The geography of pilgrimage and tourism: Transformations and implications for applied geography

Collins-Kreiner, N.*

Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, University of Haifa, Haifa 31905, Israel

Keywords:
Pilgrimage
Tourism
Dedifferentiation
Secular pilgrimage
The visitor experience

Abstract
The aim of this research is to examine the transformations undergone in the research of pilgrimage and tourism and the implications of these types of travel on tourism planning and other economic activities. Case studies exploring four type of pilgrimage are presented: Christian, Jewish, Baha'i, and Buddhist. The paper provides examples of these transformations in the four studies. This paper concludes that, although research on this issue is not sufficiently coherent, much of the literature on this subject does explore several key themes. It also appears that, in the twentieth century, the pilgrimage phenomenon tends toward a blurring of tourism and pilgrimage.

Introduction
Pilgrimage, one of the religious and cultural phenomena most common to human society, is an important feature of the world's major religions: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. A pilgrimage has been defined as, "A journey resulting from religious causes, externally to a holy site, and internally for spiritual purposes and internal understanding" (Barber, 1993: 1). Today, pilgrimage is defined differently, and can be considered a traditional religious or modern secular journey. The phenomenon of pilgrimage is currently experiencing resurgence throughout the world with longstanding shrines still attracting those in search of spiritual fulfillment (Digance, 2003). However, the literature on pilgrimage and religious tourism is still fragmented and lacks synthesis and holistic conceptualization (Timothy & Olsen, 2006).

Pilgrimage is one form of "circulation," a type of population mobility. "Mobilities" constitute a well-known interdisciplinary field of study. Circulation encompasses large-scale movements of people, objects, capital, and information throughout the world, as well as the more local processes of daily transportation, movement through public space, and travel for material things in everyday life. However, while the phenomenon of migration has gained much attention in the literature, different forms of "circulation," and "religious circulation" in particular, have received much less attention (Eickelman & Piscatori, 1990).

Nonetheless, these forms of "circulation" have no less an effect on the environment. This impact stems from the large numbers of participants, their cyclicity, and the large populations whom they affect (Nolan & Nolan, 1989). Pilgrimage also creates other population mobilities such as trade, cultural exchanges, political integration, and the less desirable spread of illnesses and epidemics (Barber, 1993).

Pilgrimages have powerful political, economic, social, and cultural implications, and can even affect global trade and health. Pilgrimage inevitably necessitates spatial movement and, for this reason, stimulates geographers' interest with distances travelled and the phenomenon's affect on behavior. Pilgrimage is also an important subject due to its scope and spatial influence. It is also a primary economic activity for some countries and cities (Barber, 1993; Vukonić, 1996, 2002).
For example, the last twenty years have seen an extraordinary revival of interest in the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. The route known as the El Camino Francés was declared the first European Cultural Route by the Council of Europe in October 1987, and registered as one of UNESCO’s World Heritage Sites in 1993. Many thousands of people each year now make their way, on foot or by bicycle – sometimes on horseback – along the ancient routes (Fig. 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>2,491</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>30,126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>2,905</td>
<td>1999 (Holy Year)</td>
<td>154,613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>3,501</td>
<td>2000 (Jubilee Year)</td>
<td>55,004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989 (Pope’s visit)</td>
<td>5,760</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>61,418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>4,918</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>68,952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>7,274</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>74,614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>9,764</td>
<td>2004 (Holy Year)</td>
<td>179,944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993 (Holy Year)</td>
<td>99,439</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>93,924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>15,863</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>100,377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>19,821</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>114,026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>23,218</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>25,179</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 1. Number of pilgrims at Santiago de Compostela (The Confraternity of Saint James, 2009).

It is estimated that more than two million Muslims make the Hajj – the Muslim annual pilgrimage to Mecca – on a specific date (Fig. 2) and that about one quarter of all tourists arriving in Israel come for religious reasons (Fig. 3). Each year, five million pilgrims go to Lourdes in France, and twenty-eight million Hindu pilgrims go to the River Ganges in India (Singh, 2006).

All of this implies that tourism planners must first of all understand the phenomena with which they are dealing, as well as the participants’ characteristics and desires. In many parts of the world the pilgrimage shapes the nature of economic activity and the design of the public space.

It was only in the 1980s that geographers began to obtain a better grasp of pilgrimage research through their focus on the spatial dimension of the phenomena. Yet, this research was still conducted from the old paradigm that defined pilgrimage as a kind of religious journey. In addition to studying the effects of total distance on movement, geographers have started to examine the routes of movement, catchment areas of pilgrims, as well as answer questions of size and scale, hierarchical relationships, location, and distribution of sacred places. All of these and the development of religious sites constitute some of the topics that contribute to a better understanding of pilgrimages (Bhardwaj, 1997; Stoddard, 1997; Stoddard & Morinis, 1997).

