Existential Walking

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Abstract: This paper analyses Camøno, a pilgrim route on the island of Møn in Denmark, through the lens of existentialism. The theoretical framework draws on literature focusing on contemporary pilgrimage tourism and existentialism, as presented in Walter Kaufmann's works. The analysis is based on empirical material comprised of Instagram images shared by the pilgrims. The coding and analysis of the data combines a thematic and a metaphorical visual method. The findings show a strong resonance between the experience as portrayed by the pilgrims and core aspects of existentialist thought. They reveal the importance of nature and simple living and the limits to commercialisation and institutionalised religiosity. The study prompts us to rethink our understanding of the interconnection between spirituality in tourism.

Keywords: spirituality, Instagram, visual methods

INTRODUCTION

This is a story in images which began with a question: Is it possible or even desirable to invent a pilgrim route that is for everybody? In the spring of 2016 our research team was looking for an interesting case to study tourism innovation in the coastal areas of Denmark. Camøno – a new pilgrim route that was to be opened in the summer of 2016 on Møn, an island located in the South East of Denmark – had appeared in the national press as a promising community-based initiative. Thus, to start this collaboration we organised a workshop for the stakeholders of Camøno. The event took place in a beautiful setting, an old house that was a mix of a tourist shop/atelier/café/community centre in the small village of Nyord. The messy and welcoming nature of that space was a preview of what we later understood as the core of the Camøno experience.

We were introduced to both the project and the area by William, a friendly and talkative pensioner who was responsible for the mustard atelier/shop, one of the many features of the house, and Anne Marie Syska, a passionate former journalist working at the largest local museum, who was the main entrepreneurial spirit behind the initiative. Syska sounded convinced and convincing in her presentation; Camøno was meant to be a pilgrim

route for everybody. It should be open to all businesses, churches and local residents. Anyone who would like to join in by offering their services and products along the route was welcomed. The same inclusive spirit was addressed to potential visitors with the slogan "The friendliest walking trail in the kingdom". The project was aimed at dynamising the local community, attracting tourists and tapping into an increasing demand for pilgrimage experiences over the past decades (Kim, Kim, & King, 2016).

This case cannot be understood without looking at the blessing and challenge hidden in the name *Camøno*. This name mirrors *El Camino de Santiago*, one of the most renowned and ancient pilgrim trails in the world. The name connected this local initiative to the historical landscape of pilgrimage tourism, but also it conveyed a form of light-heartedness, a sense of humour and irreverence. The stakeholders felt entitled to associate their constructed invention of a walking trail with a cultural and religious world heritage site. Besides adopting some of its rituals such as the pilgrim passport (*credencial*) and its stamps, the values of ecumenism and openness were also part of the inheritance that came with the El Camino association.

However as the conversation developed and our knowledge of the case deepened, it became clear that, despite trying to build a reputation of openness inspired by the El Camino 'brand', implementing this 'all-welcome all-included' model was proving more difficult than expected in practice. It appeared that Camøno was a perfect example of a deconstruction of what a postmodern pilgrimage could look like. Like the Venice of Las Vegas is to Venice, 'Camøno' was to become the modern interpretation of 'El Camino': a deconstruction by cutting and pasting pilgrimage rituals and stories to tell a new story that still was not a reality but a wish; a hyper reality to be sold and packaged; an experience without the complexity of having to live up to 'authenticity' in the form of heritage conservation, but instead an authenticity that could spring from the will-to-action of the entrepreneurs behind the initiative. It was far from sure that the ironic distance – the business opportunity logic of getting a community project off the ground – and the power of creative storytelling was going to be shared by those that walked that trail. On the other hand, the pilgrims may actually 'believe' in the transformative power of walking and may have bought into the idea that the spiritual core of 'El Camino' could be magically transposed to a Nordic landscape.

Witnessing the increasing complexity and difficulties of this initiative, a question began to take form. Was it possible to create a form of pilgrimage that was for everybody; an experience that could integrate the longings and expectations of religious people as well as those who do not have a particular faith, of materialists and spiritualists, of families looking for fun and connection and walkers searching for solitude and contemplation? And how could it be possible to do this when using an established tourist destination? Whereas Camøno is a new invention, the island of Møn has a long tradition as a tourism attraction thanks to its impressive and unique chalk cliffs (Møns Klint), picturesque villages and hippie communities.

With these questions in mind, we thought of a stream of philosophy, which in itself represented that form of ecumenical and materialistic assemblage; a bricolage of thinkers and ideas that had the same heterogeneity that the Camøno project seemed to embrace. That philosophy was existentialism. Camøno's walkers could turn out to be more existentialist than postmodernist. But how could we know? We aimed to explore what Camøno meant to and how it felt for the tourists and how this relates to what existentialist philosophers have tried to express to us. Would Camøno, with its all-encompassing and expansive image, evolve to become a form of existential walking or did it have an ironic theatrical distance as a post-pilgrim experience? This paper presents what we learned about this.

PILGRIMAGE AND EXISTENTIALISM

Pilgrimage 'á la carte'

One of the most traditional tenets of the social sciences is the idea of modernity representing a process of secularisation. The rise of the tourist, a secular version of the religious pilgrim, has often been seen as a confirmation of this tendency (MacCannell, 1999). However, the increase in pilgrimage tourism, investments in traditional pilgrim routes and the establishment of new ones tell another story. It is the story of the re-making and re-performing of the religious and the secular, where one does not displace the other, but where both are remade. This tendency has been described as religion 'à la carte', a bricolage of faith, a post-secular position or as new-age spirituality. Our proposal to view this complex evolution through the lens of existentialist philosophy does not aim to oppose these other explanatory frameworks, but to complement them. The title of this section is taken from a short essay written by the sociologist Xavier Molénat called "Une religion 'à la carte [Religion as a menu]'" (Molénat, 2014). Molénat explains how the evolution of religious beliefs in countries such as France can seem paradoxical at first, where there is a strong trend of secularisation and an emergence of 'a faith without appearance'. This faith bridges institutionalised religious divisions with people who do not practice religious rituals but declare to believe in God, or in another form of spirit or life force, and it is characterised by a rise in alternative beliefs such as astrology and tarot. His view resonates with the position of Clark Roof (1999, cited in Vilaça, 2010, p. 138) who sees a fluidity between spirituality and religion. Bricolage and pastiche are common metaphors to describe this evolution where new spiritualties and religious forms evolve side-by-side with an individualisation of belief.

