard to control sample quality or representativeness with an unstaffed registration box. Their successful use depends on, among other things, the location and design of the registration box, the quality and length of the questionnaire (Petersen, 1985; Vistad, 1995), and group characteristics (e.g., boxes are less effective as group size increases as a group is less likely to spend much time at the registration site, waiting for others to fill out questionnaires).

Another critical methodological issue is the relevance of the REP-scales, which have been used for decades, but mainly in wilderness, recreational or protected areas. As far as we know they have not been used in pilgrim studies before, but we found it relevant to draw at least partly from selected REP-domains since we wanted to study pilgrimage in relation to nature visitation and long-distance hiking. We have primarily used sets of REP-items and tied them to motivational items from the pilgrim literature. This approach should be repeated and tested in other pilgrim settings.

5. Conclusions

Recent research focusing on different pilgrim routes in Europe emphasize that pilgrimage incorporates several aspects of tourism in general, even when religious motives are primary. Notably, pilgrimage is similar to other tourism practices such as long-distance hiking, which also makes pilgrims similar to other visitors to the Scandinavian mountains and national parks. The aim of this paper has been to explore the extent to which the motives of pilgrims along the *Gudbrandsdal* route leading to Nidaros cathedral share the motives of non-pilgrim, long-distance hikers, given that long sections of the SOW go through forests, mountains and other remote areas.

We identified eight motivational dimensions, in descending order of average importance: *Exercise in nature*, *Slow travel*, *Nature – knowledge and joy*, *The inner me*, *Meet the locals and local heritage*, *The religious me*, *Be in solitude*, and *Hiking together*. These generally correspond to research findings on thru- or long-distance hikers (see e.g. Collins-Kreiner &

⁵ <https://www.afar.com/magazine/the-worlds-northernmost-pilgrimage-route-is-in-norway-and-almost-no-ones-heard>.

Kliot, 2017; Hitchner et al., 2018) and partly with motivation among visitors and hikers in the Scandinavian mountains and national parks (Garms, Fredman, & Mose, 2016; Raadik et al., 2010). In contrast to national park visitors, however, the SOW pilgrims in this study lack motivations tied to *Adventure and excitement*, while they exhibit qualities like *Slow travel* and *Inner journey*.

Further, the result indicates that the motives of SOW-pilgrims are influenced by the heritage aspects of the pilgrim route, compared to long distance hiking routes in general. This is also underpinned by more open churches along the route being the most desired future improvement along the route. Our results also reveal parallels between SOW pilgrims and modern pilgrims elsewhere, like those on their way to Santiago de Compostela (Amaro et al., 2018; Kato & Prozano, 2017; Mikaelson, 2012), who are all more motivated by their own journey towards the holy shrine than reaching that holy place. The motives and experiences of modern pilgrims are found on a continuum from the purely secular to deeply religious, and these motives and meanings may vary across a journey (Damari & Mansfeld, 2016; Lois-Gonzalez, 2013). Therefore, we cannot conclude that being attracted to the heritage of the pilgrim route and the wish to visit churches in every instance reflects a religious engagement.

Motive dimension *The religious me* is more important for those who distinguish pilgrim routes from other long trails. However, this also applies to the dimensions *The inner me*, *Meet the locals and local heritage*, *Slow travel* and *Hiking together*. This indicates that a substantial number of the pilgrims in this survey consider the pilgrimage as more fulfilling of these dimensions, compared to hiking other kinds of trails. It is likely that this reflects the complex interplay of the historic, cultural, social and physical of the pilgrimage and its environment. Perhaps this is an example of the position and importance of an historic (religious) *ritual* tied to pilgrimage (Schnell & Pali, 2013: 888)? "*Rituals are behavioural scripts, describing a sequence of acts to be followed in a certain situation*". We leave it open as to whether these scripts fulfil deep needs, "*tapping and evoking a reality beyond*" as an element of implicit religiosity (Schnell & Pali op cit.), or are instead associated with seeking and approaching a more authentic pilgrimage behaviour aligned with ancient cultural heritage.

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CRedit authorship contribution statement

Odd Inge Vistad: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Resources, Data curation, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing. **Hogne Øian:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Project administration, Writing - review & editing. **Daniel R. Williams:** Conceptualization, Writing - review & editing. **Patricia Stokowski:** Conceptualization, Writing - review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

No potential conflict of interest.

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