Geographers are beginning to recognize the powerful and contingent roles of religion and spirituality on a range of geographical scales, from the corporeal to the institutional and the geopolitical (Holloway & Valins, 2002). In the introduction to a special section on the geography of religion in a 2006 issue of the Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Proctor stated that “Though religion appears to play a prominent role in the contemporary political and cultural landscape….. relatively few geographers are contributing toward a better appreciation of this phenomenon” (Proctor, 2006: 165), Kong (2001), and Park (1994) expressed a similar criticism. Proctor (2006) also suggests that it is time that geographers offer a special voice on the challenges and opportunities that the realm of religion puts in front of them, given diverse religious expressions across space, place, and landscape.

This article attempts to characterize the different transformations in pilgrimage research and their applied implications. It aims to show how pilgrimage studies have changed their direction on account of new research in the field of tourism,

Please cite this article in press as: Collins-Kreiner, N., The geography of pilgrimage and tourism: Transformations and implications for applied geography, Applied Geography (2009), doi:10.1016/j.apgeog.2009.02.001
underlining the most significant changes that have occurred. This article will also highlight discrepancies between the “old” paradigm, predicated on the assumption that religious elements lie at the core of pilgrimage, and the results of fresh research of secular models of travel, showing alternative and complementary approaches to explain the shifting boundaries between the tourist and the pilgrim.

**Pilgrimage and tourism**

Modern tourism is regarded as one of the newer phenomena in the world but, turning to its origins, we see that it is rooted in pilgrimage. The study of the relationship between religion, pilgrimage, and tourism has frequently focused separately on

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Saudis</th>
<th>Non-Saudis</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>784,769</td>
<td>1,080,465</td>
<td>1,865,234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>774,260</td>
<td>1,168,591</td>
<td>1,942,851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>699,770</td>
<td>1,132,344</td>
<td>1,832,114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>775,268</td>
<td>1,056,730</td>
<td>1,831,998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>571,599</td>
<td>1,267,555</td>
<td>1,839,154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>549,271</td>
<td>1,363,992</td>
<td>1,913,263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>590,576</td>
<td>1,354,184</td>
<td>1,944,760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>610,117</td>
<td>1,431,012</td>
<td>2,041,129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>592,368</td>
<td>1,419,706</td>
<td>2,012,074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>629,710</td>
<td>1,534,769</td>
<td>2,164,469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>573,147</td>
<td>1,557,447</td>
<td>2,130,594</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 2. Numbers of Hajj pilgrims 1996–2006 (*Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Ministry of Hajj, 2009*).

| Main market segments in Israel (Israel, Ministry of Tourism, 2007) |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| Sightseeing 13%         | Pilgrimage 24%  |
| Vacation 13%            | VFR (Visiting |
|                        | friends and   |
|                        | relatives) 36%|
| Other 6%                | Business 8%    |

Fig. 3. Main market segments in Israel (*Israel, Ministry of Tourism, 2007*).

Please cite this article in press as: Collins-Kreiner, N., The geography of pilgrimage and tourism: Transformations and implications for applied geography, Applied Geography (2009), doi:10.1016/j.apgeog.2009.02.001
the issues of religion or tourism, with little equal or comparative treatment of the two together. This is surprising, as the development of tourism is hard to understand without a study of religion and the practice of pilgrimage in ancient times (Timothy & Olsen, 2006; Vukonić, 2002).

Generally, there is a gap in the difference between pilgrimage and tourism from the religious perspective, the perspective of the pilgrims themselves, the tourism industry, and researchers (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). The issue of pilgrim versus tourist must be examined on two levels: first, from the perspective of the religious organizations and the travelers themselves. In this view, pilgrims are generally not considered tourists, or, at least, they are regarded as being different from tourists. This view suggests that pilgrims are not tourists because they travel for spiritual reasons, while tourists travel (or visit a site) for more secular reasons such as curiosity or pleasure. Second, and from the viewpoint of the industry, pilgrims are tourists and should be treated as such. This is relevant for the development of economic activities such as hotels, restaurants, shops, hospices, or religious centers.

Earlier theories concentrated on different typologies of tourists and pilgrims (Cohen, 1979, 1992; MacCannell, 1973; Smith, 1989, 1992). Urry (2001), considers the relation of tourism and everyday life; he maintains that although a difference still exists, it is not clearly asserted in these earlier theories. The roots of this dedifferentiation were evident as early as the 1970s when MacCannell (1973) argued that the tourist is searching for something different, for authenticity.

Since then, research has been dealing with the complicated relationship between pilgrimage and tourism, including the economic, political, social, psychological, and emotional aspects. Researchers have recognized that the ties between the two are unclear. For example, this connection is the subject of Eade’s (1992) article, which describes the interaction between pilgrims and tourists at Lourdes; in Bowman’s (1991) work on the place of Jerusalem in Christianity; and in Rinschede’s (1992) description of tourist uses of pilgrimage sites.

Cohen (1992) also maintains that pilgrimage and tourism differ regarding the direction of the journey undertaken. The “pilgrim” and the “pilgrim-tourist” peregrinate toward their socio-cultural center, while the “traveler” and the “traveler–tourist” move in the opposite direction. This distinction applies particularly to journeys where the destination is a formal pilgrimage center. However, a mixture of features characteristic of both pilgrimage and tourism will often mark journeys to popular pilgrimage centers.

