

Creative Tourism and Its Role in the Flourishment of Religious Creativity and Spiritualism

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Abstract

The main motivations behind creative tourism, as a new form of tourism in the postmodern world, consist in achieving a new understanding of the “self” and the pursuit of “meaning,” “identity,” and “authenticity,” which have transformed the paradigm of tourism. With the development of the phenomenon of “spiritualism” in our time in which people turn away from the religion as a predetermined and organized phenomenon, in these new styles, the criterion is not to discover the religious other; it is to discover the self in the other. In this paper, the essential difference between creative tourism as an instance of postmodern tourism and cultural tourism is introduced, and the component of spirituality in creative tourism will be examined and then, the former as an opportunity for the development and understanding of religious beliefs and a ground for the creativity of the religious culture is elaborated. Using historical-hermeneutical approach, this paper examines the concept of "spirituality" in lived travel experience of a creative tourist and argues that when discussing spirituality of tourism, one potential avenue is flourishing of religious creativity. A key objective of this paper therefore, is to provide an initial mapping of, and insights into this territory.

Keywords: Aggregation (creativity) of the religious culture, Creative tourism, Self-alienation, Spirituality, The religious other

1. Introduction

“More detailed analyses of travel motivations often focus on the concept of push and pull factors” (Cooper and Hall, 2008: 69). Travel Motivation studies seek to discover the pull and push factors, which influence tourist behaviour. Dann (1976:22) suggests, “Holidays are essentially experiences in fantasy”. He and identifies two types of fantasy: ego-enhancement (the psychological boosts through real or imagined activities that enhance an individual's self-image and appreciation) and the escape from 'anomie' (the monotony of everyday life).

The latter was also mentioned by Cohen in his classification of tourists: “Based on the place and significance of tourist experience in the total world-view of tourists, their relationship to a perceived 'spiritual' Centre and location of that Centre in relation to the society in which the tourist lives” (Cohen, 1979:179).

Therefore, at one extreme, tourists perceive their spiritual Centre to exist in their home society and regard tourist experiences as opportunities to re-affirm meaning and orientation to this Centre (the recreation mode). At the other extreme tourists consider their home environments to be inadequate and perceive their spiritual Centre to exist in another more authentic and genuine environment (the existentialistic mode) (Ashworth and Goodall, 2013: 42).

As tourism paradigm is related to human beings and human nature, it is always a complex proposition to investigate why people travel and what they want to enjoy (Al. Haj Mohammad, 2010: 42). Since late 1980s, there was a change in the taste of tourists. They shifted from cultural tourism to creative tourism, which was caused by the need to alleviate their sense of “bewilderment.” Tourism researchers, such as Cohen, MacCannell, and Langkeek, “interpret tourism as a consequence of the alienation in everyday life” (Binkhorst 2007: 127).

On a sociological view on tourism, modern and postmodern tourists are mainly distinguished by the pursuit of “meaning” and “authenticity” (Uriely 1996: 982-4). Many tourists seek consolation in the activities that enable them to find the meaning of life. Prior to this

period, the most popular forms of tourism were beach tourism and the existential cultural tourism. Creative tourism is more sophisticated than these two, in which the tourist seeks to gain the most from her time by learning a skill during the travel. The “creativity” involved in creative tourism refers to the condition provided for the tourist to actualize her potentials and arrive at transcendence. In traditional theology, transcendence is an attribute of God that indicates that he is outside and independent of the world. A number of metaphysical arguments have been developed over the centuries to prove this point (Bellah, 1970: 196). However, today, arguments are based on immanence of God, which opens up arguments about spirituality without religion. Wallace Stevens (1957: 238) notes, “We believe without belief, beyond belief” to shows the role of spiritual aspects of life in contemporary human needs.

Tourism & spirituality is a new area studies. Singh (2009:143) notes, “For many years, tourism has been studied as ritual. Few scholars have sought to make an in-depth inquiry into the spiritual aspects or dimensions of tourism”. In this current paper, we will try to argue that in light of shifting paradigm from cultural tourism to creative tourism, visitors are more curious and intelligent than previous time, their quest for meaning can promote cultural-religious creativity in both traditions.

2. Research methodology

Using historical-hermeneutical approach, this paper examines the concept of “spirituality” in lived travel experience of creative tourists and argues that when discussing spirituality of tourism, one potential avenue is flourishing of religious creativity. The *historical-hermeneutical* approach holds that the most basic fact of social life is the meaning of an action. Social life is constituted by social actions, and actions are meaningful to the actors and to the other social participants.¹

¹- For more information of hermeneutic philosophy of social science, see Sherratt, 2006.

