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## **CULTURAL TOURISM IN THE DIGITAL AGE: WHERE ARE WE TODAY? WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE TOMORROW? HOW DO WE GET THERE?**

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### **Abstract**

The paper has two aims. The first is theoretical and calls for examining key issues, arguments and conceptualizations in the scholarship on cultural tourism in order to better understand its transformation in the digital age. The study characterizes the changes that have taken place in cultural tourism research by reviewing both literature and case studies on the subject and analyzing the concepts that have been added or modified in the ongoing research.

The second aim of the paper is to offer recommendations for development of cultural tourism in the digital era. The main research findings indicate a shift to a postmodern approach, particularly with regard to the increasingly obfuscated boundaries between different tourism types. Another change currently underway is the shift in focus from creating a “product” to creating an “experience”. The change in the theoretical foundation has involved the elimination of distinctions that were accepted in the past and a growing inability to distinguish between different conceptualizations and fields of research, which are now being integrated. Finally, the recommendations focus on three levels: where we are today, where we want to be tomorrow, and how we plan to get there.

**Keywords:** Tourism development, Cultural Tourism, Experience, Digital Age.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The cultural tourism is the subset of tourism concerned with a country or region's culture. It generally focuses on traditional communities who have diverse customs, unique form of art and distinct social practices, which basically distinguishes it from other types or forms of culture. Cultural tourism includes tourism in urban areas, particularly historic or large cities and their cultural facilities such as museums and theatres. It can also include tourism in rural areas showcasing the traditions of indigenous cultural communities (i.e. festivals, rituals), and their values and lifestyle. It is generally agreed that cultural tourists spend substantially more than standard tourists do. This form of tourism is also becoming generally more popular throughout the world.

Cultural tourisms have powerful political, economic, social and cultural implications, and even affect global trade and health. Cultural tourism inevitably necessitates spatial movement and for this reason stimulates geographers' concern with distances travelled and the phenomenon's effect on behavior. Cultural tourism is also an important subject due to its scope and spatial influence and thus researchers are beginning to recognize more fully the powerful and contingent roles of culture on a range of scales, from the corporeal to the institutional and the geopolitical.

This article examines how in recent years research on cultural tourism has shifted toward post-modernism. Postmodernism is a complicated concept, or set of ideas, that has emerged as an area of academic study since the mid-1980s. The term is hard to define because it is used in a wide variety of disciplines and fields of study, including art, architecture, music, film, literature, sociology, communications, fashion, and technology (Klages, 2007). One characteristic of the researchers who employ this approach is the tendency to challenge existing theories and reject the clear-cut divisions within the prevailing scholars shows how the trends of deconstruction (or of breaking down existing theories), the prevalent tendency to emphasize the subjective over the objective, and the increasing attention paid to individual experiences are all consistent with the new post-modern approach to cultural tourism research.

The study also investigates how cultural tourism is connected to the digital age. Digitally driven globalized hyper-interconnectivity is having a profound effect on tourism, impacting upon the notions of travel, unending guest-host relationships and transforming previously accepted industry standards of authenticity, value, consumption, mobility and purpose. Much of this new technology is being applied today to cultural tourism as will be presented

Indeed, consumer-oriented information and communication technologies such as 24/7 social networking and the ubiquity of smart phones and other mobile online personal computing devices are integral to the contemporary tourism experience. Thus, for instance, well-being derived from visiting a given tourist destination is now a multi-functional shared emotion. In fact, the viral integration of instantaneous communication within the tourism industry has altered its very premise. Distant destinations, exotic cultures and wild environments are now familiarized objects, encountered both in and out-of-context and disseminated by and for an increasingly discerning public arena. This condition presents local service providers with a host of unprecedented infrastructure, environmental and organizational challenges. Prominent among them, the critical need to adjust branded tourism strategies so that they accommodate evolving, bottom-up shifts in client opinions, tastes and requirements.

