



Redefining Religious Tourism: Navigating The Paradigm Shift Between Sacral and Secular Dimensions

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the transformation of religious tourism, exploring the nuanced paradigm shift from exclusively sacral experiences to those encompassing both sacral and secular elements. Over recent decades, this shift has been catalyzed by socio-cultural changes and the commercialization of the tourism industry. We analyze the impact of globalization, secular consumer preferences, and technological advancements on religious destinations, which have increasingly merged traditional spiritual objectives with secular, recreational activities. The research underscores the complex interplay between maintaining religious sanctity and accommodating modern tourist expectations. This study proposes a redefined approach to managing religious tourism sites that balances spiritual depth with commercial appeal, ensuring sustainable and culturally sensitive development. Our findings offer significant implications for stakeholders in cultural and religious tourism, suggesting strategies for embracing these changes while preserving the spiritual heritage of religious sites.

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INTRODUCTION

Religious tourism, also known as faith-based travel, has emerged as a significant form of journeying that integrates spiritual and cultural experiences with elements of traditional tourism. This type of tourism is increasingly popular worldwide, with travelers seeking to connect with their religious beliefs and explore new destinations imbued with spiritual meaning (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). Religious tourism can be divided into two main subtypes: pilgrimages and religious sightseeing. Pilgrimages involve travel to sacred sites or places of worship for spiritual enhancement and participation in religious events or rituals. This practice, ancient in its origins, remains a critical aspect of many global religions, including Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism (Padin, Svensson, & Wood, 2016; Timothy & Olsen, 2006). On the other hand, religious sightseeing focuses on visiting monuments and religious artifacts, motivated by interests in religion, art, architecture, history, and personal heritage (Timothy & Olsen, 2006).

Compared to other forms of tourism, religious tourism uniquely emphasizes spiritual experiences and connections with religious traditions. It often involves visits to sacred places and participation in religious rituals and ceremonies, offering deeper insights into specific religions and their cultural practices. Religious tourism also differs from other tourism forms in its focus on spiritual growth and personal reflection. This might also include a sense of community and shared experiences among travelers, as many pilgrimages are communal events that bring people together in pursuit of spiritual enrichment (Collins-Kreiner, 2018). In short, religious tourism differs from other tourism types in its emphasis on spiritual experiences and connection to religious traditions, as well as its potential for personal growth and community development among travelers.

Religious tourism has been an essential aspect of travel for centuries, with people journeying to sacred sites and participating in religious rituals and ceremonies (Jongmeewasin, 2016). However, the nature of religious tourism is continually evolving, increasingly intersecting with secularism and commercialism, thus necessitating a redefinition of its purposes and meanings. The concept of religion as a tourism destination today has shifted due to socio-cultural changes and the development of religious tourism. Initially sacral in nature, religious tourism or pilgrimage has shifted towards a blend of sacral and secular elements (Liro, Sołjan, & Bilaska-Wodecka, 2018).

Pilgrimage centers and religious tourism sites are often developed to be multifunctional, offering additional cultural and tourism facilities for visitors with diverse motivations, including pilgrims, religious tourists, and recreational visitors (Liro, Sołjan, & Bilaska-Wodecka, 2017). Religious tourism, previously considered sacral, has changed and opened up to forms of secular tourism. For this purpose, many religious tourism sites have been physically expanded; existing buildings have been transformed into cultural, service, and tourism facilities to develop spatially and enhance promotional activities (Sołjan & Liro, 2020).

The religious function remains but more to serve non-religious needs, impacting the diversity of visitor profiles and vice versa. All visitors to religious tourism sites require standard comfortable services; they expect tourism and commercial infrastructure to provide satisfactory religious or tourism accommodations (Liro et al., 2017). Therefore, it is important to note that from the perspective of tourists and destinations, travel to religious tourism sites should be treated like other forms of tourism (Naumov, 2020).

