

Tourism and Spirituality: An Evolving Relationship

Richard Sharpley

University of Central Lancashire, UK

rajsharp@uclan.ac.uk

Abstract

A connection has long existed between tourism and spirituality. More specifically, travel for spiritual purposes has for centuries been a popular manifestation of human mobility. Pilgrimage and other spiritually-motivated travel is widely considered to be one of the earliest forms of tourism and nowadays, religious tourism, in all its forms, has evolved into a major sector of the global tourism market. Over the last three decades, however, an alternative perspective on the tourism-spirituality relationship has emerged. Focusing on the meaning or significance of contemporary tourism, it is argued that tourism is a sacred journey, a secular spiritual experience; in other words, tourism has become a secular alternative to the institution of religion, the contemporary tourist a modern, secular pilgrim. Hence, a conceptual divide exists in the relationship between tourism and spirituality, between spiritual (religious) tourism and tourism as spirituality (religion). Moreover, that divide is evidenced in much of the extant research into tourism, religion and spirituality.

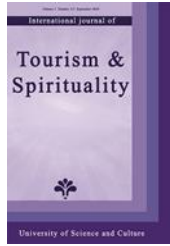
As this paper suggests, however, such a conceptual divide over-simplifies the relationship between tourism and spirituality; not only is the distinction between spiritual / religious tourism and tourism as a secular spiritual experience becoming increasingly fuzzy – some traditional religious travel experiences, for example, are taking on the aura of commoditised tourism products, with implications for the experience of participants themselves – but also the relationship can be viewed from different disciplinary and theoretical positions. A humanistic perspective, for example, questions the notion of spirituality itself, whilst varying interpretations of religion / spirituality also cast the relationship in different lights. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to explore the complexity of the spiritual dimension of tourism. Reviewing the extant literature, it highlights the dimensions of and limits to research into the relationship between tourism and spirituality and, exploring the phenomenon from a variety of perspectives, challenges contemporary understandings and points to areas demanding further research.

Keywords: religious tourism; spirituality; sacred journey; connectedness.

Introduction

Tourism and spirituality have long enjoyed an intimate relationship. Pilgrimage, for example, is widely recognised as one of the earliest forms of tourism (Digence, 2006; Kaelber, 2006; Raj & Griffen, 2015) whilst religious tourism more generally, ‘whose participants are motivated either in part or exclusively for religious reasons’ (Rinschede, 1992: 52), now constitutes a significant sector of the contemporary tourism market. Indeed, the annual number of pilgrimage trips worldwide is conservatively estimated to total 155 million (ARC, 2011) whilst more generally, the UN World Tourism Organization suggests that ‘300 to 330 million tourists visit the world’s key religious sites every year’ (UNWTO, 2014). This figure, however, includes domestic travel; international religious tourists alone have been estimated to total 28.5 million, generating some US\$19 billion annually in expenditure (Intel, 2012).

As a specific and identifiable touristic practice, however, religious tourism is arguably no more than a sub-sector within the broader context of the spiritual dimension of tourism. In other words, since academic attention first turned to it some three decades ago (Graburn, 1989; MacCannell, 1976), it has been suggested that the relationship between tourism, religion and spirituality is significantly broader and more complex than might be immediately apparent. More specifically, it has long been recognized that tourism may be motivated by religion that people engage in spiritual journeys or visit religious places and events for primarily religious purposes (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). At the same time, however, it has increasingly been argued that contemporary tourism is a ‘secular substitute for organised religion’ (Allcock, 1998), that in modern societies ‘tourism. . . is functionally and symbolically equivalent to other institutions that humans use to embellish and add meaning to their lives’ (Graburn, 1989: 22). Putting it another way, tourism has come to be seen as a secular spiritual experience, a sacred journey. Hence, as Smith (1992) has proposed, the tourism-spirituality relationship may be conceptualised as a continuum from *religious tourism* to *tourism as religion* or, as she implies, a quest for, on the one hand, a religious experience (the ‘pilgrim’) and, in the other hand, secular spiritual fulfillment (the ‘tourist as pilgrim’). Moreover, between these two points may be found innumerable religious/secular combinations of religious tourism defined by an individual’s religious or cultural/knowledge needs. Thus, Smith (1992) suggests that although tourists and pilgrims share the same fundamental requirements for travel (time, financial resources and social sanction), a distinction between tourism and pilgrimage may be identified within the meaning or personal belief attached to each activity (Sharpley, 2009).