Mats Nilsson and Mekonnen Tesfahuney (2016, 2017, 2018) have extensively examined the return of religiosity in contemporary tourism. Their insightful studies about *El Camino de Santiago* point to the relationship between pilgrimage and the post-secular. The post-secular "denotes the return of religious in contemporary world" (Nilsson & Tesfahuney, 2017, p. 161), a need to reconsider the importance of the sacred and of religiosity when trying to understand society and a recognition of an increased liberalisation and individualisation of faith as compared to more traditional denominational religions (2017, p. 161). These 'post-secular tourists' perform pilgrimage in search of ontological security (or as a way out of the ontological insecurity of modernity, as explained by Giddens (1991)). Post-secular religiosity is "a bricolage of faiths rather than one that strictly follows religious doxa or dogma" (2017, p. 168). The application of a post-secular lens to understand the experience of pilgrimage is enlightening in many ways, but some differences appear when considering a case such as Camøno. Contrary to El Camino, Camøno does not have a sacred religious heritage from which to start.

The deconstruction and reconstruction of belief also takes place spatially. Individuals often find spirituality without seeking spiritual or religious places (Bell, 2002; Cheal & Griffin, 2013; Reijnders, Area, September, & Reijnders, 2016; Sharpley & Jepson, 2011; Slater, 2004). These encounters with either God (Slater, 2004) or a new side of themselves (Bell, 2002; Sharpley & Jepson, 2011; Cheal & Griffin, 2013) can be found when being in a calming environment with room for thought and without daily stress. Highly relevant to this study is the link that Belhassen et al. (2008) make between the traditional framework of existential authenticity (Wang, 2000) and place research. Existential authenticity understands the experience of authenticity as originating in the subjective and in a potential existential state of being that is to be activated by tourism. In this context "authenticity is seen as an ontological mode of being that does not depend on any given quality inherent in any object" (Belhassen et al. 2008, p. 671). Complementary to this approach, Belhassen, Caton and Steward's (2008) study on pilgrimage emphasises the need to link the subjective with the

context of sacred spaces and indicate that a feeling of spirituality appears when your surroundings open up to this opportunity:

> [T]he search for authentic experiences during visits to holy sites is shaped by three interrelated components: the theopolitical ideology underlying the pilgrimage, the places visited, and the activities undertaken by the pilgrims. […] We refer to this relationship as 'theoplacity', bringing together the Greek 'theos' (god) and the Medieval Latin 'placea' (place), in order to capture the hybridity of its socioreligious and sociospatial foundations. (2008, p. 683)

Tomas Pernecky has documented how, in what he categorises as 'New Age Tourism', people report a connection with cosmic forces and life energies; a special and unique relationship with nature and believing that they are part of a "oneness" or "universal energy". His study validates Roof's concept of a fluidity between categorisations of religious and non-religious ways of being: "one needs to question whether these categories [New Age experiences and sacred, religious and spiritual encounters] are distinguishable" (p. 141). Pilgrimage appears as a form of action that can proliferate beyond the limits of formal religiosity or formal atheism. Forr example, Alderman (2017) describes how tourists decide to visit Elvis' Graceland as a sort of pilgrimage. Reijinders (2016) similarly studies how James Bond film locations have become popular destinations pilgrims visit to relive some of the scenes and feel empowered and masculine through the experience.

Existentialism: A philosophy on being human

The introduction of existentialist philosophy as a theoretical lens helps us question whether the expansion of contemporary forms of pilgrimage may be conceptualised beyond the return of the religious (post-secular) or of novel forms of spirituality (New Age). It indicates that what religious, spiritual and non-religious, and non-spiritual perspectives have in common is a reflection on the meaning of life or a search for ontological rootedness. This is not born out of a declaration of belief, but through the experience of being present, acting or contemplating.

Existentialism refers to a philosophical movement that expands from early 19th century to the second half of 20th century and includes a varied spectrum of philosophers. As a research method, we could have opted to apply the ideas of one of these philosophers, such as Heidegger or Sartre, or other representing the common tenets of this school. Our decision to use existentialism as a starting point came from the recognition that the existentialist philosophers as a group were a precise example of an inclusive diversity. Therefore, it made more sense to adopt the latter strategy and focus on the common tenets of this group. For this task we rely on the works of Walter Kaufmann. He has contributed extensive scholarship on existentialism, but for the purpose of this paper we used his book "Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre" (Kaufmann, 1956), which includes a collection of his selected writings about existentialist thinkers and a philosophical introduction to the movement, and two series of academic lectures that he gave on existentialism.

Kaufman sees existentialism as "a label" recognising the great diversity that existed among these thinkers. Specifically relevant for this study, he emphasises their varied faith and non-religious standpoints. Among the existentialists we find devout Christians, impassioned anti-Christians, non-denominational proponents of a 'biblical religion', well known atheists and sceptics (1956, p. 37). Kaufman's collection of existentialist writings includes authors such as Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Camus, Kierkegaard, Sartre, Heidegger and Jaspers. These thinkers and philosophers are concerned with the following major questions:

What is it to be? What is human life about? Does human life have meaning? They are also highly critical of philosophical endeavours that seem detached from human experience. These thinkers insist on the relevance of ideas to life: "The existentialist has taken up the passionate concern with questions that arise from life, the moral pathos, and the firm belief that, to be serious, a philosophy has to be lived" (1956, p. 51). According to Kaufmann, such an experiential and phenomenological emphasis also makes their understanding of philosophy a movement diverting from positivism or the sciences towards literature, the arts and, most specifically, poetry.

Secondly, these philosophers are characterised by "perfervid individualism" (Kaufman, 1956, p. 11). This extreme subjectivism/individualism links to several existentialist themes such as the feeling of alienation, the preoccupation of human loneliness and solitude, the attempt to gain clarity about oneself whilst recognising the pervasiveness of self-deception and the absurdity of social roles and masks, a demand and longing for integrity, and an appreciation of freedom as a higher human value (Kaufman, 1956). Individualism rests in the understanding that we can never comprehend another person completely or get to know their consciousness. The other appears to us as mystery and therefore also as perpetually free: "my consciousness appears originally to the other as an absence. It is the object always present as the meaning of all my attitudes and all my conduct – and always absent, for it gives itself to the intuition of another as a perpetual question, still better, as a perpetual freedom" (Sartre in Kaufman, 1956, p. 259). Thirdly, existentialist thinkers recognise a crisis in traditional morality (i.e. of the kind inherited by family or religious tradition) while also challenging the optimistic belief that scientific reason could answer the question of how to live a good life. As a direct consequence of their belief in human freedom, all of these thinkers "contrast inauthentic life and authentic life" (1956, p. 50). Authenticity and integrity are possible when humans radically consider each own's possibilities. Authentic/inauthentic are not simple, opposed categories, but a spectrum of more or less authenticity.