In line with Padin, Svensson, & Wood (2016), three categories of visitors to religious sites are identified: (1) traditional pilgrims, typically local people who visit religious sites for worship; (2) visitors on religious tours, such as those coming for pilgrimage needs like Hajj or

Umrah; and (3) mass tourists “ticking off sites on a list,” visitors who come to religious sites to admire or enjoy certain iconic features or merely to have fun, fill leisure time, and relax.

Religious tourism has long been a phenomenon attracting many people from various cultural and religious backgrounds. Yet, in recent years, there have been significant changes in the concepts and perceptions of religious tourism. In modern society, there has been a significant transformation in how people view and experience religious tourism. The traditional concept of religious tourism, based on sacral and spiritual experiences, is beginning to shift. Therefore, it is crucial to understand these changes in the context of the modern era.

The main aim of this study is to examine the dynamics of the paradigm shift in religious tourism between sacredness and secularity. In this context, it is important to explore the factors influencing the shift in the concept of religious tourism, such as the development of the tourism industry and the commodification of religious destinations, changes in lifestyle and more secular tourist preferences, as well as globalization and cultural acculturation. By understanding the paradigm shift in religious tourism, this article aims to provide insights into how this article intends to redefine religious tourism, considering the paradigm shift between sacredness and secularity. A holistic approach will be used to analyze the factors influencing these changes.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research used literature review as the method to gather and analyze data from academic journals, books, and conference proceedings that explore the paradigm shifts in religious tourism, focusing specifically on the integration of sacral and secular elements. Organized thematically, the review covers the historical evolution of religious tourism, its cultural and social impacts, the commercialization effects, and various stakeholder perspectives. Sources were chosen for their relevance to these themes and their contributions to understanding the ongoing transformations within religious tourism. This method facilitates a critical analysis of both converging and diverging viewpoints in the literature, highlighting methodological differences and their implications on findings. The review integrates these insights into broader academic discourses, identifying gaps in current research, and suggesting directions for future studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Paradigm Shift in Religious Tourism

The paradigm shift in religious tourism refers to significant changes in how people perceive, experience, and understand religious tourism. This study pointed the factors that contribute to the paradigm shift in the concept of religious tourism. Firstly, the development of the tourism industry and the commodification of religious destinations play a crucial role in this paradigm shift (Liro et al., 2018). With advancements in technology, improved accessibility, and effective marketing, religious destinations often become commodities within the tourism industry. This can lead to a shift in the focus of religious tourism experiences, where commercial and entertainment aspects may become more dominant than the traditional sacred and spiritual experiences (Mukherjee, Bhattacharjee, & Singha, 2020).

Moreover, changes in lifestyle and more secular preferences of tourists also impact the paradigm shift in religious tourism. Modern society tends to have more individualistic and consumeristic orientations, which can influence their motivations for engaging in religious travel. Tourists may be more interested in entertainment, recreation, or seeking new experiences than in experiences related to the sacred or spiritual aspects (Mukherjee et al., 2020).

Globalization and cultural acculturation also play a significant role in the paradigm shift in religious tourism. In this global era, cultures interact and influence each other. This can lead to changes in practices and perceptions of religious tourism. In some cases, the influence of global culture can replace or influence local traditions within the context of religious tourism (Haller, 2023).

This paradigm shift in religious tourism reflects the complexity of socio-cultural changes and the dynamics of the tourism industry. As religious tourism becomes more popular, it has been commodified and packaged as a commercial product, with sacred sites and rituals marketed as tourist attractions (Hassan, Carvache-franco, & Carvache-franco, 2022). This commercialization has created tension between the spiritual and secular aspects of the experience, as tourists seek both spiritual enhancement and engagement in the commercial aspects of the tourism industry (Haller, 2023). These changes can affect the characteristics, motivations, and experiences of religious tourists.

The future of religious tourism is likely to involve ongoing tension between the spiritual and secular aspects of the experience. As religious institutions and countries continue to utilize faith and spirituality to attract tourists, careful management and regulation are required to ensure that spiritual journeys remain the primary focus of religious tourism (Ibrahim, 2023).