Yet, even this conceptualization is open to interpretation. For example, this varying relationship may be considered from either a theological or an anthropological perspective whilst the concept of spirituality remains highly contested and open to varying disciplinary and philosophical interpretation. Equally, there is no single manifestation of religious tourism; it varies in form and, to different participants, in meaning whilst, as a specific and increasingly important (in economic terms) sector of the global tourism market, its organization and supply is becoming increasingly formalized. Consequently, the distinction between religious and other forms of tourism is becoming increasingly fuzzy; traditional religious travel experiences are, in some circumstances, taking on the aura of commodified tourism products, with implications for the experience of participants themselves. In short, the relationship between tourism and spirituality is both dynamic and evolving. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to consider extant understandings of and research into this relationship and to identify issues demanding further research. The first task, then, is to establish the current basis of our knowledge and understanding of tourism and spirituality.

Foundations: religious tourism

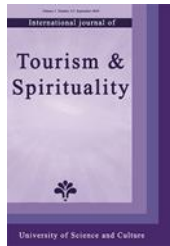
As noted above, human migration has been linked to religion from the earliest times (Sigaux, 1966; Vukonić 1996) and, hence, 'it is impossible to understand the development of... tourism without studying religion and understanding the pilgrimage phenomenon' (Collins-Kreiner & Gatrell, 2006). Moreover, not only has religious tourism evolved into a major phenomenon, but also the number of people traveling wholly or partly for religious or spiritual purposes in particular has increased both proportionally and in absolute terms. To an extent, this can be explained by the increased accessibility of sacred places and sites to international tourist markets. At the same time, however, the economic potential of religious tourism and tourists has been recognized by governments and other agencies which now seek to exploit this market (Vukonić, 2002). For example, it is estimated that pilgrimage to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia generates annual revenues of approximately US\$16 billion and that over the past 30 years, the government has invested more than \$35 billion to not only improve but also diversify facilities for pilgrims in order to gain maximum economic advantage from religious tourism (Vijayanand, 2012). Consequently, luxury hotels and shopping malls account for around half of religious tourism expenditure in the Kingdom. Moreover, the Saudi government continues to invest; recently, it approved an US\$88 billion investment aimed at boosting

tourism infrastructure, with Mecca remaining the focal point of development owing to continuing growth in religious tourism (World Report International, 2010).

As discussed shortly, the implications of this investment in and commercialisation of pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia (and other sites /destinations) may have significant implications for the religious tourist experience – and for the need for research in this area. More generally, however, given its increasing significance both culturally and economically, it is not surprising that academic attention has long been paid to religious tourism. A full review of this burgeoning literature is beyond the scope of this paper (see Raj & Griffin, 2015; Timothy & Olsen, 2006) although, as noted elsewhere (Sharpley, 2009; also, Sharpley & Jepson, 2011), the issues addressed can be categorised under four broad headings: (i) the historical development of religious tourism (for example, Swatos & Tomasi, 2002); (ii) the flows, characteristics and activities of religious tourists, including the contrasting behaviour of religious and non-religious tourists at sacred sites (Rinschede, 1992; Collins-Kreiner & Kliot, 2000; Poirá *et al.*, 2003; McKelvie, 2005; Collins-Kreiner & Gatrell, 2006); (iii) the negative consequences and management implications of religious / spiritual tourism, including both cultural impacts (the commoditisation of religious culture, and the violation of the sanctity of sacred places) and physical impacts on the natural and built environment (Shackley, 1999, 2001; Olsen, 2006); and (iv) the economic potential of religious tourism, in terms of both the economic development of the local area around sacred sites (Jackowski & Smith, 1992; Gupta, 1999; Vukonić, 2002) and the preservation of sacred sites themselves (Shackley, 2002).

