

Article

Local Pasts and International Inspirations: The Heritagisation and Caminoisation of Pilgrimage Landscapes in Norway

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Abstract: Through the case of St Olav Ways, the aim of this article is to shed light on the ways in which the contemporary pilgrimage phenomenon in Norway is developed through a combination of interpretations of local religious history and inspiration from international pilgrimage developments, the Camino de Santiago in particular. Pilgrimage is increasingly becoming visible as a contemporary phenomenon in Norway, as in several other European countries where pilgrimage was long discredited as a religious practice. From the 1990s, pilgrimage routes leading to historical shrines have been developed, initiated by agents ranging from grassroots enthusiasts to governmental ministries. This is analysed as the heritagisation of religion and Caminoisation. In a broader perspective, this pertains to how interfaces between the spheres of religion, politics and cultural heritage management are central to the development of contemporary pilgrimage landscapes. A further aim of this article is to demonstrate the importance of taking administrative and political processes into account for pilgrimage studies. The study is based on ethnographic fieldwork and document analysis.

Keywords: pilgrimage landscapes; heritagisation of religion; Caminoisation; cultural heritage



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1. Introduction

The number of pilgrims walking along designated pilgrimage routes in Norway is increasing. There are a multitude of motivations to identify as a contemporary pilgrim and undertake a pilgrimage (see [Vistad et al. 2020](#); [Jørgensen et al. 2020](#)). A central part of this experience is the way the journey is undertaken, as a slow-paced hike along historical routes. The St Olav Ways constitute the most well-known and developed network of pilgrimage routes in the country. In 2019, statistics from the National Pilgrim Centre estimated that over 2000 pilgrims walked along the most frequented of the nine routes (the Gudbrandsdal Route and the St Olav Route), based on the number of overnight stops along the way ([Jansson 2019](#)). All nine routes lead to Nidaros Cathedral [Figure 1] in Trondheim, the historical shrine of St Olav, which gives the frame and direction for the journeys thematised as pilgrimages. These routes leading to a shrine sought by medieval pilgrims provide the historical basis for the notion of “walking in the footsteps” of pilgrims in ages past.

To connect contemporary pilgrimage practices and historical pilgrimage destinations is, of course, not a peculiarly Norwegian phenomenon. On the contrary, it is part of the ongoing realisations of pilgrimage as long-distance walks along routes with branded way-markers, with pilgrims travelling routes that cross national borders as well as religious denominations ([Bowman et al. 2020](#)). As is the case with pilgrimage developments in other countries (see, e.g., [Gemzöe 2020](#) on the development in Sweden and [Bowman 2020](#) on the development in Scotland), the development of pilgrimage in Norway is to a large degree inspired by the Camino de Santiago de Compostela in northern Spain. This the most well-known and utilised network of pilgrimage routes in Europe, leading to the legendary grave of St James. The realisation of the network of routes of St James has inspired pilgrims to replicate their pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela and motivated the development of corresponding pilgrimage routes to destinations elsewhere ([Sánchez](#)

and Hesp 2016; Bowman and Sepp 2019). The “reanimation” of the Camino (Frey 1998) from the 1960s is, in turn, entangled in broader political and social developments at the national and international levels. This includes mass tourism, a growing interest in alternative spirituality and a transnational, political ambition after the Second World War to rebuild Europe through a collective past thematised as cultural heritage (Frey 1998; Schrire 2007; Margry 2008b; Murray 2021). A characteristic of the Norwegian pilgrimage realisations is that government ministries and directorates are heavily involved in managing the St Olav Ways. The development of these pilgrimage routes since the 1990s has been administered through parallel initiatives on different scales, from local initiatives run by volunteers in pilgrimage confraternities, municipalities and congregations to projects located in institutions of public governance at the regional, national or transnational level (Lunde 2022).

In this article, I explore what I identify as two constituent elements for how pilgrimage has become visible as a contemporary phenomenon in Norway: the heritagisation of religion and Caminoisation. I focus on the institutionalisation of pilgrimage in cultural heritage politics on the national level, with the aim of shedding light on the ways in which the combination of thematisations of local religious history and inspiration drawn from international interpretations of the pilgrimage phenomenon shape the ways in which pilgrimage routes are developed and interacted with (see Mikaelsson 2019; Bowman et al. 2020). I argue that these processes contribute to the recognisability of pilgrimage as a transnational phenomenon, as well as creating both flexibility and ambivalence regarding what contemporary pilgrimage as spiritual and embodied practice and as placemaking entails. In a broader perspective, this pertains to how interfaces between the spheres of religion, politics and cultural heritage management are central to the development of contemporary pilgrimage landscapes.

First, I outline the methodological approach of the study and I briefly describe the historical background for the contemporary framing of Nidaros Cathedral as a pilgrimage destination. Then, I situate my analysis within pilgrimage studies using heritagisation and Caminoisation as the analytical lens. I then outline how the St Olav Ways have been developed through *The Pilgrim Way Project* and *Project Pilgrimage Motif*, initiated by the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Church and Culture, respectively. In the last part of this article, I present examples of how heritagisation and Caminoisation are combined in the framing and administration of the St Olav Ways and some of the ways in which these processes influence the experience of undertaking a pilgrimage along these routes.