This may require a redefinition of religious tourism, with a greater emphasis on spiritual experiences and a more varied understanding of the role of commercialism and technology in the industry.

In conclusion, religious tourism is undergoing a paradigm shift due to increasing intersections with secularity and commercialism. This shift presents both opportunities and challenges, thus necessitating careful management and regulation to ensure that spiritual journeys continue to be the main focus of the experience.

Dynamics Between Sacredness and Secularity in Religious Tourism

This section explores in more depth the dynamics between sacredness and secularity within the context of religious tourism. Initially, we discuss the concept of coexistence, which is the concurrent existence of sacred and secular aspects within contemporary religious tourism. Contemporary religious tourism often reflects a blend of sacred and secular elements. Although there is secular influence within the religious tourism experience, sacred elements still exist and are valued. This reflects the complex dynamics between these two paradigms (Duda & Doburzyński, 2019). The contemporary experience of sacred spaces can influence the sacred essence, the spiritual essence of a place, and the profanum, the non-religious aspect of a sacred place. The coexistence of sacred and secular elements in religious tourism can create tension between the spiritual journey and the commercial aspects of the tourism industry (Duda & Doburzyński, 2019).

Further, the analysis of how sacred and secular elements influence and interact within religious tourism is discussed. Although there is an emphasis on secular aspects such as comfort, entertainment, and consumption within the tourism industry, sacred elements such as rituals, prayers, and spiritual experiences remain relevant within the context of religious tourism. At the same time, secular influences can also impact the religious experience, whether in terms of changing tourist motivations, shifting preferences, or interactions with local culture.

The interconnection of sacred and secular elements in religious tourism can be analyzed from various perspectives, such as economic, geographical, sociological, and theological (Liro et al., 2018). For instance, in economic or geographical studies, there may be little difference or even synonyms between religious tourism and pilgrimage, while in theological perspectives, there may be maximum accuracy in distinguishing the two (Liro et al., 2018).

A study on Muslim pilgrimages to the city of Mecca revealed that religious motivations are paramount when visiting the holy city, overshadowing secular motivations. Identified were three dimensions of motivation: religious, social, and cultural, with the religious motivation dimension proving to be the most predictive factor of satisfaction and loyalty in religious

visitation behavior to the sacred city (Hassan et al., 2022). Similarly, research conducted by Sopacoly, Lattu, & Timo (2019) on the Sacralitas Waruga: Holy Sites and Cultural Identity of the Minahasa Community showed that the pilgrimage tradition to the tombs at the Riyadlotut Thalabah Sedan Foundation is not just a religious act but also a spiritual experience with deep moral significance for the community. This tradition exemplifies how religious tourism can effectively blend the sacred with the secular, enhancing spiritual experiences while also acknowledging and honoring the historical and cultural contributions of the deceased.

The Al Wahyu Museum in Mecca, for example, offers a digital panorama of the Arabian landscape to millennial Muslim pilgrims, turning the spiritual journey into a commercial experience (Ibrahim, 2023). This illustrates the tension between the spiritual and secular aspects of religious tourism, as tourists seek spiritual enhancement while also engaging in the commercial aspects of the tourism industry.

Another study explored the blurred boundaries between secular memory and sacred space in religious tourism, using cases of Mormon and Unification Faith. This research highlights the complex relationship between the sacred and secular in religious tourism, as it often involves motivations and experiences that are both spiritual and secular (Blonner, 2021).

The study of Wali Pitu, A New Form of Worship Dynamics in Indonesia, underscores the unique intermingling of religious practices, illustrating how the sacredness of Bali as the heart of Hindu culture has facilitated the worship of seven Islamic saint tombs by Hindu community members. This phenomenon exemplifies how sacredness can transcend traditional religious boundaries, effectively blurring the line between the sacred and the secular (Tohari, 2021). Similarly, research on the motivations and experiences of visitors to specific religious sites in the Philippines supports the predominance of religious motives over secular ones. This study found that religious motivations are a very important factor for visitors, significantly more so than secular motives, with the visitor experience predominantly oriented towards spiritual (religious) participation rather than tourism (secular) activities (Rebuya, Lasarte, Amador, & Roca, 2020).

