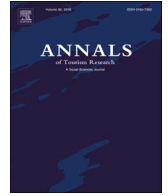


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The complexities of religious tourism motivations: Sacred places, vows and visions



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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to understand the complexity of travel motivations to sacred places. Using ethnographic techniques within the Greek Orthodox context, we argue that while motivations are institutionally constructed, they are fragile, dynamic and progressive; being embedded within everyday performances of religion. This calls into question the fixed centeredness and predetermined sacredness of religious sites. Travel motivations become directly influenced by believers' intimate and emergent performances not only of places but also of religion itself; the meaning of places being based on lived experiences of doing religion and interacting with the sacred, as exemplified in vows and visions. Such understandings are crucial in predicting the effects of failing pilgrimages and the processes of authentication of places, which can help explain visitation patterns.

Introduction

Evidence of the key role religion plays in people's lives is found not only in everyday practices such as eating, drinking and clothing (Bailey & Sood, 1993; Hunt, 2013), but also in tourist practices, including destination choice and motivations (Collins-Kreiner & Kliot, 2000; Vukonic, 1996). While a number of well-established theories such as Maslow (1970) hierarchy of needs and push/pull factors (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977), are applied widely in the tourism field (Baloglu & Uysal, 1996; Bashar & Ahmad, 2010; Crompton & McKay, 1997; Kim, Lee, & Klenosky, 2003; Pearce, 1993), travel motivations to sacred sites appear to be much more complex, entailing drives perplexed within power relations, inner desires and the supernatural experienced in religious performances. Religious oriented travelling therefore appears to be associated with motives related to constructive powers (i.e. religious authorities) (Bandyopadhyaya, Morais, & Chick, 2008; Selwyn, 1996) and what Cohen and Cohen (2012, p.1299) call "cool authentication"; people visiting sites that have been declared by religious authorities to be of importance and linked to the sacred. Often imbued with fear, a set of religious doctrines that are considered the ultimate knowledge encourage their adherents to travel to religious sites that are perceived to be the 'Centre of the World' (Eliade, 1969; Singh, 2006). Resting upon dogmas, such as the world being sacred or evil and persons being religious or sinful (Silberman, 2005), Christianity, for example, has exercised considerable power over people through its doctrine of rewarding virtuous people for their good acts while punishing sinners for their unorthodox/bad acts (Kushner, 1989). Belief in religion is, therefore, frequently accepted because of the end to which it is directed (hell, for example, in the case of a sin) and because of its link to political powers, which also constructs and determines travel motivations. The hajj to Makkah is, for instance, part of the five pillars of Islam co-constructed by the religious authorities and the state (Jafari & Scott,

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Nevertheless, in addressing the complexities of religious tourism motivations, research has found that people visiting religious sites are not driven exclusively by external factors, such as religious institutions and their scripts, which merely fall into [Dann \(1977\)](#) category of pull factors, but also by push factors that may entail also non-religious motives. In his seminal work on religious motivations, [Allport \(1966\)](#) identified two main types of persons. Firstly, the extrinsically motivated person who *uses* religion, religion playing only an instrumental role and serving assorted forms of self-interest, such as satisfying one's social life ([Durkheim, 1964](#)) or demanding personality support or help in crisis ([Pargament, Magyar-Russel, & Murray-Swank, 2005](#)). Secondly, the intrinsically motivated who *lives* religion, which floods their whole life with motivation and meaning. While this research has influenced scholars looking at religious motivations ([Hoge, 1972](#); [Hunt & King, 1971](#); [Liu & Koenig, 2013](#); [Ryan, Rigby, & King, 1993](#)) and could explain some visitation patterns, the items used to measure it do not provide in-depth understanding about travel motivations to sacred places and ignore the transformative elements in the process of becoming. Moreover, such an approach dichotomises those involved in religion, neglecting the subjectivity of the religious experience according to which both the sacred and the secular elements may be of equal importance ([Terzidou, Scarles, & Saunders, 2017](#)).

Tourism scholars have found that religious tourists may visit sacred places for reasons such as appreciation of nature, and educational and cultural enrichment ([Collins-Kreiner, 2010](#); [Ron, 2009](#)), including relaxation and self-discovery as is the case in Mount Athos, Greece ([Andriotis, 2009](#)). While these resemble traditional tourist models of motivation, it is argued that within the context of religious tourism, such journeys do not constitute an internal desire to escape from people's everyday religious life ([Iso-Ahola, 1982](#); [Matheson, Rimmer, & Tinsley, 2014](#)). Rather, religious tourists, bounded by an everyday life deeply embedded in religious practices, regard their trip to a sacred site as an extension of their religious self. Individual lived religious experiences are therefore crucial in understanding motivations, as many people aim to be transformed, cleansed or renewed based on new and powerful actions ([Hyde & Harman, 2011](#)).

