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Review of: The Politics of Religious Tourism, edited by Dino Bozonelos and Polyxeni Moira

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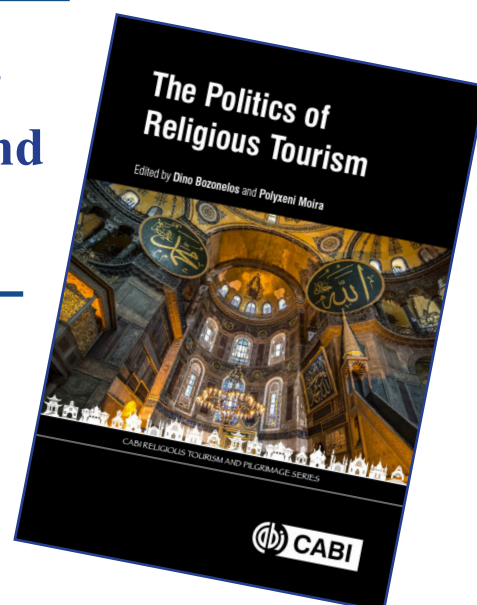
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Review of: *The Politics of Religious Tourism*, edited by Dino Bozonelos and Polyxeni Moira

Bozonelos, D. and Moira, P. (Eds.) (2023) *The Politics of Religious Tourism*. Published by CABI, Oxfordshire, UK, 2023. Hardback: ISBN-13: 9781800621718, 248 pages - DOI: 10.1079/9781800621732.0000. Price: EUR 115.00 (Hardcover).



The Politics of Religious Tourism, edited by Dino Bozonelos and Polyxeni Moira, is a timely contribution to religious tourism and pilgrimage literature. Its distinctiveness lies in its approach, which analyses this tourism phenomenon through the lens of political sciences. This novel perspective can significantly enhance our understanding of the power dynamics in religious destinations, a topic that, as the editors rightly point out, has yet to be fully explored in the literature of religious tourism.

In their introductory chapter, the editors establish the book's theoretical underpinnings, identifying two strands of research in the politics of religious tourism: one that addresses the political context of sacred sites (the most common in the literature) and one that explicitly integrates theories from political sciences into religious tourism, a less developed area to which this book seeks to contribute.

Some of the issues the book strives to address include the exercise of power in religious tourism destinations, the power relations between public authorities, religious institutions and private sector actors, and the fragmentation between institutions, affecting religious tourism and pilgrimage governance. These concerns are less frequent in the literature or limited to the management aspect of the sites, while the role of political institutions through public policy is essential (chapters 1, 5 and 9).

The volume features 16 chapters divided into three parts, with contributions from 18 authors spanning political

sciences, cultural tourism, geography, law, management, economics, sociology, and anthropology. The case studies and examples cover a variety of denominations, settings, and scales, from specific sacred sites to national and international contexts, including transnational pilgrimage routes.

The first part, entitled 'The Politics of Religious Tourism', directly applies political science theories to religious tourism. Chapters in this section discuss concepts such as contentious politics and the politicisation of sacred sites, access to religious sites as a human right, religious soft power (and soft disempowerment), and institutional logics of decision-making.

The second part delves into the 'Governance of Religious Tourism', discussing the role of institutions, such as international organisations (UNWTO, UNESCO, Council of Europe) in shaping a global framework for religious tourism, the State-Church governance of religious tourism in EU member-states, the multi-scale governance of transnational pilgrimage routes, and evidence-based policies to promote faith tourism.

Finally, the third part of the volume, entitled 'Crisis, Politics and Sacred Sites', focuses on crisis management, with a particular focus on the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on the governance of sacred sites. The chapters provide comparative analyses of how countries

and actors coped with the management of holy places and the practice of rites, evidencing ‘new and transitory geographies of worship’ beyond the sacred buildings (Castronuovo in chapter 12, p.166), the health and well-being benefits of pilgrimage besides its impact on economic development (chapter 13) and the need for policies to promote cultural and religious itineraries as sustainable tourism models (chapter 14).

In the concluding chapter, the editors identify a number of areas with potential for future research in the politics of religious tourism. This invitation to scholars from different disciplines to build upon core and peripheral concepts from political sciences and public policy discourse applied to religious tourism is a testament to the book’s potential to inspire further academic exploration in this field.

This book will be of great interest to academics in religious tourism and practitioners in the governance of religious sites and pilgrimage routes. Its topics, all highly relevant in the current geopolitical context, where the intersection between religion and politics occupies a central stage, will engage readers with their significant present and future implications for religious tourism and pilgrimage.

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