This blurring of boundaries between pilgrimage and tourism is addressed by some sociologists of religion in relation to “tourist” visits to historic European churches and cathedrals (Davie, 2000). Even in a so-called secular, post-Christian culture, Davie finds that tourists who visit European cathedrals and other historic churches – even if part of the so-called heritage industry – have a distinctive approach to visiting religious buildings. First, they view them as public spaces that should be free to access. Second, they tend to view visiting such spaces as different from visits to museums or heritage centers. There is evidence of an unclear search for what might be called some form of “spiritual experience.”

In current usage, the term “pilgrimage” connotes a religious journey, a journey of a pilgrim; especially one to a shrine or a sacred place but its derivation from the Latin peregrinus allows broader interpretations, including foreigner, wanderer, exile, and traveler, as well as newcomer and stranger. The term “tourist” also has Latin origins, namely torus, one who makes a circular journey, usually for pleasure, and returns to the starting point (Smith, 1992). Smith (1992) also claims that today’s use of the terms, identifying the “pilgrim” as a religious traveler and the “tourist” as a vacationer, is a culturally constructed polarity that blurs the travelers’ motives.

Since the 1990s, analysis of this relationship has focused mainly on the similarities and the differences between the tourist and the pilgrim (Cohen, 1992, 1998; Collins-Kreiner & Kliot, 2000; Digance, 2003, 2006; MacCannell, 1973; Smith, 1992, Timothy & Olsen, 2006; Turner & Turner, 1978; Vukonić, 1996). This division is misguided in that the religious and the secular spheres of tourism are rapidly merging, as religious tourism assumes a more prominent market niche in international tourism. The use of the concepts “sacred” and “secular” has become problematic in relation to the classic definitions of Eliade (1969), particularly in reference to sharply contrasting polarizations. Indeed, the controversial nature of the term “sacred” has attracted much interest and research (Markus, 2006).

Pilgrims and tourists are two distinct actors situated at opposite ends of Smith’s continuum of travel, which first appeared in 1992. The polarities on the pilgrimage-tourism axis are labeled sacred vs. secular, and between them range an almost endless list of possible sacred-secular combinations, with the central area (c) now generally termed “religious tourism.” These positions reflect the multiple and changing motivations of the traveler whose interests and activities may switch from tourism to pilgrimage, and vice versa, without the individual even being aware of the change. Jackowski and Smith (1992) use the term “knowledge-based tourism” synonymously with religious tourism. Most researchers identify “religious tourism” with the individual’s quest for shrines and locales where, in lieu of piety, visitors seek to experience the sense of identity with sites of historical and cultural meaning (Nolan & Nolan, 1989).

Holloway and Valins (2002) state that geographies of religion can provide key insights into the secular and sacred socio-spatial processes that shape everyday life in local places around the world. Gatrell and Reid (2002) claim that local economic processes, such as tourism or pilgrimage, are embedded within a complex of socio-spatial processes that are historically, culturally, and locally dependent. As such, complex local systems are comprised of perceptions, expectations, and experiences (Gatrell & Reid, 2002; McCann, 2002; Petrić & Mrnjavac, 2003).

The new interest in pilgrimage emerged in the 1990s and 2000s via researchers interested in the field of tourism. These researchers raised some theoretical and applied political, cultural, behavioral, economic, and geographical research subjects (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). 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 (Vukonić, 1996). More significant are the new angles and perspectives that these researchers are focusing on, in addition to the older and better-known aspects of pilgrimage. The number of books and publications on the combination of a spiritual search with a physical journey is one indication of the popularity and importance of pilgrimage tourism (Digance, 2003; Timothy & Olsen, 2006). In many of these new studies, a tendency toward dedifferentiation has been observed. Researchers also state that the differences between tourism, pilgrimage, and even secular pilgrimage are narrowing (Bilu, 1998; Kong, 2001).

‘Secular pilgrimage’

Areas of research and analyzed sites have expanded farther afield than those considered “officially sacred.” The first change in the focus of research on pilgrimage can be seen in the work of Eade and Sallnow (1991) who formulated a new, wider-viewed approach, taking into account a variety of levels and aspects: political, cultural, and behavioral, in addition to considering the tourist perspective. This new approach reflects the heterogeneity of pilgrimage as it appears in theoretical and analytical studies, and introduces a new basis for comparing pilgrimages throughout the world; one that sees the journey as an arena for competing religious and secular discourses (Eade & Sallnow, 1991; Lewis, 1991).

Over the years, the discussion as to what is “tourism” and what is “pilgrimage,” along with other definitions expanded, especially in the 1990s when various researchers, including Reader and Walter (1993), Digance (2003), and Seaton (1999, 2002), added new perspectives regarding secular sites and secular aspects of pilgrimage research. Sites, experiences, and terms such as “dark tourism,” “thanatourism” (Seaton, 1999, 2002; Stone, 2006), “popular culture,” and “New Age pilgrimage” (Attix, 2002) added to the transition in research toward the experience of the individual and to dedifferentiation. In recent years, researchers have begun to state that places other traditional pilgrimage destinations also deserve to be fully investigated (Reader & Walter, 1993). They refer to spiritual festivals and sites, war memorials and graves, secular shrines, sporting activities, and other experiences in addition to sacred constructions.