Finally, existentialists are also interested in what Kaufman calls 'ultimate' or 'borderline' experiences. Classic examples are Kierkegaard's reflections on the biblical story of Abraham, who was commanded by God to kill his own son, Camus' focus on suicide, or Sartre's exposition of a man condemned to death in his short story "The Wall". Ultimate experiences like these relate to well-known existentialist themes such as despair, dread, guilt and anxiety. These experiences, many of them related to the contemplation (realisation) of mortality, are the best starting point for engaging in philosophical reflection, according to the existentialists. They are also a reminder of the relevance of the present and of life impulses when confronted with existentialist questions such as life meaning and life finality, like in the Nietzchean call to say yes to life or in Camus' happiness as being alive in the moment (Ronald, 2017).

A visual methodological approach to understanding experiences

Our understanding of this case relies on extensive project work conducted during 2017 and 2018. This included workshops, interviews with stakeholders and fieldwork as part of the Innocoast Project (2016-2019). While this project work provided us with a large dataset and a deep overall knowledge of Camøno, the core method used for this study is *examining pre-existing visual representations* (Pink, 2007) shared by pilgrims on the social media platform Instagram. For the analysis we combined two different strategies of coding – *thematic and metaphorical* (Hartel, 2017). This method was appropriate because tourists who traditionally visit the destination of Møn (i.e. Scandinavians and Germans) have a high levels of technological literacy and are used to producing and sharing their own images online.

The focus on user-generated visual data also allows for an emic and phenomenological approach to pilgrimage. In this way, it draws on an existentialist tradition which prioritises the study of the experience of 'what it is like' to be in this world. The pilgrims decide what to photograph and what to share without these data being mediated by the researchers' agenda, arguably constituting what Silverman suggests is a form of "naturally occurring data" (2011). However, this does not mean that online user-generated photos are a pure reflection of the walkers' subjectivity, devoid of any other form of structure or context. Social media data production and publication is mediated by the socio-economic, cultural- and technological-algorithmic contexts of the specific platforms, which enables and constrains who can participate in content production and how interaction and communication take place (Munar, 2013).

A number of scholars have emphasised the ways in which cultures of tourism photography and the visual products that emerge within tourist practices provide potentially unique sets of data (Cederholm, 2001; Marckwick, 2001; Gillespie, 2006, Rakić & Chambers, 2009). Visual studies in tourism have been extended to include digitally mediated images, turning the attention to an interest in how tourists use image sharing platforms such as Flickr, Tumblr or Instragram (e.g. Nixon, Popova & Önder, 2017). In line with a business-oriented heritage in tourism research, a number of research publications have been dedicated to exploring the marketing capacity of visual social media platforms (Lim, Chung, Weaver, 2012; Hays, Page, Buhalis 2012; Hudson & Thal 2013). Other studies have emphasised how visual methods and the analysis of visual production and performance might enable new understandings of tourist practices (e.g. Larsen, 2013; Larsen & Pedersen, 2011), and how the methodical appropriation of new technologies might change the ways in which visual methods are performed (Bødker, Browning & Meinhardt, 2014).

Instagram, launched in 2010, is the most popular photo sharing application/social media platform, which, at the moment of the data collection for this study, had 700 million users worldwide (Statista, 2018a). The majority of these users are under 24 years of age. Instagram has a strong focus on aesthetics and lifestyle, with 98% of all fashion and beauty brands and 95% of travel brands being present (Statista, 2018b). Variations in levels of e-literacy and the young age of Instagram users can be considered as limitations of our dataset. Photos and videos posted to Instagram can be categorised by hashtags and location can be added by geo-tagging. We used the hashtags #camønoen #camøno and the geo-tag "camønoen" to identify photos relating to the Camøno trail. We only had access to photos that were marked as 'public', and therefore our sample is not fully comprehensive of all the photos that may have been shared by Camøno pilgrims on Instagram. Furthermore, those that may have been hashtagged differently (e.g. #walkingmøn) or misspelled do not appear in our sample. The full set of photos resulted in a sample of 437. From these we separated those that were posted by organisations and by the coordinator of Camøno (i.e. Syska), and these 57 photos were only considered for the thematic analysis to allow for a comparison between how the experience was portrayed by the pilgrims (380 Instagram images) versus the organisers/suppliers.

The thematisation and classification of the visual data followed a detailed coding procedure using the software NVivo10. The codes were developed using two classification systems: thematic and metaphorical. The thematic coding considered what could be seen in the images. This analysis was the first to be conducted and it enabled us to get a descriptive account of the experience of walking the Camøno, as seen through the eyes of the pilgrims, and to attain detailed knowledge of the empirical material. The thematic analysis was followed by metaphorical coding, examining the images' ability to evoke abstract concepts in the viewer, similar to how the poetic imaginary evokes abstract ideas or concepts in the reader.

It should be noted that a metaphorical analysis is primarily aligned with a style of literary or poetic analysis (e.g. finding links between a specific poem and the more general metaphorical language of love used by a school of poetry, such as romanticism) rather than relying on a concept of stable meanings emerging from an analysis of research data. Identifying source domains in the photo collection and linking them to the target domains is a process which relies on a familiarity with existentialist philosophy and concepts, the case and the interpretation of the images by the researchers (see table 2). Metaphorical analysis of visual user-generated content is a novel methodology in tourism research and, as such, this study   links to the

Thematic	Metaphorical
Culture & heritage	Anxiety
Food & Beverage	Authenticity
Private	Choice
Restaurants	Dread
Human body	Freedom
Markers	Guilt
Bench/Pause	Integrity
Sign	Openness
Nature	Passing of time
Animals	Possibility
Coast/ cliffs	Presence and contemplation
Fire	Human connection
Horizon	Sensing
Paths	Self-reflection
Other	Solitude
No people	
Other forms of mobility	
Urban spaces	
Traditional houses	
Other	
Walking	
Culture & heritage	
Food & Beverage	
Private	
Restaurants	

growing field of the so-called digital humanities, examining the possibilities as well as the limitations of such a methodological approach when trying to understand the tourist experience.