In the line of meeting its objectives, the paper is structured in several parts. After the introductory part, Section 2 gives a literature review on three main issues: general concepts on cultural tourism; ICT and the interrelationship with the e-tourism; and the preference of tourists and visitors as an ever changing issue. Section 3 explores two studies. The first deals with the practices that transform the Baha'i Gardens in Haifa, Israel, into a secular shared community asset, while the second is on Western visitors traveling to Dharamsala, India. The discussion on the main findings is noted in the Section 4, while the conclusions and recommendations are presented in the last section.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Cultural Tourism**

Cultural tourism is one type of “circulation,” which is a form of population mobility. During the first decade of the twenty-first century, mobility has become an evocative keyword and a well-known interdisciplinary field of study with a powerful discourse of its own. The concept of mobility encompasses large-scale movements of people, objects, capital, and information throughout the world, as well as more local processes of daily transportation, movement through public space, and the movement of material things in everyday life. Issues of movement - too little movement, too much movement, the wrong type of movement, or poorly-timed movement - are of great importance to organizations, governments, and the lives of many people (Hannam et al, 2006).

Many academicians make a strong distinction between cultural and mass tourism i.e. tourism related to ‘sun and sea’ concept (Balcar and Pearce, 1996; Konsola, 1993; McHale, 2004; Silbergberg, 1995; Stebbins, 1997; Thompson, 1998; Waitt, 2000). They all agree that developing cultural tourism brings numerous effects, in the first line, positive ones. So, some researchers put an accent to the local economy benefits, mainly by creating job places for local residents (Prentice and Andersen, 2003; Richards, 2003; Smith, 2004). In the same time, cultural tourism is a suitable form for opening family run entities specialized for local traditional food production (Bachleitner and Zins, 1999; MacDonald and Jolliffe, 2003). Others put an accent that cultural tourism may be practiced all year round and consequently reduce the negative influence of tourism seasonality (Gotti and Van der Borg, 1995; Horrigan, 2009; Mohamed, 2008; Richards and Bonink, 1995; Richards, 1994 and 1996).

Present-day tourism studies employs a “new mobility paradigm” that offers a conceptual framework for understanding the nature of the tourism phenomenon (Bærenholdt et al, 2004). According to this framework, “places are seen as dynamic,” as “places of movement”. “Places are like ships,” posits Bærenholdt et al, “moving around and not necessarily staying in one location” (2004: 146). While the phenomenon of migration has gained much attention in the literature, different forms of “circulation”, and “cultural and tourism circulation” in particular, have received much less attention. Nonetheless, these forms have no less an effect on the environment, and indeed may have an even greater one. This stems from the large numbers of participants, their cyclicity, and the large numbers of people which they affect.



### **ICT and E-tourism**

The successful introduction of the Internet to e-tourism is fully supported by the search engines which became a dominant source in tourists' use to access particular tourism and travel products. Due to its significance, this issue raised an interest within academia and practitioners. Generally, they argue regarding the understanding how search engines work and how travelers use the Internet and booking systems as tools in e-tourism (Morrison et al, 2001; Pan et al, 2007; Buhalis and Law, 2008; Pan et al, 2011; Xiang and Pan, 2010). Moreover, the success of search engine marketing requires a good understanding of consumer behavior in order to provide the information desired by different consumers. Furthermore, the necessity of developing digital technology that will support the personalized services to address individual needs is fully justified. Tourism actors should collect customer information before, during and after a visit in order to better understand consumer behavior choices and determinants (Buhalis and O'Connor, 2005).

Some researches address different approaches dealing with variety of relationships that appeared in e-tourism. So, Weber and Roehl (1999) explored demographics between Internet users and tourists at the same time. However, little research has been done on the travel-related behaviors of Internet travelers. In this respect, Morrison et al, (2001) found that some book travel on-line, while others go to travel agents or call the toll-free numbers of travel providers after getting travel information on-line. With regards to the behavioral dimensions, it may be utilized to segment travel markets as a powerful tool in managing e-tourism (Hennessey *et al*, 2008). Regardless the approach, it must be underlined that tourism needed this kind of information some years ago, while today we are faced with tourists with different travel patterns which cause different activity while travelling.

One may argue the inevitable relationship between tourism and information. Moreover, it is a widely-recognized the fact that information and decision-making have become the foundation for the world economy (Wang, 2008).

