

# Applying a Systems (Holistic) Approach to Religious Tourism

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## Biographies

Tadeja has long held a belief in systems based and holistic approaches to understanding the world. Her work has seen Touristica grow into an important centre of learning and research with a truly international and integrative feel.

Alan has worked on the cultures and heritages involved in the constructions of the worlds we live and work in. He enjoys the opportunities to teach at the University of Pannonia and develop BATUKI, the Balaton Tourism Research Centre.

## Abstract

This paper explores the ways in which the rigour of systems thinking can underpin critical research in religious tourism. Following a brief introduction of the principles of analytical systems approaches, the paper elaborates how these principles can drive analyses of religious tourism.

Systems approach is a methodology for complex phenomena research, theory and cybernetics, the disciplines, which play an important role in different fields of scientific research. Hereby we will present the tourism system from systems point of view with special regards on religious tourism.

Systems Approach uses a different process. It puts the system in the context of the larger environment it is a part of and studies the role it plays in the larger whole. The parts are no longer primary focus. The parts are essential but what is more important is the interrelationship between the parts as they work together to fulfil the purpose of the whole system. Systems approach is optimal for understanding interdependency, which requires a way of thinking different from analysis; it requires systems thinking.

## Introduction

Religious tourism is a part of larger system, the tourism system. The description of the system depends on the specific goal and point of view of the researcher. The word “complex” is used only to point out the fact that the problem treated here cannot be expressed only in hard (quantitative) relations and that most relevant values are qualitative. We consider complex systems as networks created of a many components, which interact among each other in a nonlinear way; they may evolve through self-organization, such that they are neither completely regular nor completely random (Sayama, 2015). With a

conception of complex systems we also present a system within which a complexity of interaction among system elements plays a main role. These elements are systems themselves and for this reason the behaviour of a system as a whole can hardly be predicted: the system of systems, which exchange energy and information with their environment while in transit, inflected by internal and external influences. Organisational systems among them the systems of tourism are complex because of the existing relations and nesting of its subsystems.

## **Literature Review**

We believe that this systems approach would prove to be a valuable addition in examining the complex issues, such as those outlined in Raj and Griffin (2015). The systems approach could well help to unpack complex issues such as the examination of religious terrorism (Chowdury et al 2017). The paper features a critical literature review as part of the elaboration of the approach – see bibliography.

## **Methodology**

We believe that the systems approach should be recognised as a viable methodology. Some relevant paradigms to analysis were described in Rosenhead (1989) and Mulej (1992), including: soft analysis, hard analysis of a system, critical thinking, strategic options development and analysis, dialectical theory of system. Analytical (conventional) approach bases on analysis as a three step thought process. It takes apart that which it seeks to understand, then attempts to explain the behaviour of the parts taken separately, and finally it tries to aggregate understanding of the parts in to an explanation of the whole.

## **Results**

The paper argues that the deeper and wider understanding of the systems approach will offer benefits to the study and practice of religious tourism through the promotion of critical and reflexive analysis in a holistic and integrative way.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

Systems approach became a necessity in contemporary life, which we see as a modern complex system composed from variety of other systems and their elements. In the paper we discussed tourism system and its elements or subsystems of religious tourism and from a systems point of view. Religious tourism system we described as so called soft system phenomenon, where people with their actions, knowledge, characters play the main roles represent a complex system of a society. As we reach certain level of complexity, we must search for an optimal methodology to find an optimal dealing with this complexity. The method of systems dynamics, systems thinking and modelling are some of them. Therefore, the anticipated system is much closer to describing the essence of complex systems behaviour. However, the influence of the observer in the process of modelling the complex system is of primary importance. In literature, this problem has not been sufficiently considered. The present article discusses the method of describing and modelling the complex tourism system from the systems and decision-making point of view.

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