The process and place of pilgrimage occupies a unique space in the imagination both of religious and secular tourism – what Soja (1980), a geographer, calls a “third space.” By perceiving religious sites as a “third space” that exists beyond and between the lived and the planned world, researchers should be able to deconstruct the social practices of tourists at religious sites. The “third space” idea will enable them to avoid the simplified notions of “religious traveler” or “vacationer” as pilgrim and tourist, respectively (Cohen, 1992; Smith, 1992), insofar as these two groups are linked in a shared space. Indeed, a revised religious tourism approach based, in part, on the notion of a “third space” acknowledges – in implicit and explicit terms – the interdependent nature of the two actors, pilgrims and tourists, and the social construction of a site as simultaneously sacred and secular (Gatrell & Collins-Kreiner, 2006).

The word “pilgrimage” itself is becoming widely used in broad and secular contexts – for example, visits to war graves or the graves and residences of celebrities, visits to churchyards and to funerary sites, as sacred and secular pilgrimage. One example is Elvis Presley’s mansion and tomb in Memphis (Alderman, 2002; Reader & Walter, 1993). Pilgrims, religious or secular, often share the trait of searching for a meaningful and spiritual experience. These experiences can be described in various ways: transformation, enlightenment, life-changing events or consciousness-changing events, but words seem inadequate to describe experiences that often are not amenable to reason (Digance, 2003, 2006).

Another kind of secular tourism centers on the concepts of nationalism and patriotism, as well as on the notion of ethnic linkages, which is recently referred to as “Diaspora tourism” (Coles & Timothy, 2004). In this kind of tourism, people travel back to their ethnic homelands for personal or genealogical reasons. This is a very important part of “secular pilgrimage,” although it also, apparently, includes a strong “spiritual” element for many people as they connect to deceased ancestors or the spaces where their forbearers lived and worked. Likewise, the idea of visiting national shrines and monuments may also have a spiritual connotation for many people. This is especially prevalent in the US and UK, in addition to many other countries (Coles & Timothy, 2004; Collins-Kreiner & Olsen, 2004).

Timothy and Olsen (2006) rightly state that their book does not solve the tourist-pilgrim debate, “but perhaps a solution is not as important as understanding the roots of contention” (2006: 272). Today, masses of tourists, pilgrims, and local people compete for the use of available resources such as transport, infrastructure, and parking around shrines and cathedrals. Contest over access and usage can also occur between the local population, the owners of the site and the visitors, as well as between the visitors themselves: pilgrims and tourists (Digance, 2003).

The visitors “inner experience”

A shift in tourism research can be observed from examination of the “external” elements to research on the “inner experience.” A change can also be observed from viewing pilgrimage as a general and comprehensive phenomenon to its analysis as an individual, hence more pluralistic, entity. Until the 1980s, most research concerned the sites themselves – location, characteristics and meaning – or the overall sociological feature of the community undergoing a liminal process. The multidisciplinary inventory project carried out in Europe under the leadership of Nolan and Nolan (1989), occupies a place of its own in the geographical research of pilgrimage. This project presents systematic information on 6150 Christian holy places in Europe. The authors also raise the complex issues related to the three sorts of groups who visit religious sites: traditional pilgrims, members of packaged religious tours, and tourists checking off sites on their vacation itinerary.
In addition, studies in the past presented pilgrimage as a general phenomenon (Nolan & Nolan, 1992; Turner & Turner, 1969; Vukonić, 1996). Turner and Turner (1969) introduced several fundamental social ideas into the study of pilgrimage, directing the study of these phenomena along entirely new paths. Their basic idea was that pilgrimage might be analyzed in homologous terms, proposed in their concept of the “ritual process.” They argued that pilgrimages typically involve a stage of “liminality” in which novices find themselves in the transitory stage between two established social statuses.

To understand the dynamics of the visitor experience, Cohen (1979: 180) maintained that the tourist cannot be described as a “general type” and proposed five main modes of the tourist experience which are based on the place and significance of the given experience in the tourists’ total world-view: their attitude to a perceived “center” and the location of that center in relation to the society in which the tourist lives. The five modes represent a spectrum, ranging from the tourist’s experience as a traveler in pursuit of mere pleasure to that of the modern pilgrim on a quest for meaning at someone else’s center. Cohen (1979: 183) identifies these modes as recreational, diversionary, experiential, experimental, and existential.

He claims that tourists traveling in the “existential mode” are similar to pilgrims. Both are fully committed to an elective spiritual center, external to the mainstream of their native society and culture because they feel that the only meaningful “real” life is at the center (Cohen, 1979: 186). For example, visits to nationalist locations (non-religious) might be very emotional or spiritual experiences. Even a visit to Elvis’s grave and home may be “spiritually” moving for some people.