The dominant focus of this literature on the practical / functional aspects of religious tourism is understandable, particularly given the potential economic returns accruing from the effective touristic marketing and management of religious sites, events and experiences. Immediately, however, two points arise. First, many of the issues are relevant to all forms of heritage or cultural tourism; as Shackley (2006) notes, religious or spiritual tourism is often seen as a subset of cultural tourism and, thus, many of these issues are generic, implying a certain ‘fuzziness’ or lack of distinction between religious and other forms of tourism. This, in turn, implies that religious tourism can only be defined as such from the perspective of individual tourists, their understanding of or adherence to religion and religious beliefs, and their motives for visiting religious places or engaging in religious activities.

Second, and as observed in the introduction to this paper, religious tourism can be considered from two perspectives: an anthropological (primarily western, tourism-centric) perspective and a theological perspective. Inevitably, current research adopts the former; few if any attempts have been made to locate the analysis of religious tourism



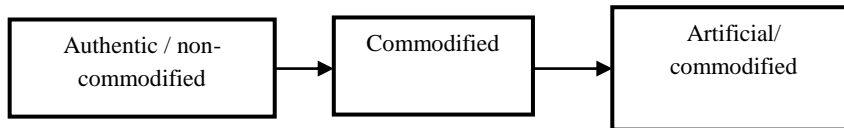
within a theological context and, as a consequence, little account is taken of the changing attitudes towards, or the role of, religion and spirituality in modern societies and the consequential implications for the supply of or demand for religious tourism. For example, religion may be defined, albeit in specific societal contexts, as an institutionalized or organized system of beliefs and practices that some or all of the members of that society adhere to, typically manifested in obligatory behaviours or rituals (Levin, 1979) and framed by a belief in one or more supreme gods or deities. Indeed, 'almost all people who follow some form of religion believe that a divine power created the world and influences their lives' (Vukonić, 2000: 497). Hence, to be religious is to be spiritual although, as discussed later in this paper, to be spiritual is not necessarily to be religious. However, not only do religions vary from society to society in terms of ritual, meaning, influence and symbolism (and many contemporary societies are becoming increasingly secular), but 'new' religions evolve which embrace new rituals, spaces / places and practices (Raj, 2008).

The implication is, of course, that it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine an identifiable or measurable sector of the overall tourism market that can easily be referred to as 'religious tourism'. Indeed, 'the world's religions find it... hard to formulate a principled theological position to the phenomenon [of tourism]' (Cohen, 1998). Different religions are more or less ambivalent to strangers; some Islamic countries have little interest in welcoming non-Islamic visitors, with consequential implications for the scope of tourism in those countries (Poirier, 1995), whilst Christianity and Buddhism are more tolerant in their provision of hospitality to strangers (Cohen, 1998). Moreover, whilst Roman Catholicism does not deny the phenomenon of religious tourism, other religions, such as Buddhism and Islam, do not accept the intermingling of profane and religious motives in travelling (Vukonić, 1996) and, hence, implicitly reject the concept of religious tourism. Thus, religious tourism is 'case specific'; it can only be understood within the context of specific religions, cultures, societies and tourists.

At the same time, the increasing focus on religious tourism by destinations seeking to optimize their economic returns inevitably transforms, to a lesser or greater extent, a religious / cultural experience into a commodified experience (Raj, 2008). Reference has already been made to the commercialization of pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia, where the pilgrim's spiritual experience is potentially being transformed into a touristic experience. However, this is not the only example. From the provision of catering and retail services within cathedrals (or indeed, the imposition of charges to visit one – see Hobson, 2010), package tours to religious destinations such as Lourdes, the Vatican or Jerusalem

(Triantafyllidou *et al.*, 2010) or the transformation of originally religious experiences into tourism products, such as the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage (González & Medina, 2003), to the representation of religion in movies (Smith, 2001) or the postmodern recreation of religious places / event, such as the ‘Holyland Experience’ in Orlando, Florida, religion and religious experiences are taking on the aura of a packaged commodity. Indeed, it is possible to envisage a continuum of religious sites and experiences, from the authentic to artificial, as in Figure 1:

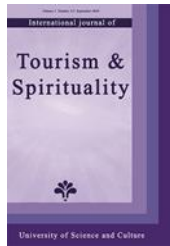
Figure 1: From authentic to artificial religious sites and experiences