### **Tourists' Preferences**

Many researchers were interested in identifying tourists' needs, expectations and behavior. In this respect, numerous papers discuss tourist roles in order to define their considerable variations. In mostly, the behavior is related to specific demographic and background characteristics emphasizing the life course as the leading component for investigating tourist role preferences. Yet, attention should be paid to a variety of social structures and processes, including psychological needs and life-course stage. Cohen (1972) was one of the first sociologists who proposed a typology to conceptually clarify the term "tourist" by developing a four-fold typology. Based on that, Pearce (1982) identified specific behavior thus enabling tying the evolutionary nature of tourist role preference and the psychological needs. Moreover he developed 15 different tourist types which allowed creation of several measurement scales. In this respect, the Tourist Roles Preference Scale (Yiannakis and Gibson, 1992) presents a comprehensive classification of leisure tourists. Additional work resulted in adding two more tourist types to the tourist categorization (Gibson and Yiannakis 2002). Moreover, researchers focused on exploring the experience of tourists as well as the importance of the tourist experience for tourists (Yfantidou et al, 2008).

On the other hand, the researches emphasize the relationship between IT and tourists' behavior. Namely, many of them underline that IT acts as a protector and enhancer thus directly having influence on tourists' experiences, preferences and behavior (Kim and Ham 2007; Singh et al, 2006; Winata and Mia, 2005).

### **EMPIRICAL STUDIES**

Two different studies dealing with various kinds of tourism are analyzed for this research. The studies will also be analyzed below, according to the shifts in theories which were identified through the literature reviewed. The reason for choosing these two different case studies was to diversify the investigated phenomena as much as possible: This trend provokes major questions on the entire nature of the cultural tourism as a phenomenon. The material for the case studies was collected using different methods in order to diversify, as much as possible, the outcomes of the works.

The first case study looked into the experiences of Baha'i and non-Baha'i visitors to the Baha'i Gardens in Haifa, Israel (Collins-Kreiner and Gatrell 2006). The second study explored the phenomenon

of Western visitors traveling to Dharamsala, India, through interviews and participants' observations (Collins-Kreiner and Sagie 2011).

### **Baha'i Cultural Tourism**

The first study examines the practices that transform the Baha'i Gardens in Haifa, Israel, into a secular shared community asset. It concentrates on the visitor experience within this context. The research employed a mixed methodological approach that included participant observation, archival documents and short, informal and unstructured interviews with Baha'i volunteers, tourists and guides, as well as empirical observations concerning the physical landscape and the observed practices of pilgrims and tourists. The contemporary nature of the garden as a tourist attraction makes the case of the Baha'i Gardens and its cultural and economic context both more distinct but also somewhat ambiguous as the perceived boundaries are unclear (Collins-Kreiner and Gatrell 2006).

A basic typology of the visitors to the gardens is established: the religious visitors are in the "existential mode" (Cohen, 1979: 190). In this mode, they are fully committed to an elective spiritual center. They are Baha'i who see their travel as a cultural tourism and as a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The experiences of their visits are not dominated by recreational or diversionary elements. However, the pilgrims will derive the restorative effects of their trip's inherent spirituality.

The cultural tourists in this research correspond predominantly to Cohen's "recreational mode" (1979:190) of tourism. Their trip is a form of entertainment not unlike the cinema, theatre or television. This kind of tourist, usually the domestic Israeli visitor, enjoys his or her trip because it restores physical and mental powers and endows him or her with a general sense of well-being. In addition to the recreational mode, a number of visitors may be classified as experiential tourists in that the gardens and the Baha'i World Centre may provide an authentic "other" experience distinct from everyday life and their normal social context. Indeed, the gardens themselves, their connection with the emerging faith system of the Baha'i, and the aesthetics of the tour place the experience well beyond the everyday life of many visitors.

The case of the Baha'i Gardens in Haifa demonstrates that the differing motives of the visitors are defined by their activity space and embodied in their movement. The separation of the tourist and the pilgrim experience at the Baha'i Gardens is unique, as the gardens have been designed to prevent any potential conflict with local residents, which, in turns, enables the municipality to emphasize the secular and aesthetic benefits of the gardens.

