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Management Practices for the Development of Religious Tourism Sacred Sites: Managing expectations through sacred and secular aims in site development; report, store and access

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Through a distillation of practices reflective of the extant literature and socio-economic approaches to inclusive development of sites of religious experiences and worship, we posit that there are seven core conceptual approaches to support evolving site management needs. Therefore, developing sites of special significance necessarily requires the dissemination and sharing of both intellectual and practical contributions to meet those needs in a planned and stakeholder-driven approach. Traditional approaches to development emerged half a century ago with a focus on core competencies and the agreed understanding that open and fair competition would raise quality and assure reasonable profit margins. Creating awareness of services and products and mapping those to our marketing practices are the first two tools in the toolkit. Analysis and synthesis through primary research enables cleric and manager to grasp visitors' and worshippers' needs and develop audiences for sites. Fourthly we present the importance of maintenance and plans for developing sites to accommodate factors in both internal and external environments that acknowledge the requirement to remain competitive. Next, the importance of networks, grappling with the wider community and perhaps establishing a wider, even global, reach, is appraised as important. In seeking to tap into resources traditionally not employed in managing religious and pilgrimage sites we elevate the need for an enterprise culture (this enterprise culture is seen in the other papers in this special issue). The final offer includes dimensions of volunteering, non-traditional support networks, altruism and philanthropy which we name as 'the third way'.

Key Words : religion, pilgrimage, management, development, toolkits

Introduction

The social and community ties that bind us together have always been important identifiers of shared values, identity and goals. It is only more recently that as a business, the community became more divisive of shared values and expectations and possibly more encouraging of individualised and somewhat selfish and unrealistic private goals of citizens within the community (Sander and Putnam, 2010). In the late twentieth century, many people in the West had decided for themselves, and felt that it was determined for them by the very nature of post structural market force models, that they would indeed be 'bowling alone' as Putnam identified (Putnam, 1995). The highly complex and characteristically chaotic agenda for mergers, acquisitions and buy-outs in the business world had implications for us all. Not only were individuals effectively treated as cogs in a large machine by politicians and economists with a view to engaging better competitive advantage for nations, regions and large businesses but also there is evidence of stripping away layers of meaning, identity and uniqueness for the thoughtful, sentient and philosophically belief-driven adherents of faith. What has been termed as a sociological phenomenon of social capital is losing ground to a faith of monotheistic business management.

Thus, in Scandinavian and Germanic nations the reduction in gemeinschaft was partially compensated by a rise in gesellschaft[1]. People were becoming more loyal to corporate belief systems and abandoning the conceptual community of shared values that was typically led by, and physically represented by, a

1. ***gemeinschaft*** is defined as social relations between individuals, based on close personal and family ties; community.
   gesellschaft is defined as social relations based on impersonal ties, such as duty to a society or organisation.

church, temple or sacred gathering space or site. However, this space or site was still at the heart of the community in both literal and figurative senses.

In light of this evolving position of faith and worship:

> [t]*here is* . . . [an emerging] *need for a broader understanding of the nature of religion and how it impacts the lives of global communities. We need to move beyond a conversation about 'what people believe' to better understand how these beliefs contribute to worldviews, how people live their lives, and how they engage politically* (Finlow and Fitzgerald, 2014; 1).

The ensuing decade or so, of the new millennium has given pause for thought about ways to restore beliefs in faith, to re-energise individuals with a real offer of future community prosperity and enshrined values for new forms of capital and goodwill that have traditionally heretofore been embodied in religion and one's faith. Of course, some may well argue that social capital is still formed in different ways and that physical manifestations of a networked society are still present and relevant in the twenty-first century and that we just need to identify whether religion and special places of observation of faith are necessarily part of a new networked society (see Stolle and Hooghe, 2005; Boggs, 2001; Mulgan, 1997, for example). The concern is that as we develop solutions to management problems in the context of religion, pilgrimage, mobility and responsibility for solutions that we identify examples of good practices. We then need to apply those recommendations in context with varying internal and external factors and spaces of concern. Finally we need to access those narratives and suggestions and disseminate good practices to bolster our knowledge base and increase our stores of social capital. This proposed model we referred to as the *Report, Store and Access* (RSA) solution in knowledge transfer and application.