Complementing these findings, a study on the management model of religious tourism based on 'Serenity, Sustainability, and Spirituality' demonstrates how managers can strategically plan and organize tourism to foster a harmonious balance between these sacred and secular elements. By employing strategic planning, asset organization systems, travel guides, and evaluation methods, managers are able to cultivate an environment where religious and secular motivations coexist beneficially (Faletahan, 2019). Together, these studies highlight the complex dynamics within religious tourism, where the integration of sacred and

secular factors can enhance the spiritual and cultural richness of religious sites, thereby enriching the visitor experience. They also showed that the dynamics between sacredness and secularity in religious tourism are complex and varied, involving both spiritual and secular motivations and experiences. The studies also highlight the importance of understanding these dynamics to effectively manage religious tourism and preserve holy sites and experiences for future generations.

However, as religious tourism becomes increasingly commercialized, there is growing tension between the sacred and secular aspects of the experience. Tourists may seek spiritual enhancement and connection with their faith, but they also engage in the commercial aspects of the tourism industry (Hedges, 2014). This intersection can lead to a redefinition of religious tourism, as it becomes less focused on the spiritual journey and more on the commercial experience.

Managing religious tourism is a complex issue that requires careful planning and coordination among various stakeholders. This includes local governments, religious institutions, and tourism operators. Effective management of religious tourism can help preserve the spiritual and cultural heritage of a destination while ensuring that tourists have a safe and enjoyable experience. The future of religious tourism is likely to involve ongoing tension between the sacred and secular aspects of the experience. As religious institutions and countries continue to leverage faith and spirituality to attract tourists, careful management and regulation are needed to ensure that the spiritual journey remains the primary focus of religious tourism. This may require a redefinition of religious tourism, with a greater emphasis on spiritual experiences and a more diverse understanding of the role of commercialism and technology in the industry.

The paradigm shift in religious tourism also has significant implications for the management of tourism destinations. In facing the paradigm shift, managers of religious tourism destinations need to consider the needs and preferences of modern tourists. While maintaining sacred and spiritual values, they must also consider commercial, comfort, and entertainment aspects. A holistic tourism experience can include comfortable accommodation facilities, accurate information about religious sites, support for spiritual practices, and programs that attract tourists with more secular interests.

Despite the paradigm shift, it is important to preserve the cultural authenticity and religious values of religious tourism destinations. Destination managers can implement responsible management practices, including protecting cultural heritage and sacred sites,

involving local communities in decision-making, and promoting deeper education and understanding of traditions and religious beliefs.

Faced with the paradigm shift, destination managers need to innovate in the development of tourism products and experiences. This can include developing tours that combine historical, cultural, and spiritual aspects, as well as providing enlightenment and personal development programs. The use of information and communication technology can also be used to enhance the tourist experience with accurate and interactive information about religious destinations.

Managers of religious tourism destinations need to collaborate with relevant parties, including religious authorities, local communities, and other tourism stakeholders. Strong collaboration can create synergy between sacred and secular aspects and ensure the right balance in destination management. Through good dialogue and cooperation, sustainable management can be achieved, positively impacting all parties involved.

CONCLUSION

Religious tourism represents a dynamic and rapidly expanding field, offering unique spiritual journeys that blend cultural and religious experiences with traditional tourism elements. As this form of tourism gains popularity, it is crucial to take appropriate measures to ensure that it is managed responsibly and sustainably, while also preserving the spiritual and cultural heritage of the destinations visited. Religious tourism is undergoing redefinition as it increasingly intersects with secularity and commercialism. This paradigm shift in religious tourism presents both opportunities and challenges, thus necessitating careful management and regulation to ensure that the spiritual journey remains the central focus of this experience.

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