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Rethinking pilgrimage routes within the context of safe environments

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Biographies

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Abstract

Safety and security are complex, multidimensional concepts, that have undergone a significant change and are active elements of tourism, with a wide range of components belonging to it: political security, public safety, health and sanitation, personal data safety, legal protection of tourists, consumer protection, safety in communication, disaster

protection, environmental security, getting authentic information, quality assurance of services etc. (Hall et al, 2009). Studying problems of safety and security has become vital for the tourism industry as it needs to understand what are the main factors influencing the perception of safety, the key elements that are treated as belonging to security and safety problems nowadays and how do safety problems influence the tourists decision when they are choosing their holiday destination. The aim of this paper is to design a conceptual research framework taking into consideration two fundamental aspects – the changing motivations, needs and consumption patterns by pilgrims seeking lifestyle quality experiences and the identification of factors associated for ensuring that the undertaking of spiritual journeys take place in the context of safe and secure environments.

Introduction

More than 330 million people become pilgrims each year, whether for hours, days, weeks or months. And numbers are increasing. Ancient routes are popular as never before and new routes are being rediscovered and developed (ARC, 2014). Pilgrimage has stimulated much interest and writing throughout history, parallel to the practice itself. The ''old'' paradigm was predicated on the assumption that religious elements were at the core of the journey but, in recent years, there has been a growth in the number of researchers dealing with various aspects of pilgrimage (Vukoni'c, 1996). Today, pilgrimage is defined differently, and can be considered a traditional religious or modern secular journey. Old pilgrimage routes are being revitalized by emerging destinations seeking a place on the tourist map or for diversification purposes by well-established destinations. But changes seem to be taking place in the motivation for the pilgrimage resulting in different forms of consumption (Fernandes *et al*, 2012). The conceptual framework presented is designed to guide the development of reflection questions to be answered by the research and to show how the components identified by the researchers fit together.

Literature review

Pilgrimage is one of the oldest and most basic forms of population mobility known to human society (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). It is not surprising that a human activity as complex and varied as a pilgrimage has no universally accepted definition. Converting the concept of pilgrimage into an operational definition that will apply equally well to all

cultural settings is difficult, particularly if we consider the diverse types of pilgrimage that can be identified throughout the world, as illustrated by Stoddard (1997) who proposes a set of twenty-seven potential types of pilgrimages (p. 41), which he used to establish a classification of pilgrimages based on three key elements (1) length of journey, (2) frequency of pilgrimage event, and (3) the pilgrimage route.

The features of present-day pilgrims can be represented on a scale that may be described as secular versus spiritual, and tourism versus pilgrimage and the convergence of old-fashioned pilgrimage and current tourism, which have much in common (Vijayand, 2012). Increasingly, motivations for beginning the pilgrimage are varied, dynamic (they usually are transformed during the experience), and sometimes ambivalent usually referring to tourism in one form or another (Digance, 2003, Slavin, 2003; Gómez-Ullate, 2016). Tourists and pilgrims (or religious and secular pilgrims) share itineraries, places and motivations. Routes as well as experiences vary in different aspects –length, duration, frequency, motivations, transportation mean, single person/group, attitude, value systems.

One major new product that has become important for some destinations is the development of cultural routes and itineraries related to pilgrimage routes or religious sites (Fernandes & Richards, 2007). Literature suggests that pilgrimage routes entail bridging tangible and intangible elements of heritage representing the region´s traditions and cultural identity. Emphasis is placed on linkages between the physical surroundings associated to the landscape and the social interaction between pilgrims and local residents as well as amongst pilgrims (and tourists) themselves in their search for aesthetic experiences to satisfy their high-order needs, such as novelty, excitement, enjoyment, prestige, socialization, learning, and contribution to the enhancement of a sense of well-being (Prebensen et al, 2014) in an environment in which pilgrims feel safe. Physical security is no longer the only factor of tourist destination's safety, but other factors such as political security, hygiene, biosecurity and environmental security are determinant factors.

