

Religion and Tourism: Beyond the Pilgrim and the Tourist

Introduction

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Recreation and tourism are booming businesses, even in times of recession. They belong to the most important forms of leisure activities that we spend time and money on. They have become the largest and fastest-growing economic sector in the world. As an export category tourism ranks fourth after fuels, chemicals and automotive products. According to the statistics of the World Tourism Organization of the United Nations (UNWTO) international tourist arrivals will have reached one billion in 2012; this number is expected to reach 1.8 billion by 2030. International tourism receipts in 1950 were us dollar 2.1 billion; in 2011 they surpassed us dollar 1 trillion.¹ The pros and cons of this development are clear: prosperity for people working in the tourism sector, knowledge of other cultures, possibilities for relaxation on the one hand, and traffic congestion, pressure on natural resources, threats to natural areas and cultural heritage, etc. on the other.² In our Western and European perception, tourism is associated primarily with beaches, hotels, free time, hiking, visiting museums and relaxation rather than with religion. In general, the combination of the concepts of religion and tourism has a negative ring to it, especially as seen from the perspective of the church or all kinds of official religious institutions. However, as part of the broader leisure culture, religious tourism is an important cultural phenomenon and one that manifests itself in a variety of different ways. While participation in traditional institutional manifestations of religion is evaporating, religion has come to play an alluring role in leisure culture and tourism where it has firmly established itself as an influential element. Many people visit places, buildings, objects and events stamped by religion, also without there being any kind of religious purpose behind it. Religious locations can be part of a travel program or actually be the destinations of trips or journeys, and there may or may not be a spiritual or religious motivation underlying the visit. In many cultural historical travel programs religion is a central theme. However, religion is not merely the object of many forms of tourism and leisure. Leisure culture itself comprises many aspects and characteristics originally affiliated to religion. There is a juncture where religion and leisure meet. Tourism is not only a location of religion but is itself also a manifestation of religion. This raises questions about the possible religious character of leisure and tour-

¹ <http://dtxqtq4w60xqpw.cloudfront.net/sites/all/files/docpdf/markettrends.pdf> (accessed July 2014); <http://media.unwto.org/en/press-release/2012-05-07/international-tourism-receipts-surpass-us-1-trillion-2011> (accessed July 2014).

² B. ELANDS & J. LENGKEEK: *Typical tourists. Research into the theoretical and methodological foundations of a typology of tourism and recreation experiences* (= Mansholt studies 21) (Wageningen 2000) 1.

ism and the reverse. What makes sacred places so fascinating that they should attract so many visitors and why is it that precious places and actions are experienced as sacred or religious and considered worth going to or visiting?

The scholarly approach of tourism is a recent development which can be seen in the emergence of leisure and tourist studies as a distinct sub-discipline. Religion has been studied for centuries, especially from a theological point of view and later on as a cultural phenomenon from an anthropological perspective. The relation or interaction between tourism and religion in our contemporary western world has become only in recent decades subject of scholarly approaches. Most of the time both subjects have not been seen from a mutually dependent or interrelated perspective.

The thematic field of religion and tourism has been on the research agenda of various disciplines in culture studies, if only because of the classic topos of the 'pilgrim and the tourist'. The research has seen a remarkable and largely coherent development that can be captured in a subdivision into three phases.³

Initially, the research is characterized by dichotomy. Differences are stressed. The overall impression one gets is one of one-sidedness. It is religious studies and theology in particular that shield religion from tourism. But also in other contexts tourism is felt to be a threat, corroding authentic religious ritual, a superficial phenomenon connected to the evils of modernity.⁴

In the course of the Long Sixties, a shift begins to occur. Religious studies, in an increasingly open-minded approach, is including peripheral and popular non-confessional repertoires in its research, and there is growing contact with adjacent disciplines (such as the social sciences). This results in a second phase, characterized by a growing awareness of the interrelatedness of the two domains. In research on religion, there is increasing appreciation of the essentially layered quality of religious repertoires – the recreational element being part of this – and the existence of sacred zones outside the church. However, this shift from divergence to convergence was made possible in large measure thanks to the emergence of leisure studies in the framework of studies on the tourist experience conducted in the social sciences, notably in anthropology. This experience in many ways turned out to be quite similar to the religious experience. An important factor in this research is that the modes of tourist experience are approached starting from practical activities, from rituals. Eric Cohen and Jaap Lengkeek after him are important exponents of this approach.⁵

³ Cf. P. POST: 'De pelgrim en de toerist. Verkenning van een topos', in *Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift* 67 (2013) 135-149.

⁴ A. FRANKLIN: 'The tourist syndrome. An interview with Zygmunt Bauman', in *Tourist studies* 3 (2003) 205-217.