This approach places interpretation of meaning at the centre of social inquiry; and it drew much of its methodology and tools of inquiry from the hermeneutic tradition—the tradition stemming from Dilthey, Rickert, and other German thinkers. As Wilhelm Dilthey and his successors articulated a theory of an interpretive human science that was starkly opposed to positivism and the models of the natural sciences, in this paper we are not going to prove a premise. The main aim of this paper is to focus on “understanding” the creative tourism as a sample of postmodern tourism and perceive its role in understanding “self” and “religious others” from hermeneutical approach much better. A key aim of this paper therefore is to provide an initial mapping of, and insights into this territory. Data were analysed and interpreted in the historical-hermeneutical approach.

3. From cultural tourism to creative tourism

According to UNESCO’s definition (2003:12), “cultural tourism is “travel concerned with experiencing cultural environments, including landscapes, the visual and performing arts, and special (local) lifestyles, values, traditions, events as well as other ways of creative and intercultural exchange processes”. This is an old way of travelling dating back in Europe to the Roman era, and the main motivation for such travels was to visit monuments, antiquities, and architectural masterpieces, to meet other cultures and civilizations, and “to experience different customs and events” (Boukas 2008: 3-4).

Cultural tourism has been a popular kind of tourism in the recent century. It peaked in the second half of the 20th century. In 1950s, young Europeans walked out of their homes and backpacked their way into borders. They uninhabitably crossed the borders legally or illegally. They travelled from town to town in other countries without having a specific destination. Their destination was just “to go”. They did not know what they wanted. The number of these young wanderers was so great that they could be found in every capital, square, school, town, and village here and there in Europe. Measures by governments to inhibit them were to no avail. Many young people from different European cultures exchanged books and magazines with one another in

pathways and squares and conversed about different issues, from the most trivial such as basic lifestyles and cooking to significant issues such as the statespersons and rulers of their countries. It was the most impressive cultural exchange within the human history (Rezvani, 1386: 51).

Following this event, capitals and big cities around the world came under the spotlight of investors for purposes of tourism. In this period in which cultural tourism flourished and tourists were enthusiastic about the culture, heritage and history of other nations, tourism investors began to transform the cities by commercializing their cultural products in order to attract visitors from around the world. This included the construction of monumental museums in cities such as London and New York.² These museums were not intended to introduce their respective cultures; they were only supposed to attract tourists for economic purposes.

As a result of such developments in cultural aspects in general and in tourism in particular, the phenomenon of McDonaldization of culture occurred being led to the homogenization of different cultures. Thus, although tourists spent their time in different cities of the Europe, the cultural similarity among these cities had become so great that they lost the pleasure of discovering the other. As Rasky (1998: 68) suggests:

The McDonaldization of cultural consumption has meant that it is increasingly difficult for cities to develop a distinctive image or cultural identity based on cultural consumption policies. The same cultural offerings can be found at a multiplicity of festivals all over Europe every summer. The only choice left to the cultural tourist is where to consume their culture.

In general, a number of factors led urban planners to the idea that cultural tourism should be controlled: the commercialization of cultural

² 150 million pounds were spent for Guggenheim Museum in New York, and the expense for new museums in London in 2000 is estimated to be over 600 million pounds (Richard Crispin 2000).

objects, and consequently the commodification of local cultures and the industrialization of the cities, had to be prevented.

On the other hand, an essential shift took place in the tourists' motivation. Apparently, after the progress of the civilization and complications of the urban life, and due to the disappointment from organized religions and failure to know one's identity and one's self, some people found new existential motivations for their travels as a process of self-knowledge via interactions with the others and an opportunity for an authentic and deep experience, or as a path to meaning and rediscovery of one's identity.

The procession of young Europeans can be considered as a turning point at which the old paradigm of tourism—which consisted only in visiting other cultures—was replaced by the postmodern paradigm in which knowing the other was superseded by knowing oneself through the other. More precisely, in cultural tourism the ultimate goal was to know the other, while in the postmodern paradigm, the ultimate goal of the travel is to arrive at a better understanding of their own selves.

Thus, although this is taken by some people to be an extended version of cultural tourism, we suggest that these are two different forms of tourism with respect to their motivations and goals.