Methodology

The aim of this paper is to design a conceptual framework for rethinking pilgrimage routes taking into consideration three fundamental aspects:

1. understand the concept of pilgrimage and the spiritual fulfilment by traditional religious pilgrims;
2. the changing motivations, needs and behaviour by religious pilgrims and the lifestyle and experiences seeking secular pilgrim (or tourist); and,
3. the identification of factors associated for ensuring that the undertaking of such physical and spiritual journeys take place in the context of safe and secure environments.

A conceptual framework is a set of broad ideas and principles taken from relevant fields of enquiry and used to structure a subsequent presentation (Reichel and Ramey, 1987) and provide clear links from the literature to the research objectives (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984). The framework is based on a literature review to determine how extensively the topic has already been researched and which direction any new research should take.

Results

Religious sites, often located at isolated locations, attract many domestic and foreign visitors. These sites attract mass tourism and are usually over-crowded. Some of the problems that must be addressed are management and monitoring flows and access. To ensure that pilgrims are received and accommodated under good hygienic and public health conditions. Measures must be taken in order to provide food services for pilgrims that observe the dietary rules of their religion, assistance for the sick pilgrims (health services/infrastructures) and correct information about itinerary, places, services, times of ceremonies, restrictions and eventual dangers (Khajuria & Khanna, 2014; UNWTO, 2007).

Suggestions of safety measures associated with each type of risks are classified as:

- ✓ *Trail/path related*. There is a risk for pilgrims but also for drivers when the route includes passage along a main road with vehicle traffic as distractions tend to be the cause of accidents.
- ✓ *Signage and information*. The lack of signs and poor information leads to risks associated with pilgrims getting lost or being misguided..

- ✓ *Services and facilities related*. Risks associated with the inexistence or poor conditions of infrastructure along the route such as accommodation and food establishments.
- ✓ *Crime*. Along the routes, the more isolated areas and walking alone are when pilgrims are most vulnerable.
- ✓ *Gender-based violence*. It seems to be increasing along pilgrimage routes, with women being the most vulnerable.
- ✓ *Health related types*. Weather conditions can pose health related risks.
- ✓ *Food poisoning*. Caused from eating uncovered foods that are exposed to temperatures, lack of hygienic conditions, or sensitiveness to specific ingredients.
- ✓ *Physical burnout and feet problems*. Long hours walking can cause physical fatigue or even burnout, often aggravated by poor physical condition of pilgrims and short preparation.
- ✓ *Massive Human Panic*. At the final destination (the sacred site) pilgrims often encounter overcrowded religious spaces increasing the likelihood of experiencing massive panic.

Pilgrims need to prepare for the journey beforehand and take safety precautions along the pilgrimage, for example:

- ✓ Pilgrims should start preparing months in advance for the journey, through daily walks, jogging and hiking, in order to get physically fit and prepare the body for the physical challenge ahead.
- ✓ In order to avoid carrying unnecessary extra weight, only the right gear should be packed.
- ✓ The hot months should be avoided, but if need be, pilgrims should bring along the essential items to avoid sunstroke.
- ✓ Carrying large amounts of money increases the likelihood of a robbery.

Conclusion and Discussion

The subject of managing pilgrimage routes and pilgrimage sites is a very complex process as it involves numerous actors, much entangled criteria and elements. Physical security is no longer the only factor of tourist destination's safety, but other factors such as

political security, hygiene, biosecurity and environmental security are determinant factors. Stakeholders and policymakers´ initiatives should be directed towards creating and promoting crime-free, safe and secured environments for pilgrimage tourism. Religious organizations, public authorities, route management organizations, volunteer organizations, businesses, etc. can play a crucial role and contribute greatly to keep risk to a minimum and stimulate a much safer environment along the route. Promote a safe pilgrim concept. Additionally, pilgrims can prepare for a safer pilgrimage through preparation before departing on the journey and by taking the appropriate safety precautions along the route.

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