Figure 1. Nidaros Cathedral and a milestone with the logo of the St Olav Ways. Photo by the author.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Methodological Approach and Empirical Data for the Study

The study is based on ethnographic fieldwork and document analysis of historical and contemporary source material about pilgrimage in Norway. Participatory observation was conducted between December 2018 and August 2021 along stretches of the St Olav Ways, the regional pilgrimage centres between Oslo and Trondheim and at Nidaros Cathedral. Sixteen semi-structured interviews with pilgrimage agents were conducted between May 2019 and July 2021. The term “pilgrimage agents” refers to individuals and institutions taking part in developing pilgrimage routes and accommodating journeys for others. Although most interviewees are accommodators, the category of “pilgrimage agents” entails individuals who also identify as pilgrims (Lunde 2022). Pilgrimage has become an identity marker for individuals engaging in its social arena, and an issue ranging from the practical tasks of mapping, marking routes and accommodating pilgrims, through to places to meet and receive guidance before, on and after the journeys, to anchoring projects in local communities along the routes. As has also been observed in other studies, significant overlaps exist between pilgrims, accommodators and researchers (Eade and Sallnow 1991; Frey 1998; Coleman and Elsner 2003; Schrire 2007; Margry 2008a; Mikaelsson 2008, 2017; Sepp 2012; Øian 2019; Grau 2021). The interviewees were chosen by virtue of their role related to accommodating pilgrims in administrative projects, either in paid positions or as volunteers. The interviews cited are referred to by the time and place they took place, for instance: (Interview Oslo 24.08.20). The textual sources mainly consist of political documents outlining visions and plans for the development of pilgrimage routes since the 1990s and promotional material for the St Olav Ways accessible online or in

print. These documents provide rich source material about how the Norwegian pilgrimage landscapes are realised, by presenting visions, strategies and, in turn, funds, approval and contestations about the development of pilgrimage routes and centres.

2.2. Nidaros and St Olav: Historical Roots for Contemporary Pilgrimage Renewals

To understand the development of contemporary pilgrimage in Norway, it is particularly important to grasp the national and religious symbolism of Nidaros Cathedral and St Olav in the last 200 years (Amundsen 2002; Mikaelsson 2008). Nidaros Cathedral in the city centre of Trondheim, was the most visited and well-known pilgrimage destination in Norway during the Middle Ages, due to the cult of St Olav. The city, historically called Nidaros, was the ecclesiastical capital of the country, a status gained through holding the grave church of St Olav and the status of an archdiocese from 1152/53. The figure known as St Olav in his saintly afterlife was the historical king Olav Haraldsson. Even though his reign only lasted a short duration (periods between 1015 and 1028), after his death he gained the status of “the eternal king of Norway”, *rex perpetuus Norvegiae*. Both royal and religious power became defined around him as a royal martyr (Bjelland 2000; Ommundsen 2010; Laugerud 2018; Skeie 2018; Ekroll 2019). First placed in St Clemens Church in 1031, the reliquary of St Olav was later translated to the present location of Nidaros Cathedral. A wooden chapel was replaced by a stone church initiated by king Olav Kyrre in the second part of the 11th century. The church developed in phases from a Romanesque church in the 12th century to a Gothic cathedral completed around 1300 (Hvattum 2014; Ekroll 2019). After the change in the official state religion with the Lutheran Reformation of Denmark–Norway in 1537, the reliquary of St Olav and other saints and together with sacred objects were removed, and the shrines were left to deteriorate. The cult of saints and pilgrimage (i.e., seeking the location of sacred objects for healing, blessing or penance) may have continued but its status changed from acceptable piety to “superstition” or “papistry” (Mikaelsson 2017; Laugerud 2018).

The time prior to the Reformation gained great significance in the struggle for Norwegian independence in the 19th century. In this period, the interpretative framework for both the material remnants of Nidaros Cathedral and St Olav shifted from an emphasis on the Catholic past to the national symbolic value of this place and saint, as memories of the time of independence before the two unions with Norway’s neighbouring countries. This was a time of grand national histories, expressed through a great interest in the Vikings and Middle Ages; the time of “the Norwegian Realm” (“Norgesveldet”). These eras of independence became important for and likened to the then-current struggle for independence from the union with Denmark (between 1537 and 1814), and then from Sweden (between 1814 and 1905) (Hodne [1995] 2002; Eriksen 2016). By the end of the 19th century, Nidaros Cathedral had become the very materialisation of the national building project. Reconstructions of the cathedral have been ongoing since 1869 (Hvattum 2014; Mikaelsson 2019).

The current development of Nidaros Cathedral as a pilgrimage destination has developed without the reliquary of St Olav, once the focus of veneration by pilgrims, and without the overarching theological and organisational canopy of the Catholic Church. As remarked by Arne Bugge Amundsen (2002), Roger Jensen (2016) and Lisbeth Mikaelsson (2019), the contemporary usage of St Olav is connected to identity and nation building more than an interest in medieval theology. It is the religious history of the cathedral as a shrine and the notion of the heritage of St Olav that constitute the roots for the ongoing pilgrimage realisations. This is exemplified by the slogan presenting the St Olav Ways on the front page of their website:

“The destination [Nidaros Cathedral] has endured for a thousand years, but the journey there is your own to discover. [. . .] To walk in the footsteps of a thousand years of pilgrimage to Nidaros could be the experience of a lifetime” (NPS 2023a, accessed on 20 April 2023).

This quotation illustrates how the development of contemporary pilgrimage routes to historical shrines combine the heritagisation of religious history, materialised by Nidaros Cathedral, with the notion of pilgrimage as a long-distance hike in the footsteps of pilgrims from ages past. As formulated by Lisbeth Mikaelsson (2019, p. 104): “The Olav heritage is [. . .] constructed as a process through centuries and a pertinent source of both spirituality and national identity. [. . .] Nidaros Cathedral had started to function as a modern pilgrim church in the wake of the local heritagization of the Olav tradition, before the later pilgrim enterprise resulting in the St Olav Ways network”. Defined as heritage, pilgrimage routes and destinations are staged “as displays of what they once were” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995, p. 371), while being experienced as “walking in the footsteps of” medieval pilgrims—within the safe conditions of the 21st century leisure sphere (cf. Dicks 2003). In this way, the development of pilgrimage routes such as the St Olav Ways provides the infrastructure for an embodied experience of walking along designated pilgrimage routes that are “charged” with a historical depth which also serves to connect local and national history to an internationally recognisable pilgrimage phenomenon.