The metaphorical coding was developed from pre-determined themes and sub-themes from the literature and in line with the aim to examine the possible relationship between existentialist philosophical themes and the Camøno experience. Following the visual research method of Hartel (2017), the researchers identified preliminary metaphoric target domains. A target domain refers to ideas that images symbolise or evoke, and in our case it was the ideas of existentialist philosophy that these photos could symbolise or evoke. Based on the analysis of images, the second step consisted of grouping the photos into source domains (themes and content related to the experience) presented as a collage of several images that form a bridge or connect to the target domain. For example, 'contemplation' can be said to be a *target domain*, and a group of photos of horizon landscapes is a *source domain*.

Table 1. Thematic and metaphorical coding.

To increase the robustness of the interpretation, we made several iterative rounds among the researchers and one with the stakeholders of Camøno (see table 2). A first, deductive round relied on (1) the thematic analysis on the literature of touristic pilgrimage and the information received through the workshops with stakeholders of Camøno and the fieldwork experience, and (2) for the metaphorical analysis on the literature of existentialist philosophy, as explained in the previous section. Once we had done the first coding of all images, we used an inductive approach to identify themes that emerged from the dataset to complete the categorisation. The coding procedure was made separately by two of the authors and then compared and discussed among them. Finally, the results of the thematic and metaphorical analyses were presented and discussed with the stakeholders of Camøno during a workshop.

Table 2. Methodological process, activities and participants

Summer 2017 – Spring 2019	Activities in chronological order	Participants
1st Workshop	Study idea generation Gathering of knowledge on the case	Camøno organizers/stakeholders and researchers
2. Fieldwork	Interviews and participant observation	Camøno organizers/stakeholders, pilgrims and researchers
3. Data collection	Creation of data base of Instagram photos	Researchers
4. Coding development	Development of thematic and metaphorical classifications	Researchers
5. Thematic coding classification and analysis of data (1st round)	Coding of photos according to theme. Synthesis and analysis of thematic coded data by individual researchers	Researchers

6. Thematic analysis of data (2nd round)	Comparative analysis of data among researchers and improvement of first coding classification.	Researchers
7. Metaphorical coding classification and analysis of data (1st round)	Coding of photos according to metaphor. Synthesis and analysis of metaphorical coded data by individual researchers	Researchers
6. Metaphorical analysis of data (2nd round)	Comparative analysis of data among researchers and improvement of first coding classification. Final coding of metaphorical analysis.	Researchers
2nd workshop	Presentation and collective discussion of the analysis and insights for development of Camøno	Camøno organizers/stakeholders and researchers
Article writing	Final revision	Researchers

Ethical considerations and presentation of images.

There are no hard and fast rules for maintaining good research ethics in a study that uses images from social media platforms (Taylor & Pagliari, 2018). Ethical concerns in social media research remain a matter of judgment rather than being subject to strict rules or guidelines. An exception could be the use of social media data for research efforts in areas that are deemed 'sensitive' (e.g. medical research) and deserving of strict principles of anonymity and a transparent research approaches such as the Belmont principles for medical research (1979). As profiles and images on Instagram are easy to mark as private (thus restricting the possibility of 'following' a profile to the discretion of the account holder), we assume that posters who post publicly have no concerns about the availability of their images (Franzke, Bechmann, Zimmer, Ess, and the Association of Internet Researchers, 2020). We see that our study entails no ethical 'risks' for the account holders, and since we have not obtained informed consent from the posters, we found that the blurring/anonymisation of account details as well as recognisable facial features, dates of posting, and so on, are a sufficient means of mitigating risk.

A description of Camøno through images

The island of Møn (Figure 1) is known for its natural beauty, highlighted by the chalk cliffs of Møns Klint on the east coast, as well as for its medieval heritage and well-preserved townscapes. Like most Scandinavian rural communities, Møn has suffered from a declining economy, lost employment opportunities and a stagnating population. However, the island has also managed to attract young hippies, neo bohemians and new affluent migrants (e.g. hobby farmers, empty nesters and urban retirees), who contribute to a demographic composition that is more diverse than other rural areas (Lorentzen, Larsen, & Schrøder, 2015, cited in Gyimóthy & Meged, 2018). Within this migrant community, two young female lifestyle entrepreneurs conceived the idea of creating the 175 km long walking trail circumventing the islands of Møn, Nyord and Bogø. (Figure 1). It became first and foremost a community building project, where human as well as physical local resources were mobilised and valorised drawing on a communitarian ideology (Gyimóthy & Meged, 2018).

Figure 1. Island of Møn in Denmark. Source: Los688, Denmark location map.svg, CC BY 3.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=8229134. and The Camønø Trail with routes and Camønø Stops (Courtesy of Møn Museum).

The project became funded by Realdania Credit Fund programme, Places Matter, and with Møn Museum as the project owner. The trail was successful from its opening day, and 9000 hikers or pilgrims walked the trail during the first season in 2016. As of today (February 2020) the number of visits has levelled out to around 15,000 a year. This new trail could have been seized as an opportunity to revive a languishing Danish state church, but the project manager Syska explains that the churches on Møn were reluctant to embrace the Camøno project. The main church in Stege (the largest village) performed a service at the opening of the Camøno in 2016, and a part-time Tourism and Pilgrim Vicar was later employed to organise religious activities and pilgrimages on the Camøno trail. However, the initiative has had limited outreach. In 2018 a monthly one-day pilgrimage walk and pilgrimage service was offered from May to September (Stege-Vordingborg Provsti, 2020), and with a total of five isolated one-day events it indicates that most of the pilgrims are not met by the local church.

Thematic analysis

Our thematic analysis reveals that the protagonist of this experience is nature (266 photos) and, more specifically, a pristine, immense nature without people (219 photos). Most photos depict open spaces. The horizon is a dominant theme (105 photos). Other images reflect the experience of walking together. Only a few of the walkers are asked to look back at the camera and they are not posing for the photographer. The category of urban spaces has very few photos; walkers do not focus or share urban environments and there is only one photo of a church in the whole sample. This points to a kind of pilgrimage which is far from being religious or close to any form of religious symbolism. Instead, they post close-up photos of pretty traditional houses, doors or windows with flowers. The photos show an appreciation of the picturesque and motifs that can be found in traditional small villages across Denmark.