The contemporary analogy for knowledge management, in particular knowledge exchange, storage and retrieval, comes from the business and tourism management pantheon (Hecker, 2012; Howell and Annansingh, 2013). In taking this analogy we concur that RSA action depends upon sharing, for mutual benefit, both explicit and tacit knowledge from tourism operations, local government tourism governance and supply chain partners (Nonaka, 1994). The sense of partnership is important in that individual service providers, be they operators or suppliers, do not necessarily provide intelligence that can be shared throughout the community (or in the tourism analogy, the destination) (Baggio and Cooper, 2010).

New ideas and concepts that are successfully turned into good practices are derived from community or destination knowledge accumulated and shared explicitly and tacitly in a network structure (Chen and Hicks, 2004). Ultimately, these new knowledges are shared, stored and retrieved informally through a loose network structure (Granovetter, 1973). The sharing is embedded within the community or destination, thus creating a resource or repository that can be tapped into by new profit, and not-for-profit, ventures and community groups as desired. It is important that we acknowledge the current informality of such processes. It is equally important that we acknowledge the importance in such a system to provide all stakeholders with equity of access to RSA systems, which minimises any resource burden to public sector bodies.

In a neo-liberal or market forces-model the public sector is a regulatory but not especially innovative force, nor is it charged with being ultimately competitive or discriminatory in delivering shared knowledge. Effective accumulation and dispersion of innovations and practices is found informally, and formally, through networks (Xiao and Smith, 2010). Repositories of new knowledge in tourism operate in parallel to emerging destination knowledge in religion and pilgrimage. Churches, temples, tranquil and special places of worship are now sharing knowledge how best to provide service and support in an ecumenical manner. What we identify in communities of good practice is the capacity and expectations of maintaining RSA models (Shaw and Williams, 2009).

Critical to the success of providing services for sacred and secular visitors to sites of significance for worship, culture and heritage, and recreation is the ability, capacity and commitment of site guardians and managers to the needs of those visitors (Morpeth, 2011; Olsen, 2006; Shackley, 2003, 2001).

Some practices to enable sustainable development for sites, for communities and wider destinations that can benefit from site development are identified. The essential components of these practices have been developed at various sites, mostly in the developed world. Such good practices do not have universal application, nor do they benefit each and every stakeholder at site, community and destination levels. Varying inputs of socio-cultural, economic, environmental and psychological levers will essentially modify each input according to site. However, the inputs from socio-cultural and economic factors may often skew results for site development in more complicated political arenas - maybe where regionalism has a big role and devolved responsibility and management practices become chaotic in the extreme legacy of millennia of growth and adaptation. What is consistent is the knowledge acquired by stakeholders. It is this new knowledge, freely accessible and transferable in the public domain that is important to be reported, stored and accessible. A true site development process will inevitably contain new knowledge that should be retained for future generations. A learning destination can deliver successful site development; it can also generate transferable knowledge that needs a repository and a team that can make that repository work well to inform the values, beliefs, strategies, reflections and reviews that all sites endure during the development process (Senge and Scharmer, 2008). A learning destination is at the heart of contemporary tourism management and at the heart of religious site development action (Senge (1993) provides a useful outline of ways in which this learning can be managed).

In this *Special Issue* we explore the three components of successful management on a spatial and political basis. Some sites, such as Manresa in Catalonia, are specifically targeted by politicians and clergy to receive benefits from the reporting, storage and accessing of management successes. Other sites, such as Mount Paiko in Greece, are as yet untapped by stakeholders for sacred or secular purpose but evidently have considerable potential for contribution to wealth and wellbeing of communities that support and value religious sites.

Some of these destinations are located in the developed world, others are scattered and dispersed throughout emerging destinations and fast-developing communities. These emerging destinations have exceptional intellectual and physical resources and narratives to relate. This text focuses our attention on these and at the same time proposes special studies of best practices for all to emulate.

The lens that will be used is socially constructed using mobility and liminality at its centre (Olsen, 2002). Suppliers acknowledge the centrality of consumer flexibility, individualism and mobility. Destinations reflect the liminal heart of the experience and should aim, as we find, to match the sacred and secular purpose and the motivation to continue and co-create special experiences.

Management practices in case studies and using tools featured in this edition relate very much to the operational areas of organisations providing services for clients that we will inevitably name as visitors or worshippers (see the Konya Museum in Turkey). The practices are broadly defined through their operations management, research and planning, human resources, finance, marketing and sales promotion. In addition, we highlight policy and strategy practices that have come to be devolved from centre or core of governance to the bottom-up approach of post-structural policy, planning and strategic discourse (Amore and Hall, 2016; Wiltshier, 2016).