3. Analytical Approach: Heritagisation of Religion and Caminoisation

3.1. Heritagisation

As is the case with “reanimated” shrines and routes in other parts of Europe (Frey 1998; Coleman 2012), historical shrines form the foundation for multi-layered arenas for contemporary pilgrimage realisations in Norway. As heritage, certain aspects of the past are given new meaning and value for contemporary aims and needs through creative processes of interpretation as well as negotiation (Smith 2006; Eriksen 2009; Harrison 2013). The heritagisation of religion refers to the process where religion is interpreted as part of cultural heritage for contemporary purposes (Selberg 2011; Meyer and de Witte 2013; Harrison 2013; Mikaelsson 2019; Isnart and Cerezales 2020). In the case of the St Olav Ways, “the heritage of St Olav” is the historical and symbolic grounds for the contemporary reframing of Nidaros Cathedral as a pilgrimage destination (see e.g., Ministry of Culture et al. 2012; Kjølsvik 2014; NPS 2019). Despite an interruption of five hundred years and changing cultural, political and religious conditions, pilgrimage is often interpreted as a continuation or renewal of earlier traditions (Eriksen 1999; Selberg 2006, 2011). While meeting personal needs in the present, many pilgrims feel that they are also replicating an ancient ritual; that is, walking along the same routes as medieval pilgrims (Frey 1998). Frey (1998, p. 4) remarks on a distinctive feature of pilgrimage as a contemporary practice that is also observable in Norway: it is practised as a form of leisure as well as a religious ritual.

A prevalent trait of the ongoing pilgrimage interpretations is the mingling of extra-institutional and “secular” forms of pilgrimage with religious traditions and rituals. Interpretations of pilgrimage as a practice, and the significance of the shrines to which the routes lead, are detached from—or, at least not exclusive to—adherence to religious or denominational dogma or, in the Norwegian cases, to the material existence of the historical shrines of the saints who today are naming the pilgrimage routes. Importantly, different interpretations of pilgrimage share the same “stage” rather than entailing a dichotomous shift from an explicitly religious sphere to a secular one (Reader and Walter 1993; Coleman and Elsner 1995; Badone and Roseman 2004; Margry 2008a; Coleman 2019). Different interpretations of what constitutes the sacredness or specialness of pilgrimage destinations occur simultaneously (Bowman 1993, 2012). As observed by Simon Coleman (2019, p. 123) with reference to English cathedrals, the heritagisation of sacred spaces may include a considerable degree of ambivalence and different interpretations being adjacent rather than one understanding replacing another. As Isnart and Cerezales (2020, p. 6) remark: “Religious buildings, rituals, and objects do not always lose their original religious values and powers when entering the heritage realm”. Because the shrines are absent, the symbolic potency of the saints and the places where they historically were venerated are transformed into roots and used in debates about why and how the places are thematised as contemporary pilgrimage destinations. Peter Jan Margry (2008b) notes how cultural

heritage, as a political term, plays a part in reframing Europe through the shared values and heritage of Christianity, rather than its institutional, ecclesiastical authority:

“[...] heritage and Christian history are again being mobilised, and new forms of religiosity created. This network of pilgrim ways [the Camino de Santiago] thus becomes a supranational instrument which creates connections with others in a newly constructed and heritage-based imagined spiritual community” (Margry 2008b, p. 18).

To define something as heritage is far from a value-neutral categorisation; it is to imbue something with value. It entails selecting elements from the past that are interpreted as significant for the present and future. The term “heritagisation” underlines the active relationship of human agency in defining and valuing parts of the past as relevant and valuable (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995; Smith 2006; Eriksen 2009; Meyer and de Witte 2013; Harrison 2013; Mikaelsson and Selberg 2020). It also entails value creation in a monetary sense. A central aspect of motivations and contestations about pilgrimage thematisations in cultural heritage politics is the allocation of funds as part of budgets of public administration (Mikaelsson 2010; Reader 2014). A range of stakeholders are involved in monetizing pilgrimage, such as tourism agents organising package tours, agents offering accommodation and cultural experiences, food and transport along the routes and the production of pilgrimage souvenirs. Although the commercial aspect of developing pilgrimage routes is not the main objective of this article, the economic and commercial interests are undoubtedly central aspects of the developments outlined. The ways in which contemporary pilgrimage is entangled in different forms of governance and administration on different scales are addressed in several recent publications (Reader 2014; Gardner et al. 2016; Coleman and Eade 2018; Bowman 2020; Murray 2021; Grau 2021). Such entanglements may lead to contestations, as addressed by Bowman et al. (2020):

“A development visible in the emerging pilgrim infrastructures in all northern European countries is that the history of religions in Europe is being rewritten and reframed as cultural heritage: not simply in scholarly works, but in the action plans of pilgrim activist, the governmental reports, the maps, guidebooks, and waymarks that now are transforming remote footpaths and rural sites into public heritagized spaces. While the work of bottom-up initiatives and individual pilgrim activists is constitutive to many of the emerging route networks, the frameworks in which they have to operate is still one of often competing institutions” (Bowman et al. 2020, p. 443).

These authors show how pilgrimage routes are not only a means of transit for pilgrims, but also involve a range of agents along the routes. Pilgrimage developments can be significant for communities in being “put on the map” (cf. Bowman 2020) at the local, regional or national level. This takes place in the context of an international branding of heritage, emerging as an opportunity for governments and local businesses as well as interest groups to revitalise national and local economies (Harrison 2013). Of course, such developments may also be a source of contestations about what it entails to be a pilgrim in contemporary multi-religious and secular societies, and regarding differing interests e.g., between locals, landowners, commercial agents, religious denominations and administrators in municipalities and national bodies of governance, both along the routes and concerning activities at the shrines (Eade and Sallnow 1991; Mikaelsson 2008; Øian 2019).

