

Pilgrimage tourism-past, present and future rejuvenation: a perspective article

Noga Collins-Kreiner

Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to analyse the development of the pilgrimage phenomenon over the past few decades. Pilgrimage was the first tourism mobility to come into existence thousands of years ago. In recent decades, its significance has decreased, as other tourism segments have gained prominence. Although modern tourism is regarded as a relatively new phenomenon, its origins are clearly rooted in the age-old practice of pilgrimage. Indeed, the development of tourism is difficult to understand without a thorough comprehension of the practice of pilgrimage in ancient times.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper analyses the development of the pilgrimage phenomenon over the past few decades. The phenomenon of Pilgrimage Tourism and the nexus between the two mobilities has been experiencing tremendous changes over the past few decades and is still in the midst of an on-going process of transformation.

Findings – This paper concludes with the prediction that pilgrimage will re-emerge when the many similar segments – particularly, spiritual tourism, heritage tourism, religious tourism, dark tourism and secular pilgrimage – are re-identified as pilgrimage: a mobility for the search for meaning that contains an element of transformation that is often deep and enduring (as they were viewed at the dawn of humanity and for thousands of years).

Originality/value – This review has examined the development of pilgrimage tourism as a research topic, highlighting the importance of re-examining our contemporary usage of terms in order to allow for broader interpretations of different phenomena in the field of tourism. These conclusions are consistent with the current calls for a fundamental rethinking of the paradigms and the norms shaping scholarship on pilgrimage, dark tourism and tourism as a whole from a post-disciplinary perspective based on synthesis and synergy.

Keywords Religion, Dark tourism, Pilgrimage, Pilgrimage tourism, Religious tourism, Secular pilgrimage

Paper type Viewpoint

Noga Collins-Kreiner is based at the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel.

Introduction

Pilgrimage was the first tourism mobility to come into existence thousands of years ago (Timothy and Olsen, 2006). Although modern tourism is regarded as a relatively new phenomenon, its origins are clearly rooted in the age-old practice of pilgrimage. Indeed, the development of tourism is difficult to understand without a thorough comprehension of the practice of pilgrimage in ancient times.

This brief piece analyses the development of the pilgrimage phenomenon over the past few decades and concludes with the prediction that pilgrimage will re-emerge when the many similar segments – particularly, spiritual tourism, heritage tourism, religious tourism, dark tourism, and secular pilgrimage – are re-identified as pilgrimage: a mobility for the search for meaning that contains an element of transformation that is often deep and enduring (as they were viewed at the dawn of humanity and for thousands of years).

The phenomenon of Pilgrimage Tourism and the nexus between the two mobilities has been experiencing tremendous changes over the past few decades and is still in the midst of an on-going process of transformation.

Received 14 April 2019
Revised 9 June 2019
Accepted 9 June 2019

© Noga Collins-Kreiner.
Published by Emerald Publishing Limited. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>

A past perspective on pilgrimage tourism research: from the 1960s through the 2010s

Pilgrimage as a research concept, as distinct from a market segment, hardly existed before the 1990s. Its roots, however, reach back to concepts and theories – developed primarily by sociologists and anthropologists – that were analysed in the tourism literature of the 1970s and the 1980s and that focussed on the “visitor experience” and the psychosocial dynamics that drive different kinds of tourism, including pilgrimage (Cohen, 1979; 1992a, 1992b; 1998; Jackson and Hudman, 1995; MacCannell, 1973; Turner and Turner, 1969, 1978).

Several fundamental social ideas that featured in the study of pilgrimage in those years were: the “ritual process” (Turner and Turner, 1969); the holy site as the centre of the world (Eliade, 1969); “liminality”, a transitory stage between two established social statuses (Turner and Turner, 1969); “Communitas”, a specific kind of group dynamics that are characteristic of assemblies of pilgrims (Turner and Turner, 1978); tourism as a quest for the “authentic”, representing the pilgrimage of modern man (MacCannell, 1973); tourism as a “sacred journey” (Graburn, 1977); and five main modes of tourist experience based on the location and significance of the given experience within the tourist’s overall worldview (Cohen, 1979).