The result of this place-based strategy at conflict avoidance or mitigation has been the creation of a layered collection of spatial practices to preserve the sacred nature of the Baha'i complex and to enable the non-Baha'i community to yield a variety of secular benefits while preserving the place sacred nature. This strategy should be adopted by planners and practitioners in other places in the world.

### **Western Visitors Traveling to India**

The second study is on Western visitors traveling to Dharamsala, India. This paper's aim was to consider their cultural, educational and religious experiences and the implications of their visits, and to supply information on the growing phenomenon of Western people visiting the East for self-fulfillment, study, and belief. The methods used were both qualitative and quantitative. A structured questionnaire was administered to 127 visitors at seven different sites in Dharamsala. In addition, twenty in-depth interviews were held, and participant observation was chosen as another research method (Collins-Kreiner and Sagie, 2011).

This paper considers the degree of "quest in guest," that is, identifying the extent to which visitors to a specific spiritual destination were motivated by a search for spiritual fulfillment as suggested by those describing tourism as a sacred journey. The respondents were chosen from the broader stream of tourists to Dharamsala; these were visitors who depicted themselves as different from regular tourists and who stayed longer than one month. The findings show that they did not define themselves as tourists, although they differentiated themselves from the locals. According to the literature, they could be defined as pilgrims, but this was not the case according to their self-definition. They defined themselves as "students," thus placing them in the cultural-educational -tourism market as a special interest tourism niche.

Two layers of identity emerge: the richer layer is the educational and spiritual layer which consists of their beliefs and their wish to study. This guides them in their plans before embarking on the journey:

when to take the trip; handling economic, family, and health problems; and when they prepare themselves spiritually.

The second layer is thinner: it is the tourist layer. The visitors depicted themselves as students, not as tourists. Their motivations and expectations in the tourism realm were minor. Yet, tourist aspects of the trip were revealed in some of the visitors' comments and responses. As tourists they met local people and saw many facets of India, beginning with the airport, then the roads, the cities, and the landscape. Still, as stated, all these points were much less important than the primary goal of their tour - education. In this case study, most of the visitors classified themselves as belonging to the specific category of "students," and as participating in an edu-tourism visit. They travelled with specific educational or even spiritual intentions and thus returned home feeling stronger and more fulfilled.

The "students" see their visit as a once-in-a-lifetime experience. It will seldom have recreational, diversionary elements, though they feel that, mentally and spiritually, the trip has restorative effects. For these travelers, the "quest in guest" has been fulfilled and their visit has been a success. They have discovered in Dharamsala their spiritual home or "center" (Cohen, 1979; Eliade, 1969) and the satisfaction of their spiritual needs meant that they had come to the end of their journey. They had fully immersed themselves in the spiritual "other," becoming, in a sense, permanent tourists. For them, spiritual fulfillment is part of the journey. In other words, the notion of the edu-tourist as a pilgrim has, to a certain extent, been verified.

Although a variety of motives, from education to a more purposeful need for satisfaction, were identified in the research, it is evident that, albeit unintentionally, different intensities of spiritual fulfillment were experienced by visitors to Dharamsala. Thus, it is apparent that, within particular destination contexts, cultural tourism can begin to take on the characteristics of a sacred journey.

## DISCUSSION

In the studies presented, we can see how differentiation is giving way to dedifferentiation. For practitioners, it is important to understand that it is practically impossible to draw clear boundaries around the categories of travel or to differentiate segments of tourists. For example, the ability to differentiate becomes even harder when considering Western visitors to India, as their experiences are so mixed: educational, tourist, spiritual, and cultural. For some, the journey has strong meaning while for others it does not. This dedifferentiation also exists when different spaces, as multiple activities can exist simultaneously at the sites, and the attitudes of the different visitors can vary markedly.

The main task for planners is, therefore, to pre-plan a strategy for such complex spaces with different meanings for different visitors. This strategy should include not only planning the space, but also the various activities and different marketing methods for the various market segments that often contrast with each other. The result of this place-based strategy should be conflict avoidance that also preserves the nature of the specific site.