Yet, while nearly every individual aims for her/his pilgrimage to be successful, the link between intentions and outcome is often elusive ([Kaell, 2016](#)) as are the subsequent reactions of the pilgrims. Rather than confining understanding of motivation as a practice that exists predominantly in decision-making before travel, this paper identifies tourist motivation as emerging throughout the religious experience, recognising the need to develop a deeper understanding of tourists' personal religious performances, and their association with the visitation of sacred sites. The paper also responds to [Olsen's \(2017\)](#) call to further investigate the effect of pilgrimages' failures on believers and their selection of sacred sites, in other words not just focus on highly successful ones.

Building upon research conducted in the context of Christianity ([Belhassen, Caton, & Steward, 2008](#); [Collins-Kreiner & Kliot, 2000](#); [Eade & Sallnow, 1991](#); [Rickly-Boyd, 2013](#); [Turner & Turner, 1978](#)), and within the framework of Christian Orthodoxy ([Andriotis, 2009](#); [Andriotis, 2011](#); [della Dora, 2012](#)), this study uses ethnographic tools to collect data on two organised coach trips to the island of Tinos (a Christian Orthodox site in Greece) and offer new, in-depth insights into religious tourists' motivations. Following [Belhassen et al. \(2008\)](#) and [Thrift \(1997\)](#), the study posits that motivations emerge throughout the religious tourists' experience, as cultural, social and material worlds intervene and interact. Specifically, aiming to understand the complexity of travel motivations to sacred places, we argue that religious tourism motivations are more than a result of constructed motivations, that is, of external agents such as religious/political powers and social realities ([Bourdieu, 1990](#); [Cohen & Cohen, 2012](#)) that predetermine religious travelling. Rather, we acknowledge a refocussing from researching external and what [Collins-Kreiner \(2010, p.447\)](#) calls "general" elements of pilgrimage ([Nolan & Nolan, 1989](#); [Turner & Turner, 1978](#)) to researching the individual inner experience (for a detailed review of the literature, see [Collins-Kreiner, 2010](#)) within the context of motivation. Religious tourism motivations are also the result of lived experiences that incorporate a series of personal embodied and affective engagements, and encounters with the sacred both in-site and in one's everyday life that may entail the unexpected ([Badone & Roseman, 2004](#); [Frey, 1998](#)). Based on [Belhassen et al. \(2008\)](#) influential work on *theoplicity* that highlights the importance of the dynamic relationship between the social and the spatial elements in touring a destination, and [Rickly-Boyd's \(2013\)](#) focus on the performativity of authenticity and places in tourism experiences, our study moves one step further. Specifically, its contribution lies in understanding the effect of the direct human-sacred interaction in generating motivations and authenticating places in an informal and immanent way ([Cohen & Cohen, 2012](#); [Edensor, 2009](#); [Coleman & Crang, 2002](#); [Crouch, 2000](#)), thereby often re-writing places and questioning their fixed nature.

While an extensive literature exists regarding the influence of external factors on travel motivations, less has been written about the way personal lived performances of religion and supernatural experiences authenticate places and influence motivations to visit them. Specifically, while some studies on vows and visions exist, which exemplify personal experiences with the sacred ([Badone, 1990](#); [Boissevain, 1977](#); [Narayanan, 2006](#); [Raj & Harman, 2006](#); [Terzidou, Scarles, & Saunders, 2018](#)), limited attention has been given to their effect on the selection of sacred sites – an aspect which the current study aims to address. To contextualise our arguments, we first review theories related to constructed motivations emphasising the semiotic nature of motivations. Then we review theories of embodied and affective engagements related to experiential and non-representational aspects of motivations, reframing these within the religious tourism motivation context. Next we outline the method used to understand religious tourist motivations presenting the ethnographic tools adopted in this study. We then discuss the main findings before offering summary reflections in our conclusions.

Rethinking motivation in religious tourism

Within the tourist motivation literature, traditional approaches emphasise the semiotic nature of tourists' motivation ([Urry, 1990](#)). Tourists have a need to look in a detached way at signs and symbolic structures that are created through constructed textual or verbal means, such as collective narratives ([Badone, 2007](#); [Bogari, Crowther, & Marr, 2003](#); [Bruner, 2005](#)), word of mouth ([Govers,](#)

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