Here are some general features of creative tourism:

- “Since cultural tourism is greatly based on the exchange of cultural and economic capitals related to the symbolically economic rise, creative tourism is even linked to the more flexible forms of exchanging social, relational and spiritual capitals between networks” (Richards and Marques 2012, cf. Hassani and Bastenegar 2016: 83).
- Creative tourism is community-based. Unlike tourism in the modern period which was mainly focused on economic benefits, creative tourism is essentially a matter of improving the life quality of the local community. Creative tourism amounts to the participation and intervention of tourists in tasks in the host land. It is not merely their presence in the environment; it is the interaction between the host and the guest in all dimensions.

- Creative tourists tend to participate in artistic and creative activities in order to better understand the local culture, and thereby make more intimate relationships with deep layers of the host community. Thus, instead of visiting well-known touristic attractions, they wander around unknown alleys and streets. They are not concerned with visiting salient monuments of a place. They try to rise over their role as a “tourist” and feel like a “local” or a “citizen of the community” (Dyer, 2003:37; Grimshaw, 2008: 33).
- In contemporary tourism industry, creative tourism appears when cultural symbols of a land are manifested in intangible forms such as experience and memory, instead of tangible forms such as museum, exhibit, historical site, old houses, handicrafts and traditional arts. Thus, other existential dimensions will be needed and a new dimension will emerge, that is, meeting one’s spiritual needs. Such tourists will seek to satisfy their more transcendental and non-material needs, which are closely tied with their individual identity.
- Tourists are currently expecting to participate in and seemingly, to co-create their experience while accepting the transitory nature of this negotiation, and the “staged authenticity” that often accompanies it, as MacCannell has identified (Carson, 2017:3).
- To flourish the creative tourism no fundamental infrastructures are needed, while cultural tourism requires such infrastructures. Creative tourism is easier to develop. “Creativity is mobile. Where cultural consumption is dependent on a concentration of cultural resources, creativity can become extremely mobile – arts performances and artworks can today be produced virtually anywhere, without the need for dedicated infrastructure”(Richards, 2001:67).

4. Spirituality in creative tourism as a postmodern tourism

In the modern period, secular attitudes and changes in the use of the term “religion” led into a definition of the religion as a personal and pluralistic experience, in which the notions of religion and spirituality are distinguished. Paul Heelas (1998) believes that it is possible to have a spiritual experience without having a religious experience (Timothy and Olson, 2013:17). Heelas and Woodhead named this “tectonic shift in the sacred landscape” as “the spiritual revolution” proposed a theory which can at one and same time explain the decline of some forms of the sacred and the rise of others” (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005:2).

Although the process of generating a universally acceptable definition of spirituality is bound to fail (Wilson 2013: 152), one possible description is that spirituality is the way an individual expresses his or her existence as a member of the humankind (Braine 1992). An individual's search for the meaning of life, also known as a spiritual search, roots in their biological, psychological, linguistic, and social nature (Hardy 1979; Torrance 1994).

If, following Wilson, we take spirituality to be a search for meaning or an interpretation of the “why's of life”, then it should be said that the search for meaning is a salient feature of creative tourism because a creative tourist travels to learn a new skill and meet his or her existential needs. Recent domestic research has provided a theoretical account of different dimensions of “spirituality” in creative tourism.³

Thus, many people consider themselves as spiritualists without considering themselves as religious. In this position, spirituality can be defined as self-transcendence or more simply as following one's conscience. This definition makes it clear that all humans are spiritual in one way or another. In a second approximation, spirituality can be defined by the beliefs and practices (Hegy, 2017:1). Sometimes, spirituality leads people to a selective attitude towards the religion, whereby they freely abandon parts of the religion they are not happy with. Such a change in people's taste shows itself within creative tourism.

³ For instance, see Hassani, A. & Bastenegar, M. (2016), “Components of Spirituality in Creative Tourism”, Vol.1. Issue 1, University of Science and Culture.

From a sociological point of view, the postmodern period is a period of variety within people's lifestyles and a period of bewilderment in choosing one's style. According to Giddens (1991:1, 5): "One of the distinctive features of modernity, in fact, is an increasing interconnection between the two "extremes" of extensionality and intentionality: globalizing influences on the one hand and personal dispositions on the other". Reflexively organized life planning ... becomes a central feature of the structuring of self-identity".

