

## AUGUSTA THOMSON, BECARIA PREDOCTORAL FULBRIGHT EN LA CATEDRA INSTITUCIONAL DEL CAMINO DE SANTIAGO Y LAS PEREGRINACIONES DE LA USC

La doctoranda Augusta Thomson se encuentra entre nosotros en Compostela este presente año de 2022 para la realización de sus tesis doctoral “Reanimating the Camino de Santiago in the Age of Social Media and Sustainability.”

Actualmente, está realizando entrevistas sobre la sostenibilidad a lo largo del Camino y agradecería cualquier idea o colaboración de quienes deseen enriquecer esta investigación.

Abstract de su proyecto de tesis doctoral:

On July 11, 2017 a group of young locals marched through the city center of Logroño, the capital of La Rioja, a province in the north of Spain; they protested outside of two pilgrim hostels, holding placards that read: “Pilgrims go home” and “Fewer pilgrims, cheaper wine.” These protesters, part of the movement STOP Gentrificación Logroño, were not asking for the Camino Francés to close but were hoping to raise awareness about the consequences of increased travelers along the path. Protestors cited issues such as rent hikes, higher prices in bars and restaurants, increased waste, and lack of true religious belief.

Since the 1980s, the Camino de Santiago, an early medieval pilgrimage route located in Spain and the most significant Christian pilgrimage in Europe, has experienced a marked reanimation. The increase in pilgrims, traveling between Navarre, in the Basque region of Spain, and Galicia, has coincided with a proliferation in tourism infrastructures that are economically productive for some sectors of local communities, while redirecting business away from others. Many of these tourism infrastructures—including luggage transport services, restaurants, supermarkets, bars, and cafés— rely on communications infrastructures to market their services and attract consumers. As the pilgrimage grows, touristic and communications infrastructures become increasingly sophisticated, attracting yet more consumers and perpetuating contentions about the authenticity of pilgrims

versus tourists. Online platforms, such as booking.com and Airbnb, and social media applications, like Facebook and Instagram, are revolutionizing touristic consumption of the pilgrimage route. This has exacerbated tensions between large and small businesses with varying technological capacities to compete for pilgrim attention and money.

Over the course of six months, I will study how the aforementioned commercial tourism infrastructures both enable and compromise the consumption of tangible and intangible cultural heritage along the Camino Francés. I will conduct research into the usage of UNESCO World Heritage sites, monuments, churches, museums, festivals, dances, and culinary traditions by locals, pilgrims, and tourists, attending to post-pandemic transformations. I will particularly consider the heightened role that communications infrastructures play in the political economy and consumption of heritage, through an analysis of the exchanges, both real and virtual, that occur among permanent dwellers and those passing ephemerally along the route. After a three-month research stint in Santiago de Compostela, I will depart for Pamplona (with the assistance of my project advisors). This will give me the opportunity to trace distinctions in tourism and heritage consumption at two distinct points of the pilgrimage route. After a brief research period, I will once again return to Santiago de Compostela for the remaining two months of the grant period (June and July) to undertake participant observation during the busiest time of the summer for domestic and foreign pilgrims. My research corresponds with the Holy Year; as such, officials predict especially large numbers of pilgrims. And yet, given that pilgrim travel patterns will likely shift after COVID-19, the final summer months of 2022 are particularly significant to this project.

The classic prior anthropological study of the Camino de Santiago, written by Nancy Frey, in 1998, focused on pilgrims' experiences of liminality. Twenty years later, intensified tourism along the Camino has raised other issues, involving the infrastructures that maintain the route and the environmental impacts of growing numbers of travelers. My dissertation research will engage questions of materiality and sustainability as they intersect with pilgrimage scholarship, especially those related to the Camino de Santiago. It is highly likely that COVID-19 will have contributed to infrastructural changes, and I am, likewise, eager to document those changes and their impacts on the route. Through collaborations with local scholars

and producers, I will make my research findings accessible to diverse multi-lingual audiences, contributing to the sustainability of the pilgrimage route. My research will thus (a) emphasize the reshaping of tourism and pilgrimage in the Anthropocene and the environmental implications of increased global travel; b) illustrate how attention to social and media infrastructures enrich our understandings of the effects of pilgrimage and tourism; (c) and enliven theories of mobility and heritage by addressing their unexpected intersections.

This work carries particular resonance for regional Spaniards, who remain deeply connected to local heritage. It is also significant for Europe and beyond; as a route that connects countries in Western Europe via a series of networked pathways, the Camino is walked by citizens of over 120 nations. The pilgrimage route thus fosters increased cross-cultural awareness and interaction. As an American researcher and seasoned pilgrim (This will be my fourth research period on the pilgrimage route.), fluent in Spanish, I am well positioned to connect with local communities living along the route, as well as transient groups of pilgrims, among whom English remains the dominant spoken language.

While tourism contributed 14.6% of Spain's GDP in 2018, and Spain was ranked the most common tourist destination in the EU in 2017, protests against tourists in 2017, including those in Barcelona and Logroño, suggest that this economic growth is far from universally celebrated. As the number of tourists and pilgrims walking the Camino de Santiago continues its annual rise, my examination of tourism in Spain addresses the voices obscured and homogenized by national indices of financial growth, the various ways that pilgrimage-as-tourism inspires local advocacy and activism (both positive and negative), and the ecological consequences of this longstanding tradition as it is reshaped in the Anthropocene.

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