The experience of shelter and resting appears in its utmost simplicity and solitude. Most photos of this category show a simple tent or shelters situated in a peaceful, relaxing setting.

The photos that represent social connection are divided between those showing couples (half of this category) and those showing groups. The social interaction shown as taking place seems to primarily happen among the pilgrims themselves. There is only a single photo in the whole sample that shows interaction with a local person (a pilgrim asking for directions). The sample includes 90 photographs depicting the human body; relaxed portraits of people sitting, eating or walking naturally. People are casually dressed and there are no photos of people partying together. There are no portraits of sport enthusiasts or people with disabilities. The photos of human bodies are dominated by parts of the body, faces or hands or feet, with almost no posing. Although foodinstagraming is a major feature of Instagram cultures, food and beverage do not appear to be at the core of the Camøno experience. The tourists do not seem to spend time at local restaurants (only seven photos). The majority of the photos are about eating outdoors in close contact with nature (44 photos). The images portray basic foods, like strawberries, a cup of coffee or a cup of noodles; nothing fancy or styled.

The 57 photos provided by stakeholders of Camøno differ greatly from the pilgrims'. This sub-sample is dominated by products, markers and a few groups of people, whereas in the pilgrims' photos specific brand elements of the Camøno route (the Camøno sign and the designed benches) are nearly absent. The stakeholders' photos lack the feeling of solitude and minimalism that dominates the pilgrims visual experience. This dissonance could point to two possible explanations: that the stakeholders close a gap of information by providing visuals with a different aim, or that the understanding of what this experience is about differs greatly between the image projected by those who manage the Camøno (a commercial business opportunity) and those who walk it.

After completing the thematic analysis, and with a deeper knowledge of what the sample contained, we began the metaphorical analysis. This consisted of a mirroring exercise, looking at each photograph and reflecting on what the theme, composition and atmosphere conveyed to the viewer and how, in its totality, the image could be seen as related or non-related to the existentialist themes we had identified previously. In short, what we found was that there was an important resonance or relatedness and that the sample could be seen as conveying and existentialist feeling.

Existential walking

The solitude and the self. This group of photos invite the viewer to contemplate man alone in nature. They are frames of large natural landscapes where there is no one, nor any sign of habitation, beyond the imagination of the pilgrim/photographer. Many consist of paths without walkers of which one cannot see the beginning or the end; others are dramatic cliffs standing as thresholds to the liquid infinity of the sea (see figure 1). When someone else appears in the photos they are always portrayed far away in the distance, as a shadow of someone who we are not able to identify; contours of individuals walking, resting and contemplating in solitude. The colour palette of these photos, with their softness and nuances, far away from the excitingly bright and monolithic colour of signs, shops, houses or cars, evokes a meditative state. There is no recollection of traditionally sacred or religious heritage.
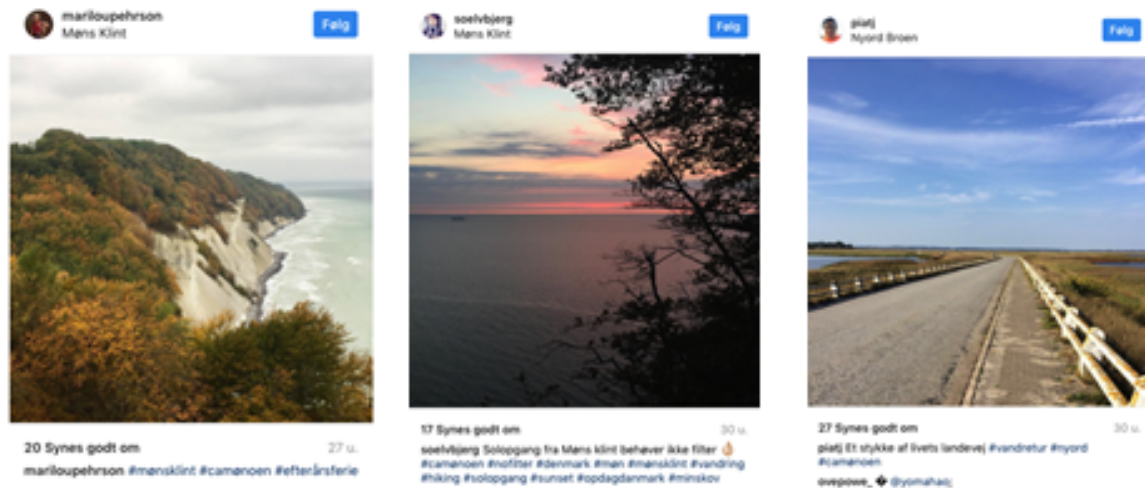
Figure 2.

At times, the evocation of solitude and the self appears as a sense of wonder and *contemplation* in front of an emotional and grandiose universe. In these cases, existence is not portrayed as friendly or calm, but as powerful with dramatic skies (see Figure 2).
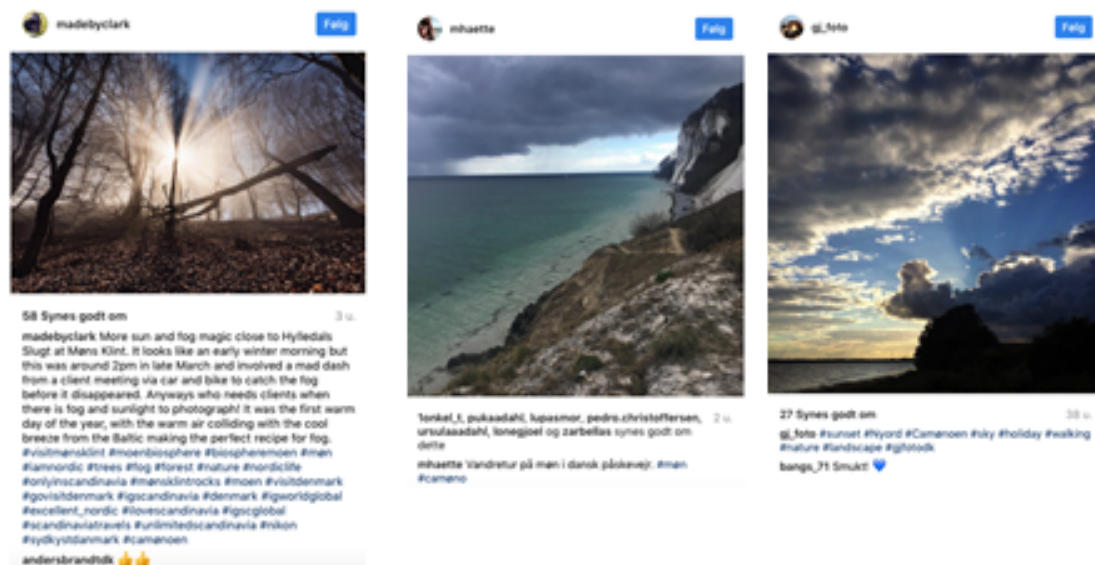

Figure 3.