This paper suggests that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the differences between tourists are fading while numerous points of similarity are emerging; both require spatial movement and both could involve an emotional desire on the part of the individual to visit sites meaningful to him or her. Overall, however, the visitor's experience, be it termed cultural tourism or tourism, is, in fact, not homogeneous; rather, it comprises different experiential types. Visitors' motivations are also highly diverse, ranging from curiosity to a search for meaning. Differing market segments of visitors go to the various sites, holy or not, and coexist. This coexistence occurs even though the reasons for visiting and the activities at the site vary widely.

Everyone has different expectations from his or her tour; the question is, to what degree? At one end of the scale are the spiritual visitors, the spiritual sites and the spiritual experiences which constitute searching for new meanings to life; these are visits that can change the spiritual visitors' lives. At the opposite end are visitors who are not affected by their visit. A visitor can move along the continuum. There are, for example, Western visitors to the East who left their homes as secular visitors and were affected by their visit and, as a result, return home as spiritual visitors (Sharpley and Sundaram, 2005).

The two studies deal with the inner experience of the visitors. This is an example of the shift from an examination of "external" elements to research of the "inner experience." Thus, another task of planners and practitioners today involves finding out what the visitors themselves say about their cultural tourism, since they are its main "elements". All of this information implies that "tourism planning" should be an addition to the "regular" planning and should have its own voice and contribution.

A transformation was also observed in the view of cultural tourism from a general and comprehensive phenomenon to its analysis as an individual and hence a more pluralistic, entity. This shift includes placed along the experience on a scale. The scale affirmed that visitors may have a variety of experiences, and may switch between types of experiences. The visitors to India researched by the author confirmed this new stage of research, as these visitors claimed to have undergone various inner experiences that changed according to their length of stay or state of mind.

As a result of the two studies presented, it is now clear that each person may interpret his or her own experience differently and it is not enough to focus solely on the experience offered by the objective, namely the cultural tourism. The visitor experience, be it called cultural tourism or tourism, is, in fact, not a homogeneous entity. Visitors' motivations are also highly diverse, ranging from curiosity to the search for meaning. It was also found that differing market segments of visitors go to various sites, holy or not, and coexist. This occurs even though the reasons for visiting and the activities at the site are quite disparate.

Together with an increasing dedifferentiation of cultural tourism, tourism and secular tourism, and the narrowing difference between the wishes of people to search for a new meaning to their everyday life, all the shifts described show that the study of tourism is being modified in the twenty-first century. This change is found in both the theoretical and the practical base; it includes erasing the distinctions that were accepted in the past as well as a growing inability to distinguish between the different perceptions and research areas that are now becoming integrated.

## CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Geographers evidently have something to contribute to contemporary debates about tourism, space and experience, which are emerging across a range of disciplines. In reviewing these central themes, which highlight the value of a new direction in the research of tourism we have contextualized recent work in geography and Tourism.

This article analyzes the main transformations that have taken place in cultural tourism scholarship in recent decades. It also reveals that the most significant changes that have taken place and the new direction taken by cultural tourism studies in general have been the result of new research theories in the field of tourism and mobilities. Throughout history, cultural tourism has stimulated much interest and writing, which can be understood in parallel to the practice itself.

We are also witness to convergences with anthropology, sociology, history, religious studies, geography, and most recently, the fields of leisure and tourism. The cross-currents have become so substantial that, at times, it is difficult to distinguish between contributions from different disciplines.

The second aim of the presentation is practical and it is to give recommendations for development, organization and management of shared spaces of cultural tourism in the digital era. Different case studies from the area will be used for demonstration and especially the case study of the Baha'i Gardens and shrine in Haifa that have become a world heritage site in 2008, and was found to be a multi-dimensional space. The recommendations will concentrate on three layers: Where are we today?, Where do we want to be tomorrow? And, How do we get there?

First, the main message would be that a planning and management program should take place before it evolves on its own anyway. Secondly- we must study our "Product" and gain information such as facts (numbers of visitors, site operation, characteristics of visitors); Perceptions toward the product (of tourists, the local population) and attitudes (of stakeholders, Visitors, Non visitors. Third, we need to define our goals: what kind of tourism do we want to facilitate? Forth- we should think of the ways we want to do it such as staying authentic and developing an experience and not only a product.

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