The important point is that religious tourism, as a specific form of touristic experience, is evolving and complex; it is, perhaps, no longer sufficient to define it simply as tourism that is ‘motivated either in part or exclusively for religious reasons’ (Rinschede, 1992: 52). Not only is the concept of religion and, by inference religious places, events and experiences, becoming broader, but also the touristic focus of many religious tourism destinations and attractions is coming to the fore. That is, they are becoming commodified, with significant (and as yet under-researched) implications for the religious tourism experience. And as the next section discusses, the relationship between tourism, religion and spirituality has further evolved as religion and spirituality themselves have become more distinct phenomena.

From religious tourism to tourism as religion

Since the late 1970s and, in particular, Dean McCannell’s (1976) assertion that the modern tourist is a secular pilgrim, attention has been increasingly paid to the extent to which contemporary tourism offers a spiritual dimension or, more specifically, represents a (secular) sacred journey. Putting it another way, the contemporary tourist may be considered to be on a spiritual quest (Smith, 1989), a search for personal meaning or spiritual fulfilment through participation in tourism, an argument that follows recognition that the secularisation of modern societies may ‘conceal the sacralisation of previously profane activities’ (Allcock, 1988: 33). In other words, as Durkheim (2008) first suggested, when scientific knowledge and rationality supersedes institutionalised religion there remains a need for ‘mythological representations’ and, as a consequence, societies



and individuals seek meaning in experiences and practices beyond traditional, organised religion. And of course, as widely suggested in the literature, tourism is one such secular substitute for religion (Brown, 1998; Graburn, 1989; Haq & Jackson, 2006; Olsen, 2006; Sharpley, 2009; Timothy and Olsen, 2006).

Inevitably, perhaps, the relationship between tourism and pilgrimage has been explored at some length, the two phenomena being considered structurally similar with respect to the stages of the journey – the separation stage, the liminal stage at the destination and the reintegration, or return home, stage (Turner & Turner, 1978). Moreover, they are also functionally similar in that they both represent sacred as opposed to ordinary, obligated, profane time, or the transference of the individual from an ordinary into another, non-ordinary state of existence, a condition of liminality that is seen by some as fundamental to the contemporary spiritual experience offered by tourism (Graburn 2001; Passariello, 1983; Preston-Whyte, 2004). Interestingly, relatively few attempts have been made to verify empirically this structural-functional relationship between tourism and pilgrimage, one notable exception being Laing and Crouch's (2011) study on frontier tourism. Their work is returned to later in this paper but first it is important to review briefly the transformation in the social significance of religion and spirituality that underpins the alleged adoption of tourism as a quest for spiritual fulfilment in contemporary society.

According to Brown (1998: 1), spirituality has 'become a kind of buzz-word of the age. . . that describes what is felt to be missing rather than specifying what is hoped to be found. . . The spiritual search has become a dominant feature of late twentieth-century life; a symptom of collective uncertainty'. Indeed, it is this uncertainty, or a sense of anomie or placelessness, that, for MacCannell (1976; 1989), transforms the tourist into a pilgrim searching meaning and reality elsewhere. Conversely, others argue that spirituality has always been a subjective element of human existence. Either way, it is generally accepted that over the last century or so, western societies have witnessed a 'shift in the sacred landscape' (Heelas & Woodhead, 2005: 2). More specifically, the modernisation of society has been accompanied by a process of secularisation as evidenced by a decline in the perceived relevance of and adherence to traditional religious institutions and practices (Brierley, 1999; Lambert 2004; Stark, Hamberg & Miller, 2005) whilst, in particular, there has been a decrease in the influence and role of the church, an institution that offered stability, cohesion and spiritual guidance to its followers (Wuthnow, 1998). Consequently, it is suggested that contemporary society,

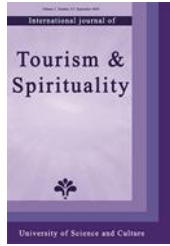
arguably set adrift with no moral compass (Houtman & Aupers, 2007), has come to be defined by a search for spirituality.