Additional complexity and depth to the development of these elements of management reflects the beliefs, values, ethics, structure and governance of various religions and the degree of engagement in multi-faith and espousing of ecumenical values and practices. Therefore, some simplistic approaches to meeting traditional post structural discourse such as competitive advantage, market-force and neoliberalism, necessarily become problematic. Approaches such as the weighting of business management approaches, third sector policy and practice and wider community governance and devolved responsibility for socio-cultural development must be considered when the management of religious tourism sites is promulgated.

Interestingly, a key focus is identity - this ranges from branding, responsibility for governance, communication of identity, brand and purpose, to a wide audience of diverse interests, needs and presumed benefits. Although issues relating to operations, human resources and finances as well as research and development should not be ignored the quixotic, inimitable even unique, messages that we bring through identity and branding are fundamental to the drivers of strategy and management of all aspects of organisations. These relevant parallel business functions are equally important to the eventual success of managed religious sites but our focus, through an emergent team of scholars concerned with religious development, is on the very basic issues of how such sites should reach agreement on ways forward in agreed identity, while also reflecting the heritage of millennia.

A guide for best practice in tools for managing site development is presented. These tools are driven by the need to provide / document a coherent, if not always comprehensive, overview of management enablers and barriers using lenses from a wide variety of experiences .

In terms of discourses this paper, and the entire Special Issue, is focused on traditional social constructivism and lenses such as actor-network and structure agency (Jenkins and Dredge, 2012). Methodologies used include participant observation, professional conversation, critical incident analysis - these have been explored, applied and reflected in the research.

Discussion and Analysis

Creating awareness of services and products

Relational as opposed to transactional marketing has long been suggested as a way towards building a stronger base market to drive consumers to services. Conceptually the activity requires organisations to be more aware of their networks, partnerships - some in supply-chain management, and others in community development collaborations - and to participate in elements of customer relationship management activity. Inevitably religion has some barbs that might prevent easier adoption of relational marketing with ministry and sacred purpose. Proselytiation is an important, often overlooked component of modern practice. In the Church of England there is a mission-based management perspective emerging from ecumenical discussions and opportunities (Mottner, 2008; Barbour, 2004). However, this proselytization is dependent on informed practices within ministry that are guided by theological conversations and multi- or inter-faith dialogue and dogma, seldom driven by pragmatic marketing approaches. In this paper we comment and reflect on the nature of theology and how best we can use these approaches, contained in religious dogma, to create and build upon a basis of services marketing. This services marketing approach has elements of stakeholder theory, valorisation theory, hegemonic theory and power theory.

Reflections on marketing practices at sites

Without doubt the most favoured approach to development is predicated upon marketing practice and marketisation theory. Religion and its physical manifestations are seldom used in a market or marketised approach, as commercial, political and physical gains are inherently contra-indicative of outcomes that meet the criteria of ministry and beliefs.

Adherents of religious dogma are effectively the best disciples of a marketisation approach by nature of their complete immersion in sacred spaces and religious sites. Word-of-mouth marketing is a process and a tool that is seldom used effectively by religious managers but used almost too effectively by charismatic and enterprising individuals. The midpoint of these two extreme approaches deserves further attention. The focus on marketing must be necessarily bound by sacred, ethical and theistic limiters. Such a focus needs further exploration, modelling and empirical evidence collection to ensure co-creation approaches to site development are not contrary to ministry and worship (Lo Presti and Petrillo, 2010).

Development of audiences for sites

Enthusiastic researchers recognised early that religious sites are desperately in need of income streams for maintenance and development in a purely structural and physical sense. The development of sites is traditionally the responsibility of the worshipper working in a lay role alongside the ministry team in the Christian faith. Therefore, audience development in a sacred sense has long been seen as critical to the healthy religious site; this is not a new phenomenon or new practice. What is apparent is that religious sites are attractive to a wider audience as part of individuals' need to belong, to associate, to consider worship, to grow as spiritual and sentient beings and to maintain evidence for all as sites that are central, relatively stable, protected physically (except in times of strife and disruption) and evidence of shared values and beliefs.