While celebrating the beauty of nature these photos remind us of our existential loneliness. With their contemplation of the immensity of nature and lack of social activity, they suggest some of the most important existentialist questions: Who are you when placed all alone in the world? Who are you when there is no need to play a role or wear a mask? Camøno's path is a specific form of technology that provides legitimate (safe?) spaces and opportunities for ontological introspection and reflection about 'being alone in the world' and 'being one's self'. Here, technology can be understood as Heidegeer did: "for the Greeks, techne meant a revelation of something, an uncovering or a bringing-forth" (Heidegger, 1977). (cited in

Pistone, p. 35). The path is a doorway that reveals individualisation and solitude; an invitation to gain clarity about oneself without any place to hide from our self-deception.

Presence as contemplation: The feeling of being. The content of these photos consists of close-ups of natural elements or simple food (e.g. butterflies, berries, mushrooms) (see figures 3 and 4), and the human connection expressed through materialities and body parts (see figure 5). This collection of images projects a more joyful mood than other contemplative photos (e.g. horizons or cliffs). They show an attention to detail, the proximity of nature to the body, and natural elements such as fire or stones. It illustrates feeling alive in the moment, being able to notice the small things around us, and opening to the senses. The feeling of being alive, of sensing existence in the here and now is a crucial aspect of existentialist philosophy. Many of these authors refer to critical moments or the contemplation of death as the moments in life that can provide an awakening, show us the importance and also the absurdity of our lives.
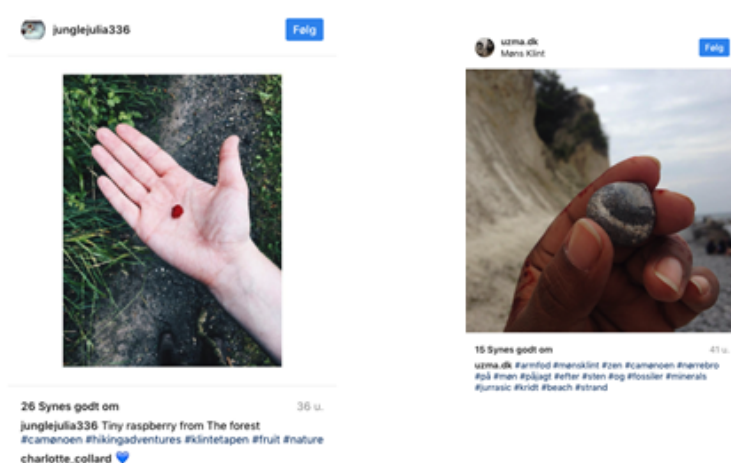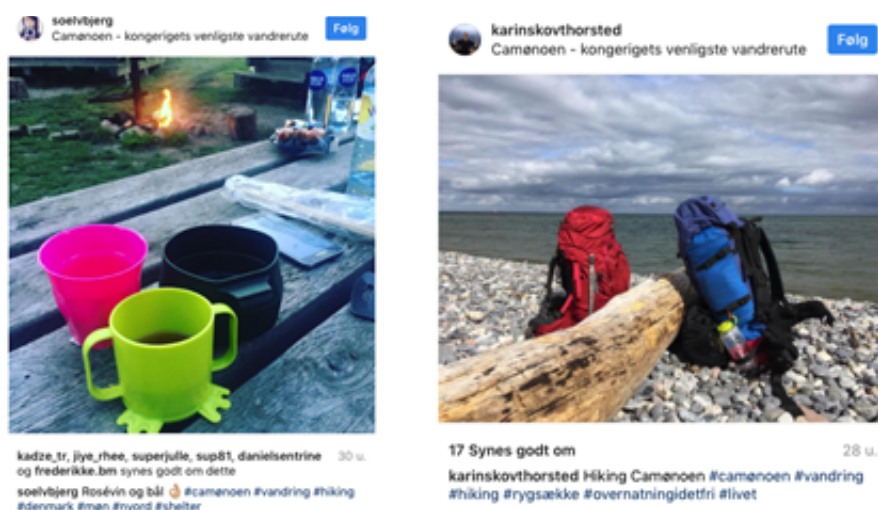

Figure 4.

Figure 5.

Pilgrimage provides a bracketing of everyday busyness and a space to engage with other questions. These groups of photos are an invitation to 'get out' of our heads and engage in the deep contemplation and mystery of the simple elements around us. They exemplify intentionality, i.e. the reflective act of paying attention as a form of consciousness and of

being in the world. They are an open invitation to alertness, sensing and appreciating the beauty of what is familiar or even insignificant, for example how a group of cups or sleeping bags placed closely together can transmit a sense of connection and sensuality. They remind us that subjective attention can create extraordinary experiences from the insignificant and ordinary. Existentialist philosophy sees how "human consciousness is not the passive recognition of material phenomena that are simply there, 'given' but a process of actively constituting or 'intending' those phenomena" (Homer, 2005, p. 19). These photographs constitute materialities through the act of attention as a form of love.
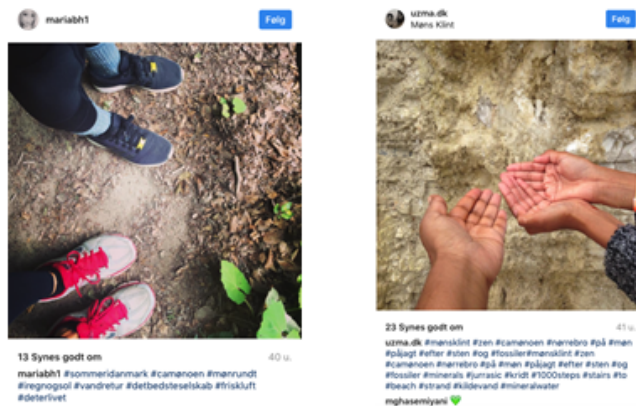

Figure 6.