This is not to say that the quest for spiritual meaning and fulfilment is a recent phenomenon, for spirituality is fundamental to traditional religious belief in a higher being external to the self (Vukonić, 1996); that is, to be religious is to be spiritual and hence, religion and religious practice has always been an expression of spirituality. It is also not to say that increasing secularisation has resulted in a religious vacuum in society. Indeed, as Heelas and Woodhead (2005) observe, there is evidence of an increasingly widespread desire within society to sustain and nurture spiritual health. In other words, religion is, in a sense, not in decline but taking on a new form; it has become de-institutionalised (Harvey, 1993) and is manifested in a variety of individualistic and group spiritual practices unencumbered by traditional religious institutions, prescribed theologies and rituals and communal responsibilities. Putting it another way, spirituality may be thought of as a postmodern manifestation of religion, an individualistic search for meaning and harmony and a connection with the world (Pargament, 1999).

Nevertheless, religion and spirituality are not synonymous. Certainly, from a theological perspective the increasing focus on spirituality may be considered evidence of a transformation in or evolution of religious practice, not least because many definitions suggest that spirituality embraces both the individual search for meaning and a belief in a higher / supreme power (Dyson, Cobb & Forman 1997; Kale, 2004; Miner-Williams, 2006; Zinnbauer, Pargament & Scott, 1999). However, people may seek or have what they consider to be spiritual experiences without holding religious beliefs or a belief in higher being (Heelas, 1998). For instance, recent research has revealed that, at least in Britain:

Spiritual beliefs are not the preserve of the religious. . . a majority of non-religious people hold spiritual beliefs. This is particularly evident when it comes to non-traditional forms of religious beliefs, where it seems to make very little difference whether someone considers themselves religious or not (Theos, 2013: 25).

Similarly, Hay and Socha (2005) identify the paradox that, despite the alleged secularisation of contemporary society, there is evidence of an increase in reported spiritual experiences. This they put down to the fact that 'spiritual awareness [is] natural and universal within the human species' (Hay and Socha 2005: 607). In other words, as Willson, McIntosh and Zahra (2013) discuss at length, to be human is to be spiritual; one's spirit is the essence of who one is and, inevitably, all humans are engaged purposefully or otherwise in a spiritual quest, a search for meaning.



This all points to the fact that although tourism may indeed be a quest for or may result in spiritual fulfilment, it is again not a simple relationship, not least because 'spirituality' can be variously defined. In other words, what tourism is a quest for (broadly, 'spirituality') is open to interpretation, depending on how the concept of spirituality is understood. For example, from the preceding discussion it is evident that being spiritual or experiencing spiritual fulfilment does not necessitate 'religious' beliefs or a belief in a higher power. Usefully, for example, Heelas and Woodhead (2005) expand on their concept of a shift in the sacred landscape referred to above by suggesting that the more traditional spiritual 'life as' (that is, life lived as an expected, obligated role conforming to a transcendent authority) has been relegated in favour of a 'subjective life' lived in accordance with an individual's inner needs, desires and capabilities. In other words, there is evidence in many spheres of social life, such as education, health care and employment, that there has been a cultural shift towards a 'person-centred' or 'subjectivity-centred' direction (Heelas & Woodhead 2005: 5) whilst, for individuals more generally, a life lived according to pre-determined expectations or 'in conformity to external authority' is being rejected in favour of a self-determined, inner-directed life, 'not to become what others want one to be, but to 'become who I truly am'' (ibid, p. 3). Moreover, the significance, meanings, relations and connectivities relevant to subjective-life spirituality are also to be found in the real world; hence, spirituality may be thought of simply as a connection between the self and the 'this world', implying that a spiritual relationship exists or is sought between people, 'this world' and, as discussed shortly, specific places.

To summarize then, spirituality as a potential objective or outcome of participation in tourism is not easily definable, but may embrace the following characteristics and questions:

- It is linked with but not synonymous with religion; is spirituality, therefore, distinct from religiousness?
- It is an individual, not collective quest / experience; but is it the essence of being human?
- It is interpreted as a search for meaning. But how and when? Is it a continual (subconscious) quest, or consciously related to specific practices (such as tourism) or life stages / events?
- It may be manifested in a state of transcendence; is it to be outside one's immediate sense of time and place, to view life from a larger, more objective perspective?