3.2. *Caminoisation*

Bowman and Sepp (2019, p. 80) remark how the Camino de Santiago has “caused radical reframing and reconsideration of what pilgrimage might mean and might have to offer”. They categorise ideas and practices inspired by the Camino, such as long-distance journeys with spiritual, non-dogmatic overtones as *Caminoisation*: “[...] the process whereby various aspects and assumptions of the contemporary Camino, particularly as encountered by non-traditional pilgrims, are transplanted and translated to other pilgrimage sites, routes and contexts” (Bowman and Sepp 2019, p. 75). On the one hand, there are recognisable features of contemporary pilgrimage on an international scale. On the other hand, each replication of the Camino entails local adaptations of the phenomenon:

“The enormous success and appeal of the Camino have inspired Caminoisation in other locations for both spiritual and practical/economic reasons. Each replication involves transplantation, and the convergence of new sets of circumstances, backgrounds and agendas in relation to local cultural, historical and religious context” (Bowman and Sepp 2019, p. 81).

The development of pilgrimage in Norway as a contemporary phenomenon is comparable to the Camino since the central element of the pilgrimage involves the pilgrims “walking in the footsteps” of their medieval counterparts along “routes with roots” to places held to be sacred or in other ways special. Moreover, many pilgrims go for multiple pilgrimages, seeking to replicate previous experiences and discover new landscapes, and sharing experiences with others, e.g., through membership of pilgrimage confraternities, writing about their pilgrimages on social media forums or publishing in magazines, guidebooks or other types of travel accounts (cf. Coleman and Elsner 2003; Johannsen and Ohrvik 2020). Visual and material objects, particularly scallops, staffs and items branded with the logo of a given pilgrimage route, are recognisable as “pilgrim signifiers” among pilgrims and administrators of shrines and pilgrimage routes. Examples of visual and material signifiers inspired by the Camino include branded way-makers, pilgrim credentials and certifications of completion (Frey 1998; Österlund-Pötzsch 2011; Dunn 2016; Bowman and Sepp 2019).

This international context of Caminoisation (Bowman and Sepp 2019) and the processes of the heritagisation of Christianity as a “heritage-based imagined spiritual community” (Margry 2008b) should be borne in mind when discussing the Norwegian cases. I consider Caminoisation and the heritagisation of religion as intertwined rather than as two separate processes. I argue that both the international developments of pilgrimage as a contemporary phenomenon and local transmutations adapted to specific political, cultural and historical contexts are central to understanding how the phenomenon is developed.

4. Development of the St Olav Ways

Contemporary pilgrimages emerged during the 1950s in Norway. As a phenomenon visible in public space and traceable as projects to mark pilgrimage routes, it is the 1990s that is frequently referred to as the decade when time and pilgrimage converged in a “Kairos moment” (Mikaelsson 2011, p. 22) for pilgrimage realisations. This convergence is expressed by pilgrimage agents in written sources as well as in interviews, for instance: “The time was right” (Andresen 2005); they [the diocese of Nidaros] were in “the fullness of time” (Wagle 2007); it was “good timing” [to publish a book about historical pilgrimage routes] (Interview Tønsberg 08.05.21); they [grassroot initiators in the area of Dovre] sensed that “something was going on” (Interview Oslo 24.08.20). Why is the 1990s the time when pilgrimage became visible as a contemporary phenomenon? Several international developments may have contributed to pilgrimage being perceived as a “timely phenomenon” in this period, including the proliferation of experience economy and leisure travel gaining pace from the 1980s (Dicks 2003, pp. 84–85). The period furthermore saw an increased focus on tourism and cultural heritage, as well as on ecumenism. The term “pilgrimage” has been frequently used in the media since the 1980s (Margry 2008a).

Some of the cultural and social factors in Norway that possibly contributed to pilgrimage realisations being a “timely phenomenon” during the 1990s include the epoch of the Vikings and the Middle Ages being recurrently thematised by, for instance, in motion pictures, outdoor plays and televised performances, and at the 1994 Winter Olympics in Lillehammer. Some of these factors are addressed by the pilgrimage agents I interviewed as part of how they discovered pilgrimage and became involved in the development of pilgrimage infrastructures as volunteers or in paid positions.

Interviewees explain that they read and heard about pilgrimage in different ways from the 1990s. Some began from what can be termed a practice perspective, that is, as personal pilgrimage journeys, oftentimes through walks along the Camino. Others explain that they first approached pilgrimage from what they term a theoretical or academic perspective, for

instance, as a historical topic encountered through studies or through reading literature written by other interpreters of pilgrimage as a historical and contemporary phenomenon, or as “pilgrimage bureaucrats” through being employed in a position entailing administrating and developing pilgrimage routes (Interview Bergen 20.05.19; Interview Trondheim 18.06.19; Interview Trondheim 31.07.19; Interview Oslo 21.06.19; Interview Oslo 23.11.20; Interview Tønsberg 08.05.21). Approaching pilgrimage from an administrative perspective frequently involves meetings with representatives from the Camino or travel to Spain to walk (parts of) the Camino (Direktoratet for naturforvaltning 1998; Ministry of Culture et al. 2012; Interview Bergen 20.05.19; Interview Trondheim 18.06.19; Interview Oslo 24.08.20). One informant explained to me that the aim of the trip to Spain with his colleagues was to learn: “We have to understand what this is before establishing a [pilgrim] centre” (Interview Trondheim 18.06.19). This demonstrates that it varies whether pilgrimage agents “practise” pilgrimage themselves, or mainly accommodate the infrastructures for pilgrimage journeys for others.

Some pilgrimage agents discover pilgrimage as an embodied practice at the Camino, with its focus on walking, whereas others focus on utilising pilgrimage as a topic in local placemaking, aiming to market local history and culture. Of course, the practice perspective and the administrative perspective may overlap. One informant explained to me that she went on her first “conscious” pilgrimage in the 2010s, when a cousin of hers asked if she would like to join her for a walk along the Camino. Before this, she mentioned having noticed “glimpses of the history” in Norwegian media since the middle of the 1990s, such as Shirley MacLaine’s Camino walk and pilgrimage routes in Spain and Norway being mentioned in newspapers “[...] about someone walking across Dovre Mountain and someone is marking, and after OL [the Olympic Games in 1994] it was like that and that” (Interview Oslo 30.01.20). Another informant refers to Spain as the place where pilgrimage “took hold of her”. This was the motivation for initiating a pilgrimage route and organising walks along this route at home; in her case this was a route leading to the historical shrine of St Sunniva at the island of Selja (Interview Bergen 20.05.19). Another informant explains that her interest in pilgrimage began with the shrine of St Sunniva before she “expanded” to Spain after she walked the Camino (Interview Oslo 21.06.19). In these cases, one informant became acquainted with pilgrimage in Spain and adapted this to a local transmutation at home later (cf. Bowman and Sepp 2019), while another informant began with the religious heritage of the island of Selja and her fascination for St Sunniva and connected this local pilgrimage landscape to the international context and experience of the Camino.