Possibility as openness and freedom. Existentialist philosophy sees the human as a being who has a possibility to be free; a being not only guided by instinct or drive, who can reflect on her own existence. This collection of images, with their focus on the individual facing an open endless horizon, reminds us of the existentialist belief in the radical freedom of humanity. The collection also includes collages of colourful experiences that invite us to consider different moments and possibilities of existence; an invitation to reflect on how our perception of the other, the pilgrim, changes when portrayed in different spaces and situations. The freedom of being on one's own, living for oneself, being able to question norms and ways of being in the world appears not only to be a blessing for our species, but also a major burden and something that most may try to avoid. Sartre expresses this tension brilliantly and polemically in his statement "men are condemned to be free".
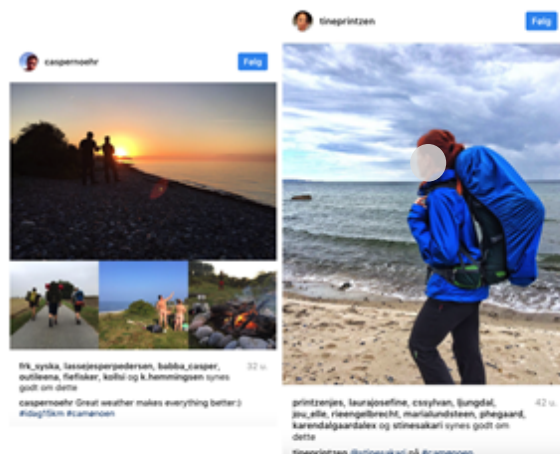

Figure 7.

Passing of time. While representations of historical buildings or sites are mostly absent, the many sunsets emerge as a powerful metaphor for the passing of time. Existentialism is a philosophy that puts the consciousness of time and the shortness of life at the centre. Many of these authors refer to critical moments or the contemplation of death, as those moments in life that can provide an awakening, show us the importance and also the absurdity of our lives. The sunset, the end of the day, is a motif similar to the image of a burning candle. It acts as an announcement of the end and a reminder of the shortness of life. These sunset images, a common theme in the sample, further strengthen the idea of Camøno as a highly contemplative and introspective experience.
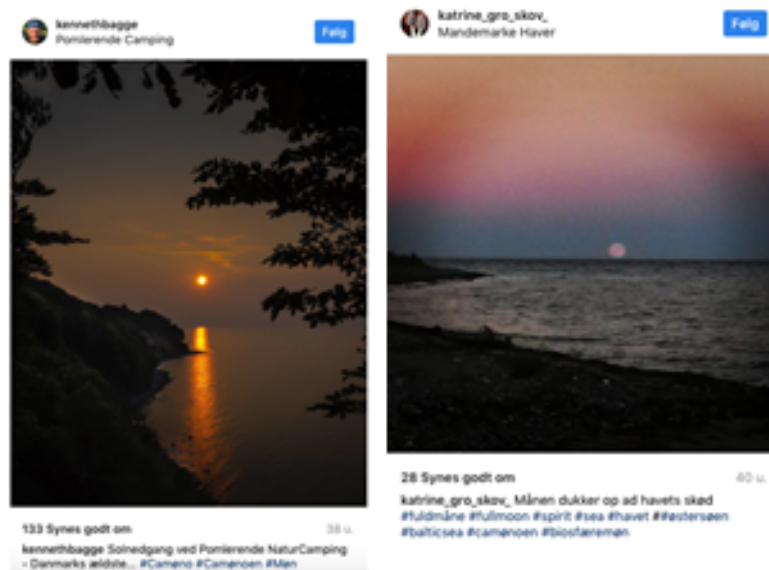

Figure 8.

Authenticity and Integrity. Some of the most famous Instagram users are lifestyle gurus, influencers or celebrities who use their fame to promote the latest fashion or specific brands, generating substantial income from social media advertising (e.g. Ronaldo, Kim Kardashian, Kylie Jenner or Ariana Grande (Statista, 2020)). By contrast, the pilgrims of Camøno portray a form of existential authenticity and a form of authenticity expressed as non-commercialised and non-'touristified' experiences. We can see this in the absence of brands or fashion items, no use of make-up and no posing or showing off 'perfect bodies'. The images are representations of a minimalistic lifestyle, an invitation to go back to basics, and a celebration of bodies that does not aim at aesthetic perfection but conveys a sense of reality, spontaneity and inclusion.

Authenticity is a theme that can be connected not only to this part of the sample but to the overall collection of images of Camøno. The majority of images evoke existential authenticity understood as the subjective perception of the experience, combined with a strong sense of place that links to the idea of authenticity as presented by Belhassen et al (2008). However, while in this latest study the experience of authenticity was grounded in the perception of a place as sacred space and linked to a form of theopolitical ideology, here we encounter basic nature and simple living as the atmospheric spatial qualities that provide the necessary spatial context for this experience to be perceived as authentic. Nilsson and

Mekonnen's studies also recognise the importance of existential authenticity and mention that the pilgrims seem to appropriate El Camino and its religious heritage to "their own highly personal and existential ends" (Nilsson & Tesfahuney, 2018, p. 170). However in our case, there is no past religious heritage to be 'appropriated'.
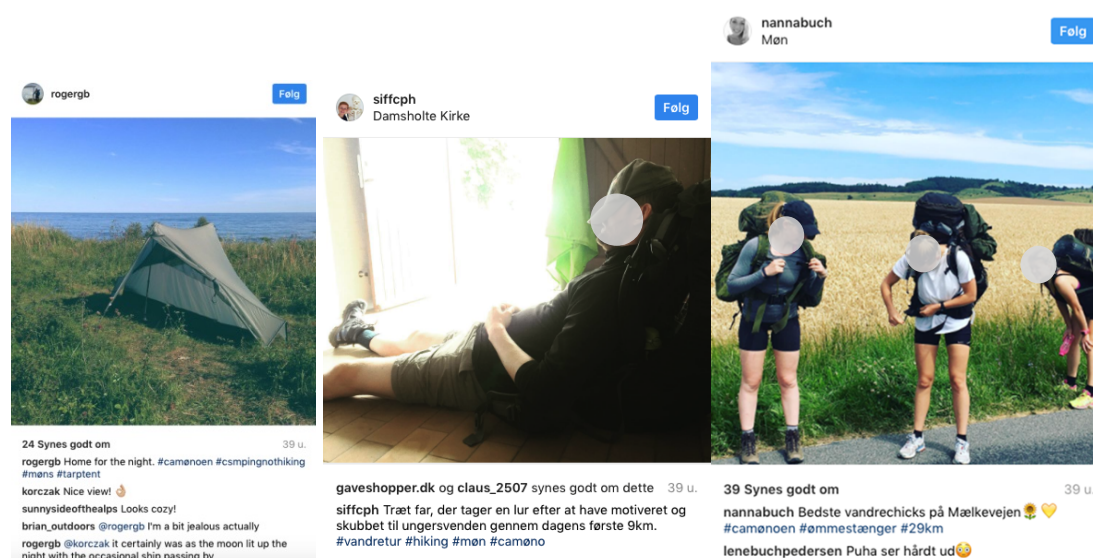