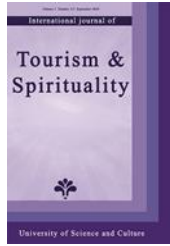
- It is concerned with the subjective life; to be who I want to be.

Overall, however, spirituality is primarily concerned with an individual sense of connectedness. The question remains, however, connected to whom or what, and how? Indeed, as Willson et al. (2013) explore in some detail, connectedness can be addressed or understood from a variety of perspectives. For example, a theological perspective would suggest that spirituality is concerned with connecting with God or a higher being, whereas a sociological perspective points to connectedness with other people. Alternatively, within the psychological context, spirituality is concerned with connecting with the self. All, of course, represent relevant and distinct frameworks for exploring empirically the spiritual dimension of tourism although arguably, a humanist perspective offers the broadest and potentially most fruitful conceptual foundation for research into the spiritual dimension of tourism.

According to Elkins et al., (1988), humanists consider spirituality to be concerned with both the subjective and the material. For example, Mason (2000) cites the Dalai Lama's definition of spirituality as being 'concerned with those qualities of the human spirit such as love and compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, a sense of responsibility, a sense of harmony which bring happiness to both self and others', human qualities which Mason considers to be 'moral and emotional' rather than spiritual. In a similar vein, Fisher, Francis and Johnson (2000: 135) identify four domains within which harmonious relationships are necessary for the achievement of spiritual well-being: (i) the personal, (ii) the communal, (iii) the environmental and (iv) the transcendental. Thus, spiritual fulfilment may be achieved through one or more of self-identity and esteem, inter-personal relationships, a sense of awe and connectedness with the natural environment and a relationship between the self and a higher thing or being (see also Jepson & Sharpley, 2015). In the context of tourism, this in turn suggests that spiritual fulfilment may be found in connectedness with the self, with others (fellow tourists or local communities) and with the environment though, to date, limited research has been undertaken in these contexts (but, see Sharpley & Jepson, 2011). In other words, significant potential exists to explore the spiritual dimension of tourism from a variety of perspectives, all of which may add to our knowledge and understanding of this phenomenon (or indeed, establish limiting parameters to claims of tourism's spiritual or transcendental possibilities).

Tourism: connectedness to place

Arguably, the most logical and potentially fruitful focus for research into the spiritual dimension of tourism lies within the environmental domain or, more specifically, in the

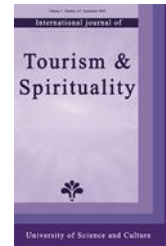


context of the tourist's connectedness to place. Not only is religious tourism in particular, as discussed in the first part of this paper, related to place – it is concerned with religiously motivated travel to places or events that, by implication, are of religious significance – but place is fundamental to tourism more generally. That is, tourism involves by definition travel from one place to another and, hence, the relationship or connectedness between tourists and the places where they both come from and travel to very much determines the nature of the tourism experience, including its potential spiritual dimension.

The importance of place to human existence and identity has, of course, long been recognized; 'To exist at all...is to have a place – to be implaced; ... To 'be' is to be in place' (Casey, 1993:13). Moreover, the definition, meaning and construction of place as well as sub-themes, such as sense of place and place identity, have long been the focus of academic attention (Cresswell, 2014; Manzo, 2003), whilst the spiritual benefits of visiting particular categories of place, such as wilderness (Heinzmann, 2007) or forests (Williams & Harvey, 2001), have also been long explored. However, despite the quite evident relevance of place to the tourist experience, research has been more limited, particularly within the context of spirituality and tourism. Certainly, Cohen's (1979) early phenomenology of tourist experiences drew on the meaning of place as a basis for creating a typology of tourists whilst, more recently, the countryside (Jepson & Sharpley, 2015) and the seaside (Bull, 2006) have both been considered from a spirituality perspective yet, generally, knowledge and understanding of tourists' interaction or connectedness with place within the spirituality dimension remains lacking.