> *Local communities, faith groups and government actors often do not share sufficiently language and discourse on issues of mutual concern. Faith groups need to bridge this gap by enabling effective communication and better understanding of their situatedness vis-à-vis conventional policy issues and frames* (Finlow and Fitzgerald, 2014:3).

What has therefore been missing is the ability to articulate the perceived value for wider audiences of the sites. Those with special responsibility for proselytization, ministry and protection of faith adherents and their places of gathering and worship have seldom considered the need to develop non-sacred audiences. Typically, they fail to develop the opportunity to demonstrate to those that are essentially secular visitors, the refreshed agenda of ministry or the solutions for community problems and ways of dealing with community issues that can arise by either participation in worship (a traditional role now expanded) or participation in what formerly were peripheral activities and seldom included in mission. The clergy is aware of the need for audience expansion but in a business management organisation context seldom has capacity or even the will and intent to expand audiences for peripheral purpose (to ministry) (see Irvine, 2005, for an example). These peripheral objectives to ensure site maintenance and development need wider engagement with the lay community and with practitioners and secular visitors' concurrence in meshing secular objectives with those established in the moving aims and objectives of faith. This is proven to be the case with Christianity and is possibly now proven to be important to other faiths as well. Our evidence is indicative of a shift in management responsibility from audience development to audience approval and enthusiasm by a melding of sacred with secular management teams at the helm and with the approval and encouragement, both explicitly and implicitly of religious leaders and clergy.

Development Issues and competitive environment

Although many sites are undoubtedly aware of the pressures brought about by competition for market share and the need to provide services that meet or exceed clients' expectations in worship and visits, there is room for a view on meeting and exceeding expectations, in a competitive and market-forces model.

An early view has been expressed through contemporary reflections on Mission. The view reflects the need to be competitive regarding expectations of worship, while meeting the social and personal needs of the sacred audience. However, in the past two decades, more so as pressures mount to fund conservation, regeneration and preservation of the fabric of churches and sites, awareness of the need to offer a competitive service has become apparent. It is becoming clear that sites are also aware that traditional approaches to managing in a commercial environment are necessary. Skills and competencies of commercial staff are seldom found at the heart of religious sites. However, more and more sites are building capacity through engaging resources for commercial approaches within their organisation. There are exemplars of such practices and the sharing of the required knowledge and skills are integral to effective site development (Sučić, 2009).

The networked site

The successful religious site manager must align resources to capitalise on the relationships already created in both sacred and secular organisations. By aligning resources, people, communications and social-media tools, today's site has an advantage in promulgating ministry and in providing solutions for the dispossessed, disadvantaged and bemused in society. The concept of joining more actors to more networks has a long pedigree in the commercial environment and in the social milieu. Our networked site can rely on partnerships to underscore the importance not only of ministry but of ancillary services provided to those in need and to those who seek meaning and identity through their relationships with sites. Competitive advantage is allied with the networked organisation. In this Special Issue we see that the Via Francigena and the Central Macedonian communities are tapping into a series of new networks to empower the stakeholders wishing to elevate the visibility of their trail. Several exemplars of good practices in employing networks are extant (Timur and Getz, 2008; Beaumont and Dredge, 2010).

Connecting entrepreneurs and the site

In addition to using new networks in a commercial sense and to obtain benefit from apparent competitive advantage our site must engage a wider audience of entrepreneurs. The exchange between enterprising individuals and site purpose (or church mission) is critical for sharing goals and identifying, for supply chain stakeholders as well as sacred and secular customers, the benefits and wider community offers that sites already possess and now plan to expand to new customers and third sector partners such as volunteer groups (Moscardo, 2014; Iannaccone, 1998; Morgan *et al*., 2002; Duff, 2009).

Third sector partnership benefits

We have ongoing concerns for special places of pilgrimage and worship that cannot 'pay their way':

> *Religious beliefs, practices and behaviour play no role in the life of homo- economicus* (Iannaccone, 1998:1491).

We are still trying to develop sites in an environment that is implicitly trying to avoid counting the costs associated with developing for a wider audience that is not specifically focused upon mission and sacred purpose. However, the importation of further partners in the site development process can excite third sector groups including not-for-profits and volunteers (Mayo *et al*., 2009).