In the 1990s, new ideas and concepts were incorporated into pilgrimage research, including: a continuum of travel from “pilgrim as a religious traveller” to “tourist” as a vacationer (Smith, 1992); the heterogeneity of pilgrimage and pilgrimage as an arena for competing religious and secular discourses (Eade and Sallnow, 1991); two different types of pilgrimage centres – the formal and the popular (Cohen, 1992a); the complex relationship between pilgrimage and tourism and the similarities and differences between the tourist and the pilgrim (Cohen, 1998; Digance, 2003; Shinde, 2015); the relationship among religion, pilgrimage, and tourism (Timothy and Olsen, 2006); and de-differentiation (Collins-Kreiner, 2010, 2016).

Beginning in the 2000s, the definition of pilgrimage has come to accommodate both traditional religious and modern secular journeys, as researchers began to discuss the modern ideas of pilgrimage in the context of spiritual rather than religious motivations and actions. As more and more research has shown, large numbers of tourists are seeking a variety of experiences, including enlightenment, knowledge, improved spiritual and physical well-being and challenge. During this period, scholars have generated new knowledge about secular pilgrimage sites and secular aspects of pilgrimage research (Hyde and Harman, 2011). The current literature understands pilgrimage as a holistic phenomenon with religious and secular foundations (Collins-Kreiner, 2016) that encompasses sites that can emerge from both religious and secular contexts.

A future perspective: the rejuvenation of pilgrimage tourism

Based on the above analysis, it appears that pilgrimage is currently in a stage of rejuvenation and is therefore in the process of losing some of its unique attributes – in our case, its religious attributes, which constituted the original basis of its identity as a distinct type of tourism – and is simultaneously developing new identities, such as secular pilgrimage, spiritual tourism, religious tourism, church tourism, dark tourism and transformational tourism (Collins-Kreiner, 2016; Kiely, 2013).

Over the past decade, the word “pilgrimage” has become widely used in broad secular contexts. Scholars have begun to think about other forms of pilgrimage, such as spiritual tourists; “New Age” spiritual travel for pilgrimage, personal growth, and non-traditional spiritual practices; and increasing research on modern secular pilgrimage, in which the search for the miraculous is a trait shared by religious and secular pilgrims alike (Digance, 2003). All pilgrims are engaged in a quest for a mystical or magical religious experience – a moment when they experience something out of the ordinary that marks a transition from the mundane secular world of their everyday existence to a special and sacred state. These experiences can be described as transformation, enlightenment and life-changing or

consciousness-changing events, although words appear to be inadequate to truly describe such experiences, which often defy reason (Kim and Kim, 2018; Liutikas, 2015).

Thus, in the past few years, new identities and concepts such as dark-tourism, spiritual tourism, and other market segments have developed and a number of sources have noted an increasing interest in tourism focussing on death, disaster and horror (Stone, 2012; Lennon and Foley, 2000; Stone and Sharpley, 2008). Dark tourism, for example, is part of the rejuvenation of pilgrimage, as they both emerge from the same milieu to include the sites of dramatic historic events that hold extra meaning (Collins-Kreiner, 2016).

Also noteworthy is the fact that the current literature is finding it increasingly difficult to differentiate among religious pilgrims, secular pilgrims, dark tourists, heritage tourists and pilgrimage, as they all are recognised as part of the growing phenomenon of tourist interest in sites that add meaning to life (Amaro *et al.*, 2018; Collins-Kreiner, 2016; Terzidou *et al.*, 2017).

Conclusions

This review has examined the development of pilgrimage tourism as a research topic, highlighting the importance of re-examining our contemporary usage of terms in order to allow for broader interpretations of different phenomena in the field of tourism. These conclusions are consistent with the current calls for a fundamental rethinking of the paradigms and the norms shaping scholarship on pilgrimage (Eade and Albera, 2015), dark tourism (Stone, 2012) and tourism as a whole (Winter, 2009) from a post-disciplinary perspective based on synthesis and synergy.