The way out of this bewilderment is the pursuit of "meaning". As opposed to Max Weber, who thought of modernity as decoding all mysteries and thereby forgetting the "spirituality" altogether, and referred to the modern society as an "iron cage" emptied from "meaning" and "freedom", postmodern sociologists came to the conclusion that the contemporary period is a period of return to "spirituality" and "meaning" as the only hope for a social development. Ashish Nandy believes that spirituality is emerging as the only hope for positive social change and for protecting truly significant values (1998: 326-7).

The key words of New Age Spiritualities are "experience" and "practice" (Heelas, 2006: 46) which links spiritual seeker to postmodern tourists. In this regards, for today's tourists Rather than attaching importance to the beliefs, doctrines and ethical injunctions of theistic traditions, importance is attached to experiencing the heart of life(ibid).

With the contemporary change of view regarding the transcendent, as above said, the goal of the postmodern tourist changed as well. A creative tourist is motivated by curing his self-alienation, emancipation from the feeling of emptiness, the desire to depart, and the acquisition of authentic experiences. Such a change in motivations arises from the desire to discover one's "self" and supply its spiritual needs. The "bewilderment" of the contemporary man, who is suppressed by modernity, has led him to adventures in other lands. What is valid and authentic in creative tourism is the construction of authentic and memorable experiences.

Thus, on a sociological view of tourism, modern and postmodern tourists are mainly distinguished by the pursuit of “meaning” and “authenticity” (Uriely 1996: 982-4).

This change in the taste of tourists can be clearly found in the work of some novelists. For instance, Alain de Botton writes in his *The Art of Travel* (2003: 10): “We are inundated with advice on *whereto* travel to, but we hear little of *why* and *how* we should go, it is a way to an understanding of what the Greek philosophers beautifully termed *eudaimonia*, or ‘human flourishing’”.

De Botton goes on to provide a biography of Gustav Flaubert, the French poet, who was filled with a feeling of emptiness and travelled in order to overcome the feeling. His “greatest wish was to leave Rouen, become a camel driver in Egypt and lose his virginity in a harem, to an olive-skinned woman with a trace of down on her upper lip” (ibid: 121).

And in his well-known novel, *The Fruits of the Earth*, André Gide (1964:13) calls his readers to quit reading and throw away the books and awakens in them the desire to depart and leave in order to find the life itself: “when you have read me, throw this book away and go out. go out from wherever you may be, from your town, from your family, from your room, from your thoughts”.

Postmodern tourists travel in search for “meaning” and “identity.” According to a report by World Tourism Organization, in future research on tourism we should keep in mind that tourists will be more educated and will seek more information; they will be cultural capitals. They will also seek meaning in their lives and more authenticity in their personal experiences (Pirmohammadzadeh, 1396: no. 1093152).

Creative tourism is an instance of tourism in the postmodern period, with an upsurge among American and European youths. Upon its popularity, it became the focus of tourism investors and agents. As Binkhorst suggests, “Several of its popular and unique cultural tourism attraction could be transformed creatively. A recent initiative, ‘Dine with the Dutch’, invites tourists to have dinner in real, private, local Dutch settings at people’s homes” (2007: 130-131).

Ecotourism also has been a successful experience in different cities of Iran. With the change in the utilization of some areas, residences have been built for tourists besides local people and in houses with authentic architectures. They have attracted many foreign tourists in recent decades. These cases include the experience by the owners of Noghli Traditional House in Kashan, an artist couple who reconstructed their ancestral house, Bekhradi's historical house in Sonbolestan of Isfahan, and the garden hotel of Moshir al-Mamalek in Yazd, which dates back to the Qajar era.

5. Creative tourism as an opportunity for understanding religious and spiritual beliefs

Travelling as a creative tourist can help broaden human's horizons in religious Beliefs. Indeed, as Nestor Garcia Canclini (1995: 47) argued in *Hybrid Cultures*, "modernization does not end traditional forms of production, beliefs and good, but creates hybrid cultures (religions) that encompass a complex, multi-temporal articulation of traditions and modernity's". The direct encounter provides a background for the flourishing of the creativity of the religious culture on both sides. In these circumstances, their religious beliefs will "aggregate," that is, although each side finds his religious tradition to be "apparently" different from that of the other, he nonetheless finds that the two are to some extent similar in "meaning." Thus, there will be a greater chance for the integration and exchange of the religious culture. This is not to say that the tourist replaces his religious propositions with those of the other; rather it is to say that the tourist becomes more creative after an encounter with another religious tradition, arriving at a new understanding of his own religious tradition. Since a creative tourist is mostly concerned with meeting his spiritual needs and since he seeks self-knowledge and not mere pleasure, creative tourism refreshes the religious tradition of the self and the other.