A specific event that drew attention to the development of contemporary pilgrimage routes was the Camino de Santiago gaining the status as the first European Cultural Route in 1987. Coleman and Eade (2018) observe that connections between religious, political and economic processes and pilgrimage are often managed through conscious strategies:

“Pilgrimage is not only a source of popular religious activity but is also subject to varied forms of control on the part of national churches, denominations, social movements, commercial enterprises, and regional and national governments, not to mention transnational organisations, such as UNESCO” (Coleman and Eade 2018, pp. 3–4).

Both the Camino and the ongoing developments in Norway form part of a movement to translate monuments, routes and traditions into cultural heritage, directed to a great degree by UNESCO and the Council of Europe. In the following, I present an outline of the two major projects that have shaped the development of the St Olav Ways on the national level.

4.1. The Pilgrim Way Project

The first initiative to mark a network of pilgrimage routes to Nidaros Cathedral on the national level was initiated in 1992, through a letter from Odd Kjærem, employed in the county of Oppland to his county governor, Knut Korsæth (Kjærem, letter dated 1 April 1992). In the letter, Kjærem presents the idea of “utilising the pilgrimage roads in a national network of paths”. He found inspiration in the book *I pilegrimenes fotspor til Nidaros* (“In

the footsteps of pilgrims to Nidaros”) by Eivind Luthen (1992). This book mainly addresses pilgrimage as an historical practice. Luthen begins by presenting a historical summary of the story from the historical Olav Haraldsson to the saint St Olav, followed by detailed outlines of possible routes medieval pilgrims may have walked (and sailed) along to reach his shrine. In this way, the inspiration for the routes was to trace “the footsteps” of medieval pilgrims to Nidaros. Kjærem attached the maps of routes outlined by Luthen in the letter and describes the pilgrimage routes as “our longest connected memory from the past” (Kjærem 04.08.92). Knut Korsæth sent this idea onwards to the Ministry of Environment (Korsæth 1992, letter dated 7 August 1992). The motivation for the Ministry of Environment in implementing the project to mark pilgrimage routes in their policy was anchored in culture and nature management. The combination of refurbishing historical paths and the pilgrimage tradition was perceived as a good match with their ongoing plan of action for cultural heritage management, based on White Papers from the 1980s onward that highlighted cultural heritage as an integrated part of nature management (Schei 1994, p. 4; Hage 1996, p. 84). In this manner, the establishment of the first St Olav Ways was part of the development of natural and cultural landscapes and outdoor recreation rather than a way of (re)conceptualising pilgrimage as religious practice. In other words, it entailed the heritagisation of historical pilgrimages and of Nidaros Cathedral as the shrine of St Olav, adapted to contemporary plans for the management of cultural heritage and outdoor recreation.

As suggested by Kjærem, the task to register and refurbish “the old pilgrimage routes in Norway” was delegated from the Ministry of Environment to two of its directorates: *Direktoratet for naturforvaltning* (the Norwegian Directorate for Nature Management, DN) and *Riksantikvaren* (the Directorate for Cultural Heritage, RA). After pre-planning in 1993 under the same title as Luthen’s book, the project was carried out between 1994 and 1997 under the name *Prosjekt pilgrimsleden* (“The Pilgrim Way Project”). The focus on physical routes leading to the former shrine of St Olav is expressed in the aim to accommodate paths to Nidaros based on old paths used by medieval pilgrims “according to tradition” and that had connections to “the tradition of St Olav” (*Direktoratet for naturforvaltning* 1998, pp. 7–8). DN and RA coordinated the work of registering, refurbishing and approving roads, as well as distributing funds. To manage the practical work, the project made agreements with local landowners, municipalities and counties and coordinated collaborations between involved groups and individuals, including voluntary organisations (Hage 1996, p. 88). Local efforts to map and mark historical routes had already been initiated by local historical associations and other interest groups and they became a resource in the project administered from the directorates. The mapping of routes combined referencing written sources to St Olav and to medieval pilgrims, local tradition and placenames, and material traces in the physical landscape (*Direktoratet for naturforvaltning* 1998; Interview Oslo 24.08.20; Interview Tønsberg 08.05.21). Two stretches of roads were in focus, from Oslo to Trondheim via Gudbrandsdalen, and from Sweden by way of Stiklestad to Trondheim and they were to be realised as a continuous route made accessible for hiking, marked with an approved logo [see Figure 2]. *The Pilgrim Way Project* was completed by the city jubilee of Trondheim in 1997 (*Direktoratet for naturforvaltning* 1998, p. 12). The routes that opened in 1997 have become known as *Gudbrandsdalsleden* (the Gudbrandsdal Route) between Oslo and Trondheim and *St Olavsleden* (the St Olav Route) from Selånger in Sweden via Stiklestad to Trondheim. By 1997, a continuous 926 km pilgrimage path through 29 municipalities and seven counties was marked. A total of 1400 wooden poles, as well as marked wedges and stones with the logo for the pilgrimage route, showed the way to Trondheim (*Direktoratet for naturforvaltning* 1998, pp. 12, 18, 26).

During the development of pilgrimage routes in the 1990s, the pilgrim tradition was framed as a dimension of nature and culture experiences. The task of *The Pilgrim Way Project* is described as being: “[...] to accommodate for hiking, not to provide content for the walk” (Hage 1996, p. 91). Nevertheless, the project also wanted to communicate “[...] the historical and spiritual tradition of pilgrimages to the contemporary wanderer”.