Since the 1990s, one can see how the individual and his or her personal experience have become the center of interest for the study of pilgrimage tourism. Researchers, such as Smith (1989, 1992), Cohen (1992), Collins-Kreiner and Gatrell (2006), Fleisher (2000); Poria, Butler, and Airey (2003, 2004) have started to look more specifically into these aspects. The literature has also focused a great deal of attention on the “visitor experience” and the psychosocial dynamics that drive pilgrimage (e.g., Cohen, 1979, 1992, 1998; MacCannell, 1973; Turner & Turner, 1978, 1969).

A shift has gradually been taking place from researching “external” and “general” elements to researching the individual “Inner Experience.” This process takes place in three stages: the first was analyzing typologies, for example, Cohen’s typology of the various experiences of a visitor. The second stage involved deconstruction of the typologies, including classification of visitor experiences into sub-types (Collins-Kreiner & Kliot, 2000). The next stage was to understand that a visitor may undergo diverse experiences, and may switch from one to another. The experience has been shown to depend on the pilgrimage, but also on the visitor and how he or she perceives his or her visit and experience.

Current research on pilgrimage emphasizes the aspect of subjectivity. Poria et al. (2003, 2004, 2006), who diverge from the traditional research approach that focuses only on the heritage site, wrote papers from this perspective. They argue that the visitor’s experience at the site, as well as his or her individual impressions, should be examined and that the experience and mental state of the visitor can change in intensity and over time, according to his or her own personal characteristics. They demonstrate this approach at sites such as the Western Wall in Jerusalem and the Anne Frank house in Amsterdam. As a result of this perception, it is now clear that each person may interpret his or her own experience differently and it is not enough to focus solely on the experience offered by the objective.

Empirical studies of pilgrimage

Four different studies dealing with various kinds of pilgrimage are analyzed for this research.1 The research is concerned with applied implications of the phenomena: the routes of movement, the catchment areas of pilgrims, the size and scale of pilgrimage, hierarchical relationships of sites, location, and images of sacred places as well as the “inner” journey of the pilgrims who participated. The studies will also be analyzed below, according to the shifts in theories which were identified through the literature reviewed.

The reason for choosing these four different case studies was to diversify the investigated phenomena as much as possible: the world’s biggest religion numerically, Christianity, was chosen as well as the relatively small religion of Judaism. Another angle of research was provided by the case study of one of the fastest-growing religions in the world – the Baha’i religion. The fourth case study is associated with the different and very interesting phenomenon of Western travelers who visit the East. This trend provokes major questions on the entire nature of the pilgrimage phenomenon. The material for the case studies was collected using different methods in order to diversify, as much as possible, the outcomes of the four works.

The first case study researched Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land between 2000 and 2004 (Collins-Kreiner, Kliot, Mansfeld, & Sagie, 2006). The second work investigated Jewish pilgrims at seven holy sites in Israel (Collins-Kreiner, 2006). The third looked into the experiences of Baha’i and non-Baha’i visitors to the Baha’i Gardens in Haifa, Israel, the most holy site for Baha’i from all over the world (Collins-Kreiner & Gatrell, 2006). The fourth study explored the phenomenon of Western visitors traveling to Dharamsala, India, through interviews and participants’ observations (Collins-Kreiner & Sagie, in press).

Christian visitors to the holy land

This study evaluated the “inner experience” of pilgrims who came to Israel during a time of crisis. It presents a qualitative portrait of 284 (157 Catholics and 127 Protestants) visitors to the Holy Land from the years 2000–2004. The Christian pilgrimage experience is researched through the eyes of the visitors using before and after interviews (Collins-Kreiner et al., 2006).

---

1 For more details on the four studies, please see the author’s papers in the references section.
Israel was, at that time, suffering from severe safety problems as a result of the Palestinian uprising (Fig. 4) and the number of tourists fell dramatically from 2.7 million in 2000 to 800,000 in the year 2002 (Fig. 5). As pilgrims consist of a quarter of all tourists coming to Israel, there was an immediate need to understand the motivation of the visitors who still came, even during a crisis, in order to attract these market segments.

The findings show that, for most of the pilgrims who visited the Holy Land, the main motive for their visit lay in their profound religious beliefs, which guided them before they took the sacred journey, and surpassed economic, family, and health considerations. The strength of their faith motivated the pilgrims and formed their expectations of the pilgrimage. The motives of these visitors were realized based on religious merits alone. The world of images and perceptions of the Holy Land is also imbued with religio-spiritual content and the itinerary is basically “walking in the footsteps of Jesus.” The different dogmas of Catholicism and various Protestant churches are also reflected in the spiritual content of the religious wish.

There are many indications of the inferior role touristic components played in the pilgrims’ sacred journey. Their motivations and expectations in the realm of tourism are minor, albeit highly fulfilled, according to their own testimony. Yet some tourist aspects of the trip are revealed in some of the visitors’ comments and responses. Like all tourists, they visit well-known Israeli sites and they spend time shopping. As tourists they enjoy the fact that the sacred sites are not crowded, but they complain about the very tight schedule and lack of free time. Yet, as stated before, all of these points were minor compared to the most important aspect of the tour – the religious one.