References

- Amaro, S., Antunes, A. and Henriques, C. (2018), "A closer look at Santiago de compostela's pilgrims through the lens of motivations", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 64, pp. 271-280.
- Cohen, E. (1979), "Rethinking the sociology of tourism", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 6 No. 1, pp. 18-35.
- Cohen, E. (1992a), "Pilgrimage centers: concentric and excentric", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 19 No. 1, pp. 33-50.
- Cohen, E. (1992b), "Pilgrimage and tourism: convergence and divergence", in Morinis, A. (Ed.), *Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage*, Greenwood Press, New York, NY, pp. 47-61.
- Cohen, E. (1998), "Tourism and religion: a comparative perspective", *Pacific Tourism Review*, Vol. 2, pp. 1-10.
- Collins-Kreiner, N. (2010), "Researching pilgrimage: continuity and transformations", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 37 No. 2, pp. 440-456.
- Collins-Kreiner, N. (2016), "Life cycle of concepts: the case of pilgrimage tourism", *Tourism Geographies*, Vol. 18 No. 3, pp. 322-334.
- Digance, J. (2003), "Pilgrimage at contested sites", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 30 No. 1, pp. 143-159.
- Eade, J. and Albera, D. (Eds) (2015), *International Perspectives on Pilgrimage Studies: Itineraries, Gaps and Obstacles*, Routledge, New York, NY.
- Eade, J. and Sallnow, M.J. (Eds) (1991), *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage*, Routledge, London.
- Eliade, M. (1969), *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Graburn, N.H.H. (1977), "Tourism: the sacred journey", in Smith, V.L. (Ed.), *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, pp. 17-31.
- Hyde, K.F. and Harman, S. (2011), "Motives for a secular pilgrimage to the gallipoli battlefields", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 32 No. 6, pp. 1343-1351.

- Jackson, R.H. and Hudman, L. (1995), "Pilgrimage tourism and english cathedrals: the role of religion in travel", *The Tourist Review*, Vol. 50 No. 4, pp. 40-48.
- Kiely, T. (2013), "Tapping into mammon: stakeholder perspectives on developing church tourism in Dublin's liberties", *Tourism Review*, Vol. 68 No. 2, pp. 31-43.
- Kim, B. and Kim, S. (2018), "Hierarchical value map of religious tourists visiting the vatican city/rome", *Tourism Geographies*, pp. 1-22.
- Lennon, J. and Foley, M. (2000), *Dark Tourism the Attraction of Death and Disaster*, Cengage learning EMEA, London.
- Liutikas, D. (2015), "In search of miracles: pilgrimage to the miraculous places", *Tourism Review*, Vol. 70 No. 3, pp. 197-213.
- MacCannell, D. (1973), "Staged authenticity: arrangements of social space in tourist settings", *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 79, pp. 589-603.
- Shinde, K.A. (2015), "Religious tourism and religious tolerance: insights from pilgrimage sites in India", *Tourism Review*, Vol. 70 No. 3, pp. 179-196.
- Smith, V.L. (1992), "Introduction: the quest in guest", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 19 No. 1, pp. 1-17.
- Stone, P.R. (2012), "Dark tourism and significant other death: towards a model of mortality mediation", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 39 No. 3, pp. 1565-1587.
- Stone, P. and Sharpley, R. (2008), "Consuming dark tourism: a thanatological perspective", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 35 No. 2, pp. 574-595.
- Terzidou, M., Scarles, C. and Saunders, M.N. (2017), "Religiousness as tourist performances: a case study of Greek orthodox pilgrimage", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 66, pp. 116-129.
- Timothy, D.J. and Olsen, D.H. (Eds) (2006), *Tourism, Religion and Spiritual Journeys*, Routledge, London and New York, NY.
- Turner, V. and Turner, E. (1969), *The Ritual Process*, Routledge, London.
- Turner, V. and Turner, E. (1978), *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, Columbia University Press, New York, NY.
- Winter, T. (2009), "Asian tourism and the retreat of Anglo-Western centrism in tourism theory", *Current Issues in Tourism*, Vol. 12 No. 1, pp. 21-31.

Corresponding author

Noga Collins-Kreiner can be contacted at: nogack@geo.haifa.ac.il

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:
www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm
Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com