



TOURISM AND SPIRITUALITY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Gregory B. Willson

Edith Cowan University, Western Australia

Alison J. McIntosh

University of Waikato, New Zealand

Anne. L. Zahra

University of Waikato, New Zealand

Abstract: Using phenomenological analysis, this paper examines the concept of ‘spirituality’ in the lived travel experience of an individual tourist. The paper contributes a phenomenological snippet of the tourist’s ‘portrait’ (the individual’s rich story, much like a portrait painting) to reveal the spiritual meaning Amber reportedly gained from and imbued onto her travel experiences with the tour operator, Hands up Holidays. The paper argues that when discussing the ‘spiritual’ dimension of tourism, one potential avenue is to seek to understand how people seek meaning and life purpose themselves, their quest for meaning, and experiences of transcendence and connectedness as subjectively lived through their travel. The paper concludes that the phenomenological view may be a useful frame through which to further examine the personal meaning of travel as lived by people, both in religious and non-religious contexts, but contextualised within the wider meaning of their lives. **Keywords:** spirituality, tourist experience, phenomenology, portraits. © 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

Although much scholarly attention has been paid to the relationship between tourism and religion, particularly in the context of pilgrimage and religious tourism, it is argued that the broader spiritual dimension of tourism remains under-researched (Sharpley, *in press*; Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005; Timothy & Conover, 2006). Despite Cohen’s (1979) pioneering work which discussed that every human being is spiritual and forms intangible spiritual connections with multiple areas, people and contexts, few attempts have been made to empirically explore the

Gregory Willson is a Lecturer, School of Marketing, Tourism and Leisure, Faculty of Business and Law, Edith Cowan University, Western Australia (Tel.: +61 863042558; fax: +61 863045840. Email g.willson@ecu.edu.au). His research interests include spirituality, the potential of travel to create peace, heritage tourism and tourists’ experiences. Alison McIntosh’s research interests focus on critical perspectives of tourism and hospitality, particularly as they relate to tourists’ experiences of heritage, host culture, wellness and spirituality. Anne Zahra’s research interests include cultural tourism, tourist behaviour, tourism policy and planning.

extent to which, or how, tourism may endow individuals with spiritual experiences, or how tourism experiences are imbued with spiritual meaning by individuals. Previous studies have described how the tourist experience has led to change (Noy, 2004), self-transformation (Voigt, Brown, & Howat, 2011; Wearing, 2001), cathartic experiences (Zahra & McIntosh, 2007), discovering dimensions of one's identity (Desforges, 2000; Palmer, 2004) and the inter-relation between everyday life and the tourist experience (Uriely, 2005), all impacting on the wider context of the tourist's life, but not through the lens of spirituality. It is argued that the exploration of 'spirituality' has traditionally been neglected within disciplines adhering to a dominant positivistic paradigm, particularly because it is a concept that is difficult to define and hotly debated (Caldwell, 1982; Masters, 1993; Stockman, 1983). However, it may offer an important insight into the subjective way in which individuals derive meaning from the things they do. As such, in line with the personal humanistic research agenda that has now gained prominence in critical tourism research (Ateljevic, Morgan, & Pritchard, 2007; Belhassen & Caton, 2011; Tribe, 2005; Tribe & Airey, 2007; Wilson & Harris, 2006), this paper aims to examine the concept of spirituality in the lived travel experience of an individual.

Conceptually, there is common agreement that religion and spirituality are closely related (Marra, 2000; Preston, 1992). As a result, many scholars have used the terms synonymously (Benner, 1989; Elias, 1991; Marra, 2000; Tart, 1983; Vaughan, 1991). Due to the arguably Judeo-Christian origins of spirituality, Dyson, Cobb, and Forman (1997) argue that it is probably impossible to wholly separate religion from spirituality. Indeed, Hill et al. (2000, p. 72) claim that by treating spirituality and religion as different, researchers can "close the door to future opportunities to explore the similarities and differences between the two concepts". Hill et al. (2000) also suggest that failing to recognise the concepts as interrelated is failing to recognise that many people classify themselves as both religious and spiritual. Burack (1999, p.280) claims that factors such as increased secularisation in the Western world have meant that, in recent times, "spirituality has grown markedly beyond its anchoring in religious traditions". Indeed, this is an argument premised within this paper and one which is similarly claimed by other tourism scholars (e.g. Olsen & Timothy, 2006; Sharpley, *in press*). Timothy and Conover (2006, p. 270), for example, argue that "even non-believers or atheists can experience something outside themselves that whispers acknowledgment of something beyond". However, most tourism scholars have discussed spirituality either from a religious perspective (Chesworth, 2006; Jackowski, 1987; Mansfeld & McIntosh, 2007), or have discussed it in the context of particular destination experiences, including yoga, wellness or wilderness experiences (e.g. Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999; Lehto, Brown, Chen, & Morrison, 2006). It is intended here to acknowledge both the overlap and differences between the concepts of religion and spirituality by drawing on a

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