These aspects were viewed as “[. . .] a new dimension of outdoor life and new experiences out of the ordinary” (Direktoratet for naturforvaltning 1998, p. 12). The religious understanding of the pilgrimage practice is not viewed as a prerequisite, but rather “left in the ground”, so to speak. Neither Luthen, Kjærem nor the project initiated by the Ministry of Environment envisioned a renewal of the historical religious practice, that is, of Catholic pilgrimage practices. Pilgrimages before the Reformation were rather seen as a “historical backdrop” (Luthen 1992; Kjærem 1992; Interview Tønsberg 08.05.21). Still, even though the thematisation of pilgrimage in Trondheim for the anniversary in 1997 may be categorised as a “broadened pilgrimage concept” (Eriksen 1999) compared to the historical practice of seeking sacred shrines for penance or in the hopes of blessing or healing, it was not a simple translation of the “pilgrim motif” from religious to heritage value (cf. Isnart and Cerezales 2020). For instance, representatives from the (Lutheran) Diocese of Nidaros emphasised the contemporary pilgrimage thematisations as a “spiritual heritage” to “step into” (Wagle 2007). This exemplifies the adjacency of interpretations of religious heritage and the reframing of pilgrimage as a contemporary phenomenon with historical roots (cf. Coleman 2019; Bowman and Sepp 2019).

The tasks assigned to RA and DN from the Ministry of Environment included providing the quality assurance of the roads and developing a logo and standardised information material. RA and Grafill (The Norwegian Organisation for Visual Communication) organised a competition to design a logo for the pilgrimage routes to Nidaros in 1993. Johanna Figur Waddington won, competing with a total of 125 suggestions. Her idea was to combine the cross of St Olav with the bowknot, a symbol generally used on public road signs to signify places as tourist attractions [Figure 2]. This type of square cross with pointed ends is found on the coat of arms of the historical archdiocese of Nidaros and on the current emblem of the Church of Norway. In the logo of the St Olav Ways, the martyr axe is replaced by the bowknot, combining the iconology of St Olav as an icon of the Catholic archdiocese of Nidaros before the Reformation and for the contemporary Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway, with the symbol signifying sightseeing locations. The logo of the St Olav Ways [Figure 2] can be interpreted both as a visual heritagisation of the religious history of Nidaros and St Olav, and as materialising Caminoisation, referencing the branded way-markers inspired by the yellow scallop and yellow arrows leading the pilgrims towards Santiago de Compostela. The logos of pilgrimage routes not only mark the geographical pilgrimage infrastructures; the symbols are also carried by pilgrims, e.g., on hats and backpacks, signifying the route they are currently walking along or routes they have walked on previous pilgrimages.

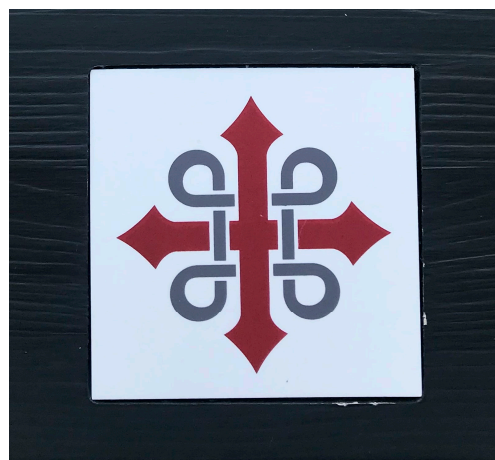


Figure 2. Logo of the St Olav Ways, depicted on a way-marker along the Gudbrandsdal Route. Photo by the author.

4.2. Project Pilgrimage Motif

If 1997 marked the beginning of a “new era of pilgrimage” (Mikaelsson 2017, p. 336), then 2008–2009 marked a new phase of the visibility of the pilgrimage phenomenon in Norway through a new level of the institutionalisation and administration of the St Olav Ways managed from the governmental level. In 2008, the second governmental pilgrimage project was initiated when the Minister of Church and Culture, Trond Giske, launched *Prosjekt pilegrimsmotivet* (“Project Pilgrimage Motif”). The report *På livets vei. Pilegrimsmotivet—et nasjonalt utviklingsprosjekt* (“On the Path of Life. The Pilgrimage Motif—a National Development Project”, Uddu 2008), ordered by the ministry, outlines the potential for pilgrimage as a national venture.

The Norwegian government addressed the question of how to contribute to supporting pilgrimage in Norway in 2009, concluding that the Ministry of Church and Culture was to have the responsibility for a strategy aimed at the “[...] development of the pilgrimage tradition” (Giske 2009). The inspiration from the Camino, combined with the emphasis on the religious significance of shrines and pilgrimages in Norway in the past is apparent in the speech held by Trond Giske at the pilgrimage conference in Trondheim in 2009. Giske (2009) refers to pilgrimage as “a common cultural phenomenon” connecting the ongoing pilgrimage thematisations with the historical practice: “We have a pilgrimage tradition dating back to the Middle Ages in Norway as well, that many different agents have been engaged in preserving, renewing and developing through many years”. In this manner, the minister combines thematising pilgrimage as “displays of what they once were” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995, p. 371) with the contemporary notion of pilgrimage as “leisure with meaning” (Frey 1998, p. 4). Several comparisons are made between Norway and Spain in the speech. For instance, Giske refers to the yellow arrows and the scallop marking the routes and carried by pilgrims along the Camino and the passports stamped along the way. Caminoisation is also reflected in the specific areas the national pilgrimage venture is based on, namely, the establishment of a national pilgrim centre, a pilgrimage credential as “a value card” and plans to fund regional pilgrim centres (Giske 2009).