One notable exception, however, is Laing and Crouch's (2011) work on frontier travel, or journeys to the Earth's more remote places involving physical danger and hardship. Relating such journeys to pilgrimage in terms of the nature of the journey, as opposed to its stages, they identify five particular characteristics of pilgrimage that may equally enhance the spiritual significance of frontier travel: (i) sacrifice, danger and hardship; (ii) personal transformation; (iii) enrichment of body and soul; (iv) *communitas*; and (v) return home.

Whilst their research focuses specifically on those who have participated in, or written about, frontier travel, the outcomes may nevertheless be applied to all forms of tourism. In other words, for frontier travellers, the 'frontier' represents the border between the safe, predictable, ordered and, perhaps, tamed world, and the dangerous, unpredictable, unexplored, untamed and challenging places on or beyond that border. In a sense, however, all people, all tourists, perceive that there are frontiers to their safe,

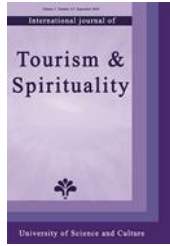


predictable world and existence. Such frontiers may be social, represented by networks of family or friends, or by the security of routine and ritual; the routines of work, obligatory activities and leisure often provide the boundaries or meaning of 'normal' life. Conversely, such frontiers may be geographical; the familiarity of place (or the unfamiliarity of other places) may also represent a boundary to peoples' lives. They may also be defined by an individual's travel experience. Thus, all people have frontiers beyond which, through tourism, they may travel. Consequently, it may be argued that all tourists may potentially experience the spiritual characteristics of frontier travel (or pilgrimage) identified by Laing and Crouch.

Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, the overall purpose of this paper was to highlight the evolving and complex nature of the spiritual dimension of tourism. In other words, although it has long been suggested that an identifiable relationship exists between spiritual and tourism, from the (arguably) specific form of tourism that might be described as 'religious' to the broader and more conceptual notion as tourism as a secular spiritual experience, it set out to demonstrate that extant research and concepts tend to over-simplify what is a more complex and dynamic phenomenon. For example, although religious tourism is typically referred to as an identifiable (and growing) sector of the global tourism market, defining and measuring this sector is complicated by varying and emerging forms of religion and religious practice and different theological perspectives on tourism, whilst the dynamic nature of the religious tourism 'product' – specifically its increasing commercialism / commodification – further challenges the 'purity' or authenticity of religious tourism experiences. Similarly, differing interpretations of spirituality in general, and of connectedness in particular, suggest that identifying and assessing the spiritual dimension of tourism is more complex than the fundamental argument that it represents the quest for 'meaning' in contemporary, inauthentic society. 'Meaning' represents different things to different people and can also be interpreted from varying disciplinary perspectives.

In particular, this paper has revealed that the relationship between tourism, religion and spirituality is not fixed or definable but, rather, 'fuzzy' and dynamic, and open to different disciplinary analysis. At the same time, external influences, such as the role of the tourism sector in creating and commodifying religious tourism destinations and experiences and, more broadly, cultural shifts that impact upon understandings and practices in religion and spirituality, cannot be overlooked whilst the significance of place to the tourism-spirituality relationship cannot be underestimated.



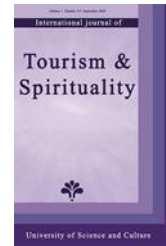
Consequently, there undoubtedly exists the need and potential for further research focusing on, for example:

- establishing definitional clarity
- the relevance of different settings / contexts to spiritual experiences in tourism
- the relationship between tourists 'spirituality' and their life experiences
- comparisons of between western and non-western tourists / tourism
- the evolving meaning of religious tourism

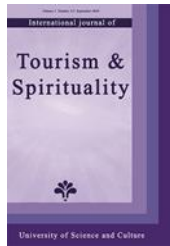
This list is by no means exhaustive. Indeed, the spiritual dimension of tourism offers a challenging yet potentially fruitful research domain which will enhance our understanding of both tourism and the quest for spiritual meaning in contemporary societies.

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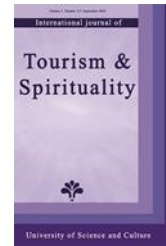
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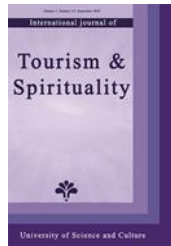
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