
Editorial

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This special issue of the *International Journal of Tourism Anthropology* is dedicated to sacred site visitation. It is the outcome of the special session, entitled 'Sacred site visitation: policies, experiences and commercialisation' organised by Filareti Kotsi at the International Conference on Tourism (ICOT 2011) held in Rhodes Island, Greece, in 2011. The idea for this special session initiated as a complement to the regular programme of the tourism conference in order to create a niche for presenters to focus on the tourism-pilgrimage dichotomy, on the hybrid nature of religious tourism as well as on the intersecting journeys of tourists and pilgrims within the context of the same sacred site.

The research presented in this issue stretches from Northern Europe to the East Mediterranean, including countries such as Britain, Lebanon, Italy and Greece. The researchers undertook their anthropological journey studying the 'other' either as anthropologists at home or at places far away from it. Rakkala-Simberg, a Finnish researcher, after having to learn the Greek language, studied the exotic 'other' during a 3 year period at a Greek convent in Northern Greece, by means of participant observation and interviews with nuns and pilgrims either at the convent or at the pilgrims' homes. In her paper, 'On an everyday pilgrimage: a suburban Greek convent as a pilgrimage site', she argues that pilgrimage does not necessarily have to be an elevated form of religious behaviour which takes place relatively rarely, possibly even only once in a lifetime but can be a daily habit or a lifestyle. Moreover, she suggests that the uncertainty of the 21st century, which also creates an uncertain touristic environment as noted at the conference's overall theme 'Tourism in an era of uncertainty', can be overcome by the 'everyday' pilgrimage to the convent. According to her research, continuously returning to the convent contributes to finding solutions to the challenges and problems of this century and reinforces the pilgrims with strength and security for encountering everyday life.

Di Giovine examines the role of souvenirs, art, built structures, objects and the deeper meanings associated with such a material culture in the contemporary Catholic cult of St. Padre Pio of Pietrelcina in Italy. His paper 'Padre Pio for sale: souvenirs, relics, or identity markers?' Based on nearly three years of ethnographic research with devotees, pilgrimage operators, tourism professionals and locals in both San Giovanni Rotondo and Pio's birthplace of Pietrelcina, examines more specifically how this material culture is created, contextualised and consumed by pilgrims. Rather than viewing these products solely as commodities, Di Giovine examines their deeper cultural and symbolic value, arguing that the role of these objects can be conceived of as relics that connect the pilgrim with the saint as well as identity markers that construct deeply held cosmological

notions of their relationship with Pio and the supernatural. These commercially purchased, mass-produced souvenirs connect the pilgrim with Padre Pio in a variety of ways.

In the paper entitled 'Tourism in the Qadisha valley (Northern Lebanon): from holiness to conflicts of interest', the French researcher Pasquier studies the protected area of the Qadisha valley in Northern Lebanon. This important early Maronite Christian monastic settlement, was listed a World Heritage Site in 1998 as a cultural landscape with great religious value. Pasquier examines how space is shared between the different stakeholders responsible for managing this holy site that has a strong tradition of tourism. She argues that the management of religious sites is complicated because the visitors have different motivations and expectations and there is a real paradox between perceptions about the area and the way it actually functions. She highlights the duality of such spaces which is marked by the differences between religious and tourist dynamics. Pasquier underpins the complexity of conflicts of interests between the different stakeholders and seeks for answers concerning the balance between the desire to attract tourists and the pilgrim's need for silence. She engaged in fieldwork over a six-month period as well as in in-depth interviews and informal discussions with people involved in the tourism industry.

The paper 'Mount Athos: development policies for short-term religious tourism' supports the importance of religious tourism for local development. Mount Athos is also a cultural and natural heritage site listed among the World Heritage Sites in Unesco since 1988. Unlike Rahkala who studied the exotic 'other' in Greece, this researcher experienced an indigenous anthropological journey 'at home'. Since the Holy Mountain is forbidden to women, Kotsi moved to the village bordering Mount Athos in order to accomplish her research. Besides living there for seven months, she returns almost each year since 1997. The author identifies several policy measures that need to be introduced to improve economic development in the area next to Mount Athos in order to develop short-term religious tourism. She argues that since sacred sites are functioning in a commercial world, pilgrimage and sacred site visitation have an economic impact on the local economy just like on the tourism industry.

Finally, Busby and Laviolette's research is concerned with the Duchy of Cornwall, a county in the far south west of mainland Britain. On-site survey conducted over 48 days at three distinct churches in Cornwall, as well as historical data sources such as guidebooks, postcards and visitor book comments, were used to enhance the findings. In their paper entitled 'Authenticating belief and identity: the visitor and Celtic Christianity in Cornwall', the two researchers outline perceptions of 'otherness' which are synonymous with 'Cornishness', thus fitting into the developing intellectual framework concerned with the authenticity of belief systems and symbolism in the realm of heritage tourism. They review the relationships between religion and the past regarding the evidence of a Celtic Christian identity over time. The cultural, historical and heritage features, visited by tourists, not only shape their travelling identity but also their conception of Celticity and Celtic Christianity and as the authors say 'Indeed, Celtic Saints 'sell'!'

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the authors for their contribution in the special issue on ‘Sacred site visitation: policies, experiences and commercialisation’. Among the presentations at the ICOT Conference 2011 there were six more that are not published in this issue. I would, therefore, like to thank the presenters for their contribution to the special session and note a few words about each one. Bond’s study entitled ‘The changing face of pilgrimage: the experiences of pilgrims at three religious sites’ explored and compared the experiences of visitors self-identifying as pilgrims at three English religious heritage sites. Three different sites were also examined in Israel by Collins-Kreiner and Shmueli. In their presentation, ‘Religious tourism and conflicts: new religious sites in Israel’, they determined the role of tourism at religious sites. Ron, presented his preliminary work on Russian Orthodox pilgrims visiting the Holy Land in Israel, in the presentation entitled ‘Effects of a changing guest community on the tourism landscape’. Liutikas’ research entitled ‘Experiences of pilgrimage in Lithuania: expression of values and identity at the new destination’ focused on the concept of valuistic journeys and their relationship to tourism in Lithuanian societies. Shi’s research ‘Business at religious sites: bless or sin?’ investigated visitors’ attitudes toward commoditisation at Chinese Buddhist sites. Finally, Eastgate emphasised the increasing number of Australian tourists who visit battlefields, memorials and graves in Belgium and France in her presentation ‘Sacred site visitation: a comparison of Australian pilgrimage to World War I Battlefields’. She argued that these sites have developed a sacrilisation and visits there become almost like pilgrimages.

In addition, I would also like to thank all the reviewers for their invaluable help and the time they dedicated to feedback and comments. Last, I would like to thank Prof. Li Cheng for his cooperation and for relying on me as guest editor as well as Liz Harris for her support throughout the year.