A meeting place for pilgrims in Trondheim run by volunteers was already established in 2003 (Vådahl 2007). Between 2010 and 2013, pilgrimage was institutionalised at the regional and the national level through permanent, administrative networks of regional pilgrim centres along the pilgrimage routes, administered by the National Pilgrim Centre (NPS) in Trondheim. Whereas the project in the 1990s established routes visible through branded way-markers, the tasks of the NPS and the regional pilgrimage centres include making the routes function as a coherent route, maintaining the signposts, and ensuring that the level of accommodation is sufficient and that pilgrims are provided with information (Ministry of Government, Administration, Reform and Church Affairs 2010). Based on the Uddu (2008) report and consultation responses (2009) to this report, five Norwegian governmental ministries (the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Government Administration, Reform and Church Affairs, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, the Ministry of Environment and of Trade and the Ministry of Industry) launched *Strategi for pilgrimssatsning: Pilegrimsleden, vei for verdifull vandring* (“Strategy for the pilgrimage venture: the Pilgrimage route—Road for valuable walks”, Ministry of Culture et al.) in 2012. The overarching aims of this strategy are:

“The pilgrimage route is to offer walks through a landscape rich in nature-, cultural heritage- and culture experiences. It is to be preserved as an important part of the European cultural heritage and provide a unique meeting with Norwegian nature, cultural memories, culture, faith, and people. The strategy is to contribute to value creation and positive development along the route through increased utilisation of it” (Ministry of Culture et al. 2012, p. 2).

These aims reflect the interpretation of contemporary pilgrimage as thematisations of local historical pilgrimage traditions and religious beliefs as cultural heritage and the aim of situating the pilgrimage routes to Nidaros Cathedral in the heritagisation of religious history on the European level.

St Olav is seen as the historical root for the contemporary development of pilgrimage routes to Nidaros Cathedral both on the European and the national level. In the governmental strategy, it is stated that “The pilgrimage venture is to have its main focus on the approved pilgrimage routes with Nidaros as the destination and anchored in the heritage of St Olav” (Ministry of Culture et al. 2012, p. 3). To be a “road of Olav” can refer to paths that medieval pilgrims probably walked along, such as the “highway” from Oslo to Nidaros across Dovre Mountain. Other routes are storied by descriptions in Sagas and legends about the travels of king Olav Haraldsson, about him being translated after his death, or places associated with vernacular and ecclesiastical legends about St Olav. These narrative frames evoke the timescape of a mythical, Christian time when the shrine was established. This corresponds with the observation by Coleman and Elsner (1995, p. 205) about how: “[...] pilgrimage sites act as embodiments of myth-history”. The criteria for being included in the network of St Olav Ways and being allowed to use the official logo have remained the same from the development of the first routes in the 1990s to the current management by the National Pilgrim Centre, to be regarded as “historically correct”, that is, to lead to Nidaros; to be a “road of Olav”; and to be “suitable”, that is, practically manageable to refurbish (Interview Trondheim 18.06.19; Interview Oslo, 24.08.20). In this manner, the narrative and material frames for the St Olav Ways are created through a combination of historical and legendary references and administrative concerns on the national level.

During the same period as *Project Pilgrimage Motif*, the St Olav Ways were connected to the transnational administration of pilgrimage landscapes, being awarded the status of a Cultural Route of Europe in 2010. Holding the status of Cultural Route of Europe entails certain administrative and practical criteria, including facilitating travels along the routes through, among other things, places of accommodation and buying food. The list of criteria for being approved as a Cultural Route of Europe includes that the theme of the route is “[...] representative of European values and common to at least three countries of Europe” and “[...] illustrative of European memory, history and heritage and contribute to an interpretation of the diversity of present-day Europe” (Council of Europe 2021). On their website, the St Olav Ways are listed as corresponding with “the Council of Europe values” thus:

“The myth of Saint Olav led thousands of pilgrims to travel for centuries across the European continent in search of his burial place. These movements caused intense cultural and religious exchanges, thus serving an important role in the construction of a European identity” (Council of Europe 2021).

Through the Cultural Routes of Europe, “the myth of Saint Olav” and pilgrimages to his grave are given significance for European identity. In other words, the connection between the religious heritage of saints and the construction of “Europeanness” becomes explicit. To paraphrase Margry (2008b, p. 21), through the Cultural Routes of Europe the construction of a mythical network of not only trans-European pilgrim ways, but trans-European cultural routes play their part in reinventing Christian heritage as a common European heritage. Following this outline of the development of the St Olav Ways at the macro-level, I turn to how the heritagisation and Caminoisation of pilgrimage affect the experience of contemporary pilgrimages in Norway on the micro level (cf. Coleman and Eade 2004).

5. “The Pilgrim Mode” and Local Adaptions of Caminoised Pilgrimage Administration

With the prevalent popular focus on pilgrimage as a slow-paced journey and development of routes accommodating such journeys as hallmarks of contemporary pilgrimage, what separates a pilgrimage from other hikes? Norwegian pilgrimage projects to a great extent concern the accommodation of routes for hiking. What is recurrently referred to as designating pilgrimages from other hikes is the direction of these hikes: a sacred destination (Interview Oslo 21.06.19; Interview Trondheim 18.06.19; Interview Trondheim 31.07.19). Recurring elements for framing pilgrimages as such are the feeling of being

part of a tradition, to be openminded and reflective. Informants refer to these elements as creating a “pilgrimage effect” (Interview Trondheim 31.07.19; Interview Oslo 30.01.20) or “pilgrim mode” (Interview Bergen 22.05.19; Interview Oslo 21.06.19; Interview Trondheim 18.06.19). Several interviewees address how this “pilgrim mode” affects the ways in which the landscape is experienced, as well as meetings with others along the way.