Figure 9.

Summing up. According to these images the pilgrim can be seen as a spiritual individual in movement and the pilgrim route as a metaphor for the 'fluidity of personal spiritual routes' – a biographical path full of meaning (Hervieu-Léger, 1999, p. 98, cited in Vilaça, 2010, p. 140). Seen from this perspective, the metaphor of pilgrimage 'à la carte' may not be the best one after all. The reality is not that of an individual pilgrim selecting one category clearly delimited from the others, such as the ordering of different items from a menu. Instead, and in accordance with the authors of post-modern or late-modern pilgrimage, Camøno is closer to a biogratised (Caton, 2016) spirituality; a collage of diverse meanings that may get integrated in a sense of self.

A range of classic existentialist themes did not dominate in our sample, such as guilt, doubt, dread, anxiety or religiosity. While we could not make metaphorical connections to these existentialist questions, the majority of the photos have an intense mood of self-reflection and solitude, which may be states that allow for introspection of the kind that doubt can provoke. The common presence of solitude and openness in the images of the pilgrims makes us question the idea that pilgrimage may provide a sense of ontological security (as it appears in the theory of the post-secular). Instead, walking in solitude may prompt an inquiry about the meaning of our being and our action in the world. As existentialists note, whenever we open up to existentialist questioning, it is uncertain that the outcome would be a sense of solace or meaning, as it could also result in feelings of anxiety or meaninglessness.

CONCLUSIONS

We began this study asking ourselves if it was possible to create a pilgrim route that was for everybody, and if the experience of Camøno would turn out to be a form of invented post-pilgrimage. After many hours of research and analysis, what we have learned from the images shared by the pilgrims is that the answer is no. Camøno is not an experience that includes all and everything. For example, it does not incorporate traditional religiosity as one

of its core aspects, and its minimalism and solitude make us question the levels of possible commercialisation of this trail. Surprisingly, despite its novelty and the lack of heritage of the route, the images describe a similar and coherent experience across the sample. This invented pilgrimage does not correspond to an idea of the post-tourism as a detached or ironic perception of the touristic experience. Our analysis shows that this form of tourism development contributes to a form of spiritual tourism that moves away from the hyper real and into the appreciation of basic materialities and simple living. There is no detachment, irony or sarcasm in these images. Instead, the pilgrims of Camøno share with the world a visual experience that has a strong existentialist meaning.

These images are an example of beautiful contemporary spirituality, showing how the sacredness of the space and action of walking the Camøno does not need to reside in a specific spiritual or religious heritage, but is born out of the calming environment that allows room for thought and attention to the mystery that resides in the most simple things, such as a stone, and sense of wonder and humbleness that appears thanks to the contemplation of immensity. They are a reminder of the power of intentionality and of 'being in the world'. Nature seems to completely replace the church as a space, place and intermediary in redeeming the experience of walking the Camøno trail. With its focus on the natural environment, imagination, collaborative entrepreneurship and inclusion, Camøno is an experiment that invites us to expand our ways of understanding tourism and to reconsider the possibilities of innovation in tourism regional development beyond a focus on heritage or conservation.

Our findings link to the research of Belhassen et al. (2008), which suggests that subjective understandings of the experience are dependent on the atmospheric nature of the space in which the experience takes place. However, our study also shows that sacred space does not need to be linked to a theological tradition or ideology. The revolutionary aspect of Camøno is that the sacred flows into the most mundane and simple spaces (a path, a coastline or a tree) and it is encountered in the most ordinary aspects of human life (shelter, bread and a cup of coffee). If the pilgrim experience of Camøno is a theoplacity, then it is in a form that moves away from organised religion and closer to animism, mysticism or other similar spiritualties that are able to find God(s) in multiple natural elements and spaces. This case also resonates with Pernecky's invitation to challenge our categorisations of spirituality in tourism. And it questions whether the experience of Camøno can at all be considered as "the return of religious in contemporary world" as theorised by the post-secular thesis. The post-secular thesis of pilgrimage, while being relevant in many other pilgrimage experiences (Nilsson & Tesfahuney, 2017) by putting an emphasis on the return to religiosity. seems to bypass what we see as the enhancement of the existential where religiosity is an element, but by far the most important one. For example, if the pilgrimage does not include traditional religious signs and sites, it is possible to question if we should call the tourists of Camøno pilgrims or walkers/hikers, or simply tourists. But in which categories are we to place the spiritual character of a journey? To our surprise the images portraying this experience clearly evoke meditative and spiritual states of mind.

This study is therefore also an invitation to recognise the limitation of our academic desire to categorise everything. As expressed so beautifully by Maria Popova (2019), categories fail us when we aim to capture human experience: "language cups only with loose fingers what it is trying to contain and classify as nuance and complexity drip past the words. We contain in order to control, and whenever we control, we relinquish the beautiful, terrifying mystery of being." It is hopeful that tourism can provide spaces and environments that allow us to engage with the questions that the existentialist philosophers dealt with: What is it to be? What is the meaning of our human life? Using a philosophical lens and engaging with the visual artistic and mundane production of images of the pilgrims has help us to

capture part of what cannot be categorised, this 'mystery of being'. Nature, the act of walking and being on a journey, and the simplicity of this experience seem to be more than enough to provide the necessary background for an existential, spiritual or religious experience.

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