**Fig. 4.** The affect of terrorist attacks on the number of tourists to Israel (Collins-Kreiner et al., 2006).

**Fig. 5.** Tourist arrivals and income to Israel by year 1995–2007 (Israel, Ministry of Tourism, 2007).
The proto-type of a pilgrim to the holy land is mainly a person who is occupied by his or her experiential feeling of the fulfillment of a religious mission. There is very little room in this world for touristic-mundane experiences and the pilgrims themselves do not feel the need to expand more on that issue.

Jewish pilgrimage

This study deals with the phenomenon of Jewish pilgrimage in Israel. It aims to analyze the characteristics of Jewish pilgrims to the sites of holy graves at the present time between 2004 and 2005 and thus to recommend ways for marketing the sites. The research examines the motives for pilgrimage, activities during the pilgrimage, and the influence of tourism on the pilgrimage. The methods include 703 interviews with the pilgrims, observations in situ, and notation of the participants’ observations (Collins-Kreiner, 2006).

The main finding relates to the existence of a continuum, as proposed by Smith (1992), in which the different groups can be represented. At one end are the pilgrims, Orthodox (19%) and religious Jews (27%) who visit the sites out of religious belief. Their main activity is praying. At the opposite end of the scale are tourists (15%), so-called spiritual or heritage tourists, whose motivations are curiosity, cultural interest, and searching for new meanings to life. Between these extremes are the traditional visitors (36%). These visitors are closer to the Orthodox Jews, believing in the power of the tsaddik (holy person) and his helpful advice. Yet this belief on the part of the traditional visitor does not stem from religious faith but from a personal outlook. This is borne out by the fact that these visitors tend to make specific requests rather than offer formal prayers.

The difference may be observed in the customs and behaviors of the different groups. Whereas the pilgrims pray and the secular visitors just visit, the mid-scale group takes part in many local folklore activities such as lighting candles, placing supplications and notes, and buying souvenirs such as holy water, pictures of the tsaddik, candles, greetings, pamphlets, and amulets against the evil eye. The differences noted in the visitors’ attitudes to the sites were found to depend mainly on their religious affiliation, not on their age, ethnic origin, socio-economic status, self-perception, sex, or other factors. The location of each pilgrim on the scale is personal and subjective, and between the extremes can be found an almost infinite number of sacred-secular combinations. The survey highlights the increasing convergence of traditional pilgrimage and current tourism, which have much in common.

Baha’i pilgrimage

The third study examines the practices that transform the Baha’i Gardens in Haifa, Israel, into a secular shared community asset. It concentrates on the visitor experience within this context. The research employed a mixed methodological approach that included participant observation, archival documents and short, informal and unstructured interviews with Baha’i volunteers, tourists and guides, as well as empirical observations concerning the physical landscape and the observed practices of pilgrims and tourists. The contemporary nature of the garden as a tourist attraction makes the case of the Baha’i Gardens and its cultural and economic context both more distinct but also somewhat ambiguous as the perceived boundaries are unclear (Collins-Kreiner & Gatrell, 2006).

A basic typology of the visitors to the gardens is established: the religious visitors are in the “existential mode” (Cohen, 1979: 190). In this mode, they are fully committed to an elective spiritual center. They are Baha’i who see their travel as a pilgrimage and as an once-in-a-lifetime experience. The experiences of their visits are not dominated by recreational or diversionary elements. However, the pilgrims will derive the restorative effects of their trip’s inherent spirituality. The secular tourists in this research correspond predominantly to Cohen’s (1979: 190) “recreational mode” of tourism. Their trip is a form of entertainment not unlike the cinema, theatre or television. This kind of tourist, usually the domestic Israeli visitor, enjoys his or her trip because it restores physical and mental powers and endows him or her with a general sense of well-being. In addition to the recreational mode, a number of visitors may be classified as experiential tourists in that the gardens and the Baha’i World Center may provide an authentic “other” experience distinct from everyday life and their normal social context. Indeed, the gardens themselves, their connection with the emerging faith system of the Baha’i, and the aesthetics of the tour place the experience well beyond the everyday life of many visitors.

The case of the Baha’i Gardens in Haifa demonstrates that the differing motives of the visitors are defined by their activity space and embodied in their movement. The separation of the tourist and the pilgrim experience at the Baha’i Gardens is unique, as the gardens have been designed to prevent any potential conflict with local residents, which, in turns, enables the municipality to emphasize the secular and aesthetic benefits of the gardens.

The result of this place-based strategy at conflict avoidance or mitigation has been the creation of a layered collection of spatial practices to preserve the sacred nature of the Baha’i complex and to enable the non-Baha’i community to yield a variety of secular benefits while preserving the place sacred nature. This strategy should be adopted by planners and practitioners in other places in the world.

Western visitors traveling to India

The fourth study was of Western visitors traveling to Dharamsala, India. This paper’s aim was to consider their cultural, educational and religious experiences and the implications of their visits, and to supply information on the growing phenomenon of Western people visiting the East for self-fulfillment, study, and belief. The methods used were both...
qualitative and quantitative. A structured questionnaire was administered to 127 visitors at seven different sites in Dharamsala. In addition, twenty in-depth interviews were held, and participant observation was chosen as another research method (Collins-Kreiner & Sagie, in press).