The “pilgrim mode” is enhanced by the infrastructure of the St Olav Ways visualising pilgrimage landscapes through the branded way-markers and administrative pilgrimage centres along the routes. Moreover, places of accommodation listed on their webpage have been integrated in the network as “pilgrimage hostels”. For instance, the historical farm Sygard Grytting in Gudbrandsdalen is described as “a medieval hostel” where one may spend the night “at a pilgrim attic from the 1300s”. In addition, it can be described as a replication and local transmutation of hostels along the Camino: “This hostel is accredited and recommended by the National Pilgrim Centre. It has met the same requirements, and holds the same standard, as the pilgrim accommodation along Camino de Santiago and Via Francigena” (NPS 2023b, accessed on 21 April 2023). The recognisability of pilgrimage in the public space enables community and the fulfilling of expectations attributed to the framework—as well as the possibility for disappointment and contestations when such expectations are not fulfilled. For instance, pilgrimage agents refer to the recurrent issue of the price level in Norway compared to Spain, and the lack of churches along the routes that are open except on Sundays (Interview Trondheim 18.06.19; Interview Selje 22.06.20; Interview Oslo 24.08.20).

As previously mentioned, the visual and administrative aspects of pilgrimage in Spain were compared to the pilgrimage accommodation in Trondheim in the speech by the minister of Church and Culture, Trond Giske in 2009: “At the pilgrimage office in Trondheim pilgrims are received, get their pilgrimage diploma and are cared for in the same manner as in Santiago” (Giske 2009). The quotation is one example of how the replication of elements from the Camino inform Norwegian pilgrimage realisations, and of the transmutation of the material culture of the Camino adapted to local contexts (Bowman and Sepp 2019). Bowman and Sepp (2019) use the material culture of the St Olav Ways as an example of the replication of the Camino, describing the latter as follows:

“It’s hallmark material culture (the creation of routes with logo-waymarked paths, pilgrim passports, pilgrim stamps, certification of completion) and activities (the pilgrim blessing, the Pilgrim Mass or service, reanimated or novel pilgrim ‘traditions’) are becoming widespread in unaccustomed and previously unexpected contexts” (Bowman and Sepp 2019, p. 95).

For pilgrims travelling on the Camino, it is necessary to hold a credential and have this stamped every day to obtain access to accommodation at the hostels (“refugios”). It must be filled out with a name, starting point, means of travel (walking, bicycle, horse) and a stamp from the pilgrimage office (Leivestad 2007; Sepp 2014). The credential serves practical and administrative functions. The credential issued by the Pilgrim Office in Santiago de Compostela has spaces for stamps on one side and maps depicting the networks of roads constituting the Camino on the other. It is necessary to present the credential upon arrival at the Pilgrim Office to document the distance necessary to receive *La Compostela*—the diploma given to pilgrims who have walked at least the last 100 kilometres of the Camino with a religious or spiritual motivation (Oficina Peregrino 2022). The framing of the pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela presented through the credential emphasises “pilgrimage with a Christian sentiment”, as well as “Christian hospitality” along the way. A different diploma is given to pilgrims who do not express religious motivations. The agent dispersing this credential is the Diocese of Santiago. Importantly, the categorisation of two different diplomas in Santiago does not necessarily reflect two strictly separated categories of pilgrims; rather, it reflects the aim of retaining the religious significance of pilgrimage from the church (Frey 1998, p. 160; Leivestad 2007, p. 60).

Nidaros Pilgrim Centre, located close to Nidaros Cathedral, is the place pilgrims visit to have their credential stamped, and (for those qualified) to receive the Olav Letter.

Following the notion of “Caminoisation”, this is the counterpart to the Pilgrim Office in Santiago de Compostela. The centre has accommodation, a café, offices and a reception where volunteers from the Pilgrimage Confraternity of St Olav welcome pilgrims. Arriving at Nidaros Pilgrim Centre can be described as a ritualised practice with a script drawn from Santiago de Compostela. This is achieved through the “ritual” of being included in the statistics of arriving pilgrims, being offered to place a pin on a map on the wall to mark where the pilgrimage began and being presented with the Olav Letter. Since 2016, more than 1000 of these diplomas have been issued each year (NPS 2019, p. 21). To be eligible to receive the Olav Letter upon arrival in Trondheim, pilgrims must walk the last 100 kilometres (or cycle the last 200 kilometres) of the St Olav Ways and present a credential that has been stamped along the way. Although pilgrimage in Norway bears many explicit and implicit traces of Caminoisation, the local historical and religious context differs from Spain. As observed by Hege Høyer Leivestad (2007) who worked as a volunteer at the Pilgrim Office in Santiago de Compostela, the Catholic Church aims to keep the framing of pilgrimages along the Camino focused on the religious significance of the journey, with the grave of St James the destination. In contrast to Santiago de Compostela, pilgrims arriving at Nidaros Pilgrim Centre receive the diploma regardless of their motivations for the journey. They are asked about how far they have travelled, the means of transport, age and where the journey began. The replication from Spain is transmuted to the local context (Bowman and Sepp 2019) by omitting the question of whether the journey held religious significance. In the Norwegian context, one gains credibility as a pilgrim worthy of the diploma because of the manner of transport and the distance travelled; that is, the frame of the outer journey, rather than presenting motifs for the “inner journey”—this is left as an individual matter (cf. Mikaelsson 2019, p. 107). Combined, the religious heritage of shrines and saints, in this case, Nidaros Cathedral and St Olav, designate a Norwegian version of the internationally recognisable pilgrimage phenomenon adapted to local conditions.

6. Concluding Thoughts

This article has demonstrated how pilgrimage realisations in Norway combine the heritagisation of the religious history of Nidaros Cathedral and the veneration of St Olav with replications of pilgrimage practices, administration and visual culture from the Camino. These processes have been analysed as the heritagisation of religion and Caminoisation. A significant aspect of this is that the contemporary socio-political context of the 20th and 21st centuries provide the flexibility of different and adjacent interpretations of religion, the sacred and of cultural heritage (Meyer and de Witte 2013; Bowman and Sepp 2019; Coleman 2019). I argue that this combination of historical roots and international inspirations are central processes in how the contemporary pilgrimage phenomenon is framed as recognisable on a transnational level as well as being flexible for local adaptations, as demonstrated through the case of the St Olav Ways.

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[ts/images/Langtidsplan_Pilegrimsleden.pdf](https://images/Langtidsplan_Pilegrimsleden.pdf); <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/pa-live-ts-vei-pilegrimsmotivet/-et-nasj/id545507/>.

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