Anthony Giddens (2002: 2) used the term *Runaway World* to describe a world that was developing quickly and out of our control.as he said :“The world in which we find ourselves today, however, does

not look or feel much like they predicted it would rather than being more and more under our control- a runaway world”.

creative tourism proceeds in an essentially unplanned and barely controllable way. Hence, it is possible to appropriate Giddens's idea to talk about *Runaway Tourism*. This is because, like most things, (creative) tourism delivered in a largely uncontrolled neoliberal market environment, which often precedes and overpowers attempts at institutional religion and their management. It increases the encounter of visitors with locals, which creates an opportunity to perceive each other better. Richards and Marques (2012) note, “a significant advantage of creative tourism is the direct encounter of tourists with locals”. For example, at Australia's Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, the Anangu Aboriginal Community invites tourists to learn about their customs and spiritual values through walking tracks and a specially designed tourist centre. (UNWTO, Conference on Spiritual Tourism for Sustainable Tourism, 2013: 3). Their program for tourists are teaching stories by old men and old women, remembering the past, thinking about future, visiting sacred sites, visiting family in other communities, teaching visitors how to observe and respect Tjukurpa, and passing on knowledge to young men and women (Katutja, 2010, 4).

But how can creative tourism lead to the strength of the religious culture? This goes back to the tourist's motivations and goals. As opposed to cultural tourism in which people seek to know the other in response to their curiosity, in creative tourism people have existential concerns, seeking to understand their own selves via the other. As Desbiolles notes, better understanding between people and nations and peace are considered the most significant benefit of creative tourism as a social force (2006: 1192).

Thus, cultural tourists visit the surfaces of another culture -tangible symbols such as buildings, historical sites, museums, and handicrafts- but creative tourists get to know the deeper layers of a community. Thus, tourists live in the houses of the locals, whereby they learn about their hospitality, their interactions, customs and manners, rules governing a family, their clothing, tasks of family members, and their

lifestyles. They are so intermingled with locals that they refuse to call themselves “tourists”. Instead, they conceive of themselves as “second class citizens” of the relevant community (Dyer, 2003: 37; Grimshaw, 2008: 33). Together with their hosts, they participate in daily activities. They help in the provision of daily foods. In general, they change role from a mere visitor to an active participant.

6. Conclusion

This discussion has been concerned with the tendency in the present era to highlight creative tourism and its role in flourishing of religious creativity. It has argued that, on a sociological view of tourism, modern and postmodern tourists are mainly distinguished by the pursuit of “meaning” and “authenticity” (Uriely 1996: 982-4), self-enhancement and self-development (Cooper and Hall, 2008: 69). Many tourists seek consolation in the activities that enable them to find the meaning of life. European youths who backpacked their ways out of their countries were mostly seeking to discover the “self” and “ego.”. “More and more people see tourist travel as an effective means to find their “identity”. A spontaneous and natural environment, where they find themselves through the interaction with others, enhances their spiritual growth, deepens their experience”(Ambrož, Ovsenik, 2011:72).

Although postmodern tourism is regarded as a relatively new phenomenon, it is clear that its origins are rooted in the age-old phenomenon of pilgrimage. In this paper, we examined creative tourism as one of the types of postmodern tourism with its several spiritual aspects, because of its pursuit on “self” – “meaning of life” and “identity”. In this regards, we can call creative tourist as a new spiritual seeker in the contemporary tourism traveling for seeking existential experiences, As Heelas (2006: 43) notes: “the key words of New Age spiritualities are *experience* and *practice*”. He/she is more concerned with the discovery of “meaning” than a cultural tourist is.

This paper has attempted to revive and reinforce a wider vision of creative tourism and its role in societies and the global community. Creative tourism can promote the religious creativity, which is the one

of the useful ways of dialogue between religions and cultures. In many cases, tourism proceeds in an essentially unplanned and barely controllable way. Hence, it is possible to appropriate Giddens's idea to talk about *Runaway Tourism*, which reduce the role of institutional Religions and make an opportunity for individual tourists to encounter with local and observe their belief, cultures and customs freely.

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