This paper considers the degree of “quest in guest,” that is, identifying the extent to which visitors to a specific spiritual destination were motivated by a search for spiritual fulfillment as suggested by those describing tourism as a sacred journey. The respondents were chosen from the broader stream of tourists to Dharamsala; these were visitors who depicted themselves as different from regular tourists and who stayed longer than one month. The findings show that they did not define themselves as tourists, although they differentiated themselves from the locals. According to the literature, they could be defined as pilgrims, but this was not the case according to their self-definition. They defined themselves as “students,” thus placing them in the edu-tourism market as a special interest tourism niche.

Two layers of identity emerge: the richer layer is the educational and spiritual layer which consists of their beliefs and their wish to study. This guides them in their plans before embarking on the journey: when to take the trip; handling economic, family, and health problems; and when they prepare themselves spiritually.

The second layer is thinner: it is the tourist layer. The visitors depicted themselves as students, not as tourists. Their motivations and expectations in the tourism realm were minor. Yet, tourist aspects of the trip were revealed in some of the visitors’ comments and responses. As tourists they met local people and saw many facets of India, beginning with the airport, then the roads, the cities, and the landscape. Still, as stated, all these points were much less important than the primary goal of their tour – education. In this case study, most of the visitors classified themselves as belonging to the specific category of “students,” and as participating in an edu-tourism visit. They travelled with specific educational or even spiritual intentions and thus returned home feeling stronger and more fulfilled.

The “students” see their visit as an once-in-a-lifetime experience. It will seldom have recreational, diversionary elements, though they feel that, mentally and spiritually, the trip has restorative effects. For these travelers, the “quest in guest” has been fulfilled and their visit has been a success. They have discovered in Dharamsala their spiritual home or “center” (Cohen, 1979; Eliade, 1969) and the satisfaction of their spiritual needs meant that they had come to the end of their journey. They had fully immersed themselves in the spiritual “other,” becoming, in a sense, permanent tourists. For them, spiritual fulfillment is part of the journey. In other words, the notion of the edu-tourist as a pilgrim has, to a certain extent, been verified.

Although a variety of motives, from education to a more purposeful need for satisfaction, were identified in the research, it is evident that, albeit unintentionally, different intensities of spiritual fulfillment were experienced by visitors to Dharamsala. Thus, it is apparent that, within particular destination contexts, edu-tourism can begin to take on the characteristics of a sacred journey. While tourism may not be functionally and intentionally sacred, and its participants might not even describe it as such, its eventual outcome may be regarded as sacred.

Transformations in pilgrimage research and their implications

In the four studies presented, we can see how differentiation is giving way to dedifferentiation. For practitioners, it is important to understand that it is practically impossible to draw clear boundaries around the categories of travel or to differentiate pilgrims from tourists. For example, Christian pilgrims or Jewish pilgrims could not be sharply distinguished from tourists, neither in space nor in their activities. The ability to differentiate becomes even harder when considering Western visitors to India, as their experiences are so mixed: educational, tourist, spiritual, and pilgrimage. For some, the journey has strong meaning while for others it does not. This dedifferentiation also exists when evaluating Christian, Jewish, Baha’i, or Buddhist holy spaces, as multiple activities can exist simultaneously at the sites, and the attitudes of the different visitors can vary markedly, even within the same religious grouping.

The main task for planners is, therefore, to pre-plan a strategy for such complex spaces with different meanings for different visitors. This strategy should include not only planning the space, but also the various activities and different marketing methods for the various market segments that often contrast with each other. The result of this place-based strategy should be conflict avoidance that also preserves the nature of the specific site.

This paper suggests that in the 21st century the differences between pilgrims and tourists are fading while numerous points of similarity are emerging; both require spatial movement and both could involve an emotional desire on the part of the individual to visit sites meaningful to him or her. Overall, however, the visitor’s experience, be it termed pilgrimage or tourism, is, in fact, not homogeneous; rather, it comprises different experiential types. Visitors’ motivations are also highly diverse, ranging from curiosity to a search for meaning. Differing market segments of visitors go to the various sites, holy or not, and coexist. This coexistence occurs even though the reasons for visiting and the activities at the site vary widely.

As we have seen, the connection between pilgrimage and tourism has attracted much attention in the literature, and it is often represented on a scale. But how does one distinguish a visitor in genuine need of prayer and spiritual peace from one admiring the work of seventeenth- or twentieth-century architects, or contemplating the tomb of a famous person? One of the key issues of this paper is the existence of a continuum of visitors, not according to their description as pilgrims or tourists, but according to the effect of the visit on them.

