

## UNESCO World Heritage Santiago de Compostela in Spain



*Images: Central dome in St Jacobs cathedral and map over city of Santiago de Compostela (city map from the conference NEARCHing factory, -new ways for archaeology 30th of January- 2d of February 2017)*

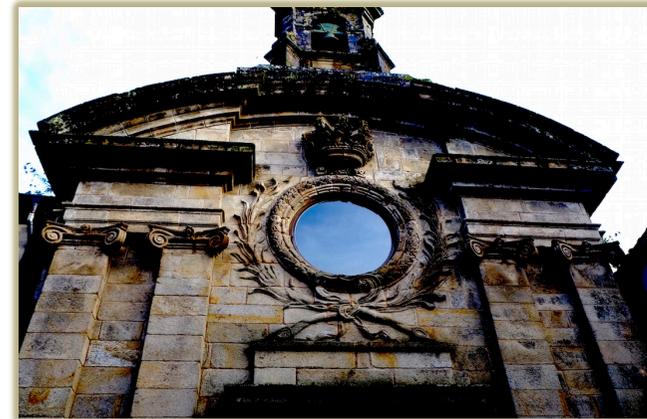
Santiago de Compostela is in many ways an unusual city. The first thing I notice is that the town retained its premedieval architecture with its squares and streets. The city is also an important religious site for many Catholics, Protestants and contemporary hikers and spiritual seekers. Santiago is well known as the final destination of the 'El Camino' pilgrimage route, running through the whole of Spain, with many walking trails that branch out to other countries in Europe. Spiritual seekers have made their journeys to this site since the 1100's, when it was said to have found St. James' relics, which was the beginning for the first construction work of the cathedral and the city center.

The city center is small by today's standards, and you can see the border between the rural and the urban borders in the horizon. This distant panorama where city and country meet gives an even stronger feeling of being on a journey back in history, as you spend moments here. Santiago de Compostela maintained a World Heritage Site notice in 1994. As far as I could see there was one single information board in the entire city giving information that the town belongs to the UNESCO World Heritage sites. And during one week I heard not a single person from the region mentioning the site's value in relation to UNESCO. Perhaps it is that

Santiago de Compostela long had a natural identity and a status by being a place of pilgrimage, and therefore do not need UNESCO to highlight its importance as a world heritage site? But maybe the situation was different in the 90s and maybe the city had not been allowed to retain its shine and original environment without being a World Heritage Site?

But now 2017 I can't stop asking questions of what the use of a World Heritage does for this city? What can it mean to live here, I wonder and begin to wander in the city for possible answers.

I follow the course as pilgrim would use as entering into the city to reach its goal - St. Jacob's Cathedral and the majestic Plaza Do Obradorio. I make a detour from Rua San Pedro, and only a few steps away, a crossroads of the well-kept street Rua San Pedro beats a poverty against me. I notice how someone finds discarded vegetables in a dustbin, how the person hastily and embarrassed hides the food inside his jacket and disappears into his gate where he most probably lives. Along an empty deserted street I hear arguments and screams from the apartments in the houses I pass, someone suddenly opens a window shutter made out of heavy wood just in front of me. A woman with a pasty face and long gone happiness in her gaze stare right at me. When I pass her in the narrow street, I feel the smell of alcohol from her body and inside the apartment I hear some children cry.



*Liberdade !! which means freedom translated to english The text written on the walls has been painted over with white paint, but the letters shines through. Across the street, just a few meters from the wall a grand frontage associated church.*

As I look closer on the walls of many houses and yards I find many scrawled slogans. Words that might have had a short life span because it also seems to be of great importance to clear the protesters away. However someone did not cover the white layer of paint enough to hide what originally was written. If anyone bothers to look you find many many protests around the city. The contrast between these traces of anger and the historically beautiful buildings runned by the heavy prestigious institutions tells different

stories of Santiago de Compostela, - on these walls there is a clear dissatisfaction and maybe this scenery is part of the economic crisis that hit the country starting in 2009. Many say that the crisis is still going on – that it is not over now it is 2017. Eight years have passed - how long to wait for something runs out! When does a state of crisis turn in to normality? Are these walls further proof that we actually find ourselves in what Donna Haraway<sup>1</sup> calls Chtulucene? Chtulu comes from the story of a terrifying monster (named Chtulu) written by author H. P. Lovecraft. The monster is a cross between a dragon, an octopus and a man, and in the story events suggests that the monster gradually is taking over all power on planet earth. Donna Haraway is interested in what happens with humans when something we have no control over (as a monster, a crisis or an undesirable future) has taken over what we own and have? What happens when we have to endure? Or as Haraway calls "staying with the trouble (= Chtulucene)? There are thousands and thousands of evidence of people who overcome the worst of the conditions of life, but what has been obvious long, communicated again and again by scientists, educators, politicians, activists, etc.



*Images: Anarchy and cold beer, a text written on a house wall, a block away from St. Jacob's Cathedral with its mighty tower here in the picture.*

- All human conditions have changed. The message is clear - there are few who from now on will fail to live with the consequences of the changes civilization left behind in the form of environmental degradation, economic imbalance and oppression against people and living beings on this planet Earth. So to actively preserve various sites for a future<sup>2</sup> may seem more relevant than ever. But the idea of preserving the sites comes from a mindset dominated by both colonial and modernist constructions of thought and values that belong to such a thought structure. For example how does the decolonialisation<sup>3</sup> affected UNESCO's approach to the

countries that manage their heritage? From a perspective where Chutulucene and UNESCO World Heritage Santiago de Compostela seems to rule I report photos and raise questions designed for further investigation with scientific art studies on the phenomena World Heritages.



*Another grand facade at the Plaza do Sto. Augustino. Almost opposite of the open space outside can be read on the painted walls of the houses: Machete ao machote, translates to english; machete against the giant macho.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Notes: Donna Haraway (born 1944) is an American science theorist / historian and feminist.

<sup>2</sup> The phenomenon of preserving monuments and sites began between the first and second world war and was taken over by UNESCO in 1945, to be entered as a UN convention in 1974

<sup>3</sup> 1974 Decolonization is a process that is now under way in different places in the world. Indigenous tribes all over the world plays an important part in this process.