Small changes can produce big results

Inevitably major changes in our approach to managed development in religious sites attracts criticism and engender dubiousness in key stakeholders; not just sacred stakeholders but also the secular audience we are attempting to develop. In some senses, nuanced by reflection on sacred purpose or mission, we can see that incremental change can be attracted by small changes in the site itself (see Senge, 1993; 63 for principles). The idea that small changes can leverage greater adaptation and bigger changes has been developed for organisations and destinations over more than two decades. In these papers we relate the conceptual leverage of change to the practice of volunteering, of third-party engagement, of aspects of human growth through community development practices and identifying multiple roles for stakeholders that do not overload the practitioners.

Examples, however, can be found where sites of worship are working successfully in conjunction with local tourism authorities. At one end of the world the regional tourism office in Bendigo, Australia recently featured the Sacred Heart Cathedral in a tourism promotion on Facebook. Whereas in Portugal in the town of Fatima, the tourism industry is inextricably linked to the religious sites within the area.

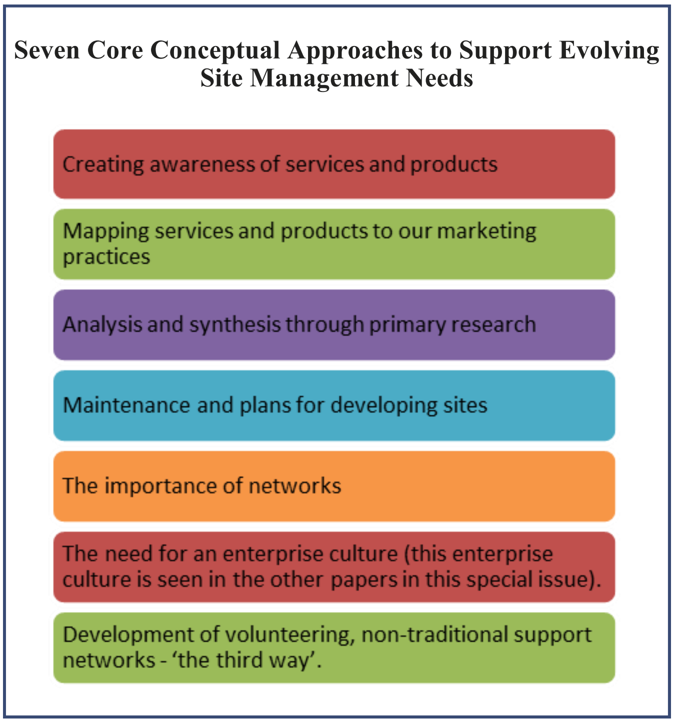
Most religious sites have been in existence for long periods of time, in some cases millennia, so it is important that innovations in both the product offering and the use of technology are considered to meet current market demand (Hjalager & Flagestad, 2010). Audio tours have been in use for decades but many of today’s visitors expect to be able to use their own devices to get an enhanced experience at tourism sites (see Enongene and Griffin, 2016 for a discussion of such technology). Another characteristic recognised by Hjalager and Flagestad (2010) is the desire of tourists to experience rather than just see, to immerse themselves into the site. In order for religious sites to achieve these aims, partnerships need to be formed with those offering expertise in the required areas.

In the formation of such partnerships and networks, it has been noted that personal relationships are the most beneficial connections to ensure positive outcomes (Beritelli & Laesser, 2011). It is through people engaging each other that bonds are then formed, the outcome of which is their institutional networks connecting. The importance of building networks composed of both public and private bodies, such as state authorities and religious bodies, in managing tourism sites has also been noted (Dredge, 2006).

When managing relationships between tourism entrepreneurs and the local community, Moscardo (2014) suggests that there needs to be strong leadership and governance measures in place in order to achieve goals that will benefit the community. It is also suggested that skills be built within the community to sustain any benefits that are initially gained. Dredge (2010) makes the case that it should be government that acts as the mediator between tourism entrepreneurs and local communities and also takes a role as a facilitator of development.

Conclusion

Over the past fifty years social scientists have worked using largely socially constructivist approaches to managing the experiences of visitors and worshippers at sites of special significance for audiences that are both sacred and secular. Our purpose is to identify factors (see Figure 1) that can improve the existence of special sites of worship and pilgrimage for both suppliers and consumers. It is not just increased awareness of tensions over the purpose of visit but more about the responsibility for conservation and intensification of usage by increasing numbers of consumers. It is indeed this usage that necessitates an approach to managing sites through the pragmatic use of critical success factors that we term a toolkit for regeneration and heightened awareness.



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