Research on tourism usually places its emphasis on the effect of tourism on the local population with little attention paid to the effect on the visitors themselves. The differing experiences of the visitor, whether pilgrim or tourist, should be shown on a scale according to the effect in time and the strength of the experience: to what extent the visitor was affected after his or her return home from the visit, regardless of his or her initial classification as a tourist or pilgrim.
Three stages of change can be recognized: external characteristics, perceptions, and attitudes. It is possible that no change will happen during the visit. If a change does occur in the first stage, it will be evident in the visitor's external features, such as their language, clothes, hairstyle, and jewellery. In the perception stage, a change may be observed in the visitor's outlook on life and his or her beliefs or behavior may start to alter as he or she adopts certain new concepts from the place and the local population that he or she encountered. In the third and last stage, a mental change or a change in attitude occurs. All of those changes are noted in the current research of Western visitors to the East. For example, researchers such as Maoz (2006, 2007), Sharpley and Sundaram (2005), and Collins-Kreiner and Sagie (in press) have found that different visitors undergo different experiences according to their age, gender, status in life, and other factors.

Everyone has different expectations from his or her tour; the question is, to what degree? At one end of the scale are the spiritual visitors (not necessarily pilgrims), the spiritual sites and the spiritual experiences which constitute searching for new meanings to life; these are visits that can change the spiritual visitors' lives. At the opposite end are visitors who are not affected by their visit. A visitor can move along the continuum. There are, for example, Western visitors to the East who left their homes as secular visitors and were affected by their visit and, as a result, return home as spiritual visitors (Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005).

It is also time for the contemporary use of the terms, identifying the “pilgrim” as a religious traveler and the “tourist” as a vacationer, especially the use of these terms in the media, to allow broader interpretations in accordance with the Latin and Greek origins of the words. The existence of the scale reinforces the emerging connection between the two mobilities of tourism and pilgrimage, presented earlier in this paper. Any distinction between the pilgrimages of the past and the tourism of today is hard to discern: both kinds of travelers may be motivated by the desire to experience something that will add more meaning to their lives.

All four studies deal with the inner experience of the visitors. This is an example of the shift from an examination of “external” elements to research of the “inner experience.” Christian pilgrims were asked about their feelings of fear during a difficult security time in Israel. Jewish visitors, pilgrims or tourists, were asked about their identity and spiritual experiences. Baha'i volunteers presented their inner world and their diaries while giving a sense of their personal feelings about the pilgrimage. Western visitors to India shared their deepest feelings during long participant observations in which they voiced their opinions.

Thus, another task of planners and practitioners today involves finding out what the pilgrims themselves say about their pilgrimage, since they are its main “elements”. All of this information implies that “tourism planning” should be an addition to the “regular” planning and should have its own voice and contribution.

A transformation was also observed in the view of pilgrimage from a general and comprehensive phenomenon to its analysis as an individual and hence a more pluralistic, entity. This shift includes the classification of visitor experiences into sub-types, as was done in the Christian or Jewish studies presented earlier, where pilgrims were placed along the pilgrimage experience on a scale. The scale affirmed that visitors may have a variety of experiences, and may switch between types of experiences. The visitors to India researched by the author confirmed this new stage of research, as these visitors claimed to have undergone various inner experiences that changed according to their length of stay or state of mind.

This understanding resulted in another shift, a movement from objectivity to subjectivity. As a result of the four studies presented, it is now clear that each person may interpret his or her own experience differently and it is not enough to focus solely on the experience offered by the objective, namely the pilgrimage. The visitor experience, be it called pilgrimage or tourism, is, in fact, not a homogeneous entity. Visitors’ motivations are also highly diverse, ranging from curiosity to the search for meaning. It was also found that differing market segments of visitors go to various sites, holy or not, and coexist. This occurs even though the reasons for visiting and the activities at the site are quite disparate.

The last shift is illustrated in how the areas of research are expanded farther afield, beyond the “officially sacred.” The fourth research study presented by the author deals with this kind of pilgrimage: Western visitors traveling to India in order to study will experience the ways of living and thinking of the East. In recent years, many researchers have begun to state that this occurs even though the reasons for visiting and the activities at the site are quite disparate.

The “tourism shift” seems to be the uniting element in the current research into pilgrimage. It also adds the element of implementation to the studies by geographers as they have an important role in tourism research and planning. Geographers have tended to concentrate on spatial elements, such as location and movement, in researching pilgrimage, but it is now evident that their writing does not and should not ignore other social, economic, and cultural aspects. Geographers evidently have something to contribute to contemporary debates about pilgrimage, tourism, space and experience, which are emerging across a range of disciplines.

Summary

Together with an increasing dedifferentiation of pilgrimage, tourism and secular tourism, and the narrowing difference between the wishes of people to search for a new meaning to their everyday life, all the shifts described show that the study of pilgrimage is being modified in the twenty-first century. This change is found in both the theoretical and the practical base; it includes erasing the distinctions that were accepted in the past as well as a growing inability to distinguish between the different perceptions and research areas that are now becoming integrated.

The “tourism shift” seems to be the uniting element in the current research into pilgrimage. It also adds the element of implementation to the studies by geographers as they have an important role in tourism research and planning. Geographers have tended to concentrate on spatial elements, such as location and movement, in researching pilgrimage, but it is now evident that their writing does not and should not ignore other social, economic, and cultural aspects. Geographers evidently have something to contribute to contemporary debates about pilgrimage, tourism, space and experience, which are emerging across a range of disciplines.