⁵ E. COHEN: 'A phenomenology of tourist experiences', in *Sociology. The journal of the British sociological association* 13 (1979) 179-201; IDEM: 'Pilgrimage and tourism. Convergence and divergence', in A. MORINIS (red.): *Sacred journeys. The anthropology of pilgrimage* (Westport 1992) 44-61; J. LENGKEEK: 'Leisure experience and imagination. Rethinking Cohen's modes of tourist experience', in *International sociology* 16 (2001) 173-184; B.

We can subsequently see a third phase emerging in our present time. While divergence and convergence still essentially start from the poles or identities of religion and tourism, various recent studies show that we have gone beyond this and that thinking in terms of poles has been abandoned. On the basis of a range of case studies, often collected in compilations, the current ritual milieu is sounded out, with religion and tourism still retaining their value as heuristic concepts, but otherwise having become largely fluid. Remarkably, pilgrimage still turns out to be a dominant theme, but often embedded now in a wider interest in sacred places and spaces, and as part of that context also in memorial culture. This phenomenon is referred to by various terms, ranging from intersecting trajectories and border crossing, to non-confessional pilgrimage, spiritual tourism, etc.⁶ Religious or leisure practices are no longer bound up with a central identity-assigning specific cultural field like religion, art and culture, leisure, sports, or tourism. Rather, what we are dealing with is multiple fields or the movement of activities and experiences from field to field.⁷ In other words: the tourist is not merely tourist and the pilgrim not merely pilgrim. What we are dealing with is a flowing dynamic whole of shifting appropriations and experiences. Practices and places offering room for these dynamics are in great demand and quite successful. One of the success stories in this respect is the *Camino*, the long-distance trail of the traditional pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, the trail as something that is open to the attribution of all kinds of meanings: religiously or spiritually, as a quest into the past, as experiencing

ELANDS & J. LENGKEEK: 'The tourist experience of out-there-ness. Theory and empirical research', in *Forest policy and economics* 19 (2012) 31-38; D. MCCANNELL: 'Staged authenticity. Arrangement of social space in tourist settings', in *American sociological review* 79 (1973) 589-603; IDEM: *The tourist* (New York 1976/1999).

⁶ E. BADONE & S.R. ROSEMAN (eds.): *Intersecting journeys. The anthropology of pilgrimage and tourism* (Urbana / Chicago / Springfield 2004); P.J. MARGRY: *Shrines and pilgrimage in the modern world. New itineraries into the sacred* (Amsterdam 2008); P.J. MARGRY & C. SÁNCHEZ-CARRETERO (eds.): *Grassroots memorials. The politics of memorializing traumatic death* (= Remapping cultural history 12) (New York / Oxford 2011); M. STAUSBERG: *Religion und moderner Tourismus* (Berlin 2010); IDEM: *Religion and tourism. Crossroads, destinations and encounters* (London / New York 2011); A. NORMAN: *Spiritual tourism. Travel and religious practice in western society* (= Continuum advances in religious studies) (London / New York 2009); D. TIMOTHY & D. OLSEN (eds.): *Tourism, religion and spiritual journeys* (London / New York 2006).

⁷ P. POST: 'Profielen van pelgrimage. Over actuele identiteiten van pelgrimages in Europa', in *De pelgrim* 26 (2010) 58-85; IDEM: 'Der moderne Pilger. Die Perspektive aktueller sakraler Felder', in S. BÖNTERT (Hrsg.): *Objektive Feier und subjektiver Glaube? Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Liturgie und Spiritualität* (= Studien zur Pastoralliturgie 32) (Regensburg 2011) 275-298; P. POST: 'De moderne pelgrim. Het perspectief van actuele sacrale velden', D. LOKIN (red.): *Pelgrims. Onderweg naar Santiago de Compostela* (Utrecht 2011) 155-175; P. POST: 'Profiles of pilgrimage. On identities of religion and ritual in the European public domain', in *Studia liturgica* 41 (2011) 129-155; IDEM: 'De pelgrim en de toerist'.

heritage, art and culture, as a sporting achievement or a challenge involving nature and one's body, a quest for healing for many, a veritable therapy for body and mind.

The characterization of this third phase is typical of the specific profile of the two international colloquia on Religion and Tourism, 15 June 2012 and 24 October 2013, organized by the Institute for Ritual and Liturgical Studies (IRiLiS) and the Department of Culture Studies of the Tilburg School of Humanities of Tilburg University. In these colloquia, the broad range of the theme was concentrated on rituals. A central aspect of the concept concerns religious or Christian ritual expressions that attract attention and on the other hand there is also religious tourism manifesting itself in ritual expressions. Most of the case studies that have been presented in the lectures explore concrete current ritual practices. Some of the papers read at these colloquia are reworked, extended and annotated and collected in this volume.