

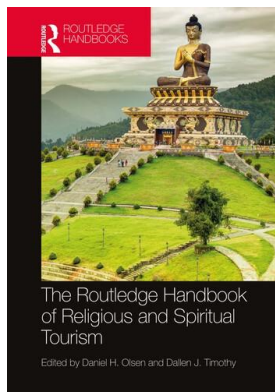
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INTERPRETING RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL TOURISM DESTINATIONS/SITES

Tomasz Duda

Introduction

The space of religious tourism, including pilgrimage, is created by delicate and extremely complicated relationships between the sacred and the profane heritage of a place. This results in the need to understand the place and experience, and how these affect the experiential recipient in very individual and unique ways. These complex relations are most fully manifested when contact occurs between the characteristics of sacred spaces and the characteristics of the visitors. What influences do such encounters have on the meanings and perceptions of a sacred site? Do the progression of globalization and the universality of narrative techniques have negative impacts on the originality and uniqueness of the *genius loci*? How should sacred places be interpreted to preserve their identity and spiritual significance, while allowing them to engage the recipient in learning about the site's other values? Contemporary interpretation is an extremely important element of the dialogue between visitors and attractions. It must therefore reconcile the growing consumption of heritage and the demand for alternative forms of tourism in a balanced way while maintaining the elemental nature of the sacred site and its spiritual significance.

From the earliest times, pilgrimage—travel undertaken for religious or spiritual reasons—satisfied important social needs and was one of the most salient short- and long-distance movement of people. Many authors even claim that tourism, like earlier forms of human mobility, was born of pilgrimage travel (e.g. Burns & Holden 1995; Różycki 2016; Vukonić 1996). However, while once the dominant motive was strictly religious engagement, multitudinous motivations have emerged since the Middle Ages, including those of an educational or recreational nature (e.g. Jackowski 2003; Olsen & Timothy 2006; Olsen, Trono & Fidgeon 2018; Vukonić 2006). Nowadays, however, a more frequent departure from the classic superficial 'sightseeing' includes engaging in deeper, more authentic experiences in connection with sacred space (Duda & Doburzyński 2019). Through proper destination or site interpretation, people should be able to sense the authenticity and spiritual depth of the sacred places they visit without excessive banalization or touristification. This chapter aims to characterize, classify and evaluate interpretation and narratives in religious tourism, as well as to indicate trends and future development directions.

Interpretation in religious and spiritual tourism

Tourism focuses largely on consuming products, impressions, pleasures, experiences and more (Vukonić 1996). Apart from knowledge, there is a strong need for feelings: deepened, moving and often calming experiences. Humans naturally seek these sensations in spiritual contexts and sacred space. Religious tourism, spiritual tourism and pilgrimage have become partly a response to these deeper senses. However, many people visit holy sites in the broadest sense not only for religious or spiritual reasons but also because these places represent valued cultural heritage and function simultaneously as tourist attractions where people can learn about the history of the place, its architecture and the religious denomination it represents.

As early as the mid-1950s, Tilden (1957) noted that the connection between a site or destination and its visitors is an appropriate narrative and interpretive message. The course of these processes is based on an intuitive understanding of the content being communicated. Tilden even speaks of ‘information-based revelation’, in which interpretation ought to provoke the recipient to think independently and create a meaningful image. Attempts to interpret sacred sites in this way were already made in ancient times, such as in ancient Egypt, where pilgrims visiting temples were accompanied by priests who explained the meaning of symbolisms and the course of everyday rituals (Lansangan-Cruz 2008; Mikos von Rohrscheidt 2019a) or in ancient Greece, where professional guides (*perigetai*—*ταῖ περιεχει*) and explanatory staff (*exegetai*—*ἐξηγηταί*) were present. One of the first tourist guides was created in Greece. It explained, among other things, the meaning of objects of worship, their symbolisms and history. This was called ‘*Peregesis tes Hellados*’.

The interpretation of sacred objects in those times, although unequivocal and narrowly catered to individual, local sites of worship was an extremely modern concept far ahead of its time. It used original narratives and aimed to help visitors understand messages. The ancient interpretation was normally an oral message and most often an uncritical narrative. Mikos von Rohrscheidt (2019a) defines this type of interpretation as a ‘single-dimensional’ one, given its limited scope of interaction.

A significant increase in the importance of sacred space, the development of symbolism, as well as a supra-local and supra-regional transmission of religious ideas occurred in the Middle Ages. Regardless of location, culture or religious circle, the influence of these times has strongly molded the religious dimensions of the social and political life of most nations. The development of sites of worship, spiritual centers and pilgrimage resulted in the intense need for interpreters who could guide and explain the meanings of the most important destinations. The narrative increasingly concerned not only individual sites of worship or spiritual objects (i.e. churches, chapels, monasteries, temples, springs and groves), but also linear systems, such as emerging pilgrim routes. Sacred space was interpreted through the use of various narrative techniques such as lectures, sermons, stories related to the figures of saints or sages, processions and biblical staging. At that time, detailed guidebooks for pilgrims were also created, which not only described the route and the religious heritage passed along the way, but also indicated the best accommodations and inns. They also mentioned the times and dates when it is best to set off on a journey of faith (Robinson 1997).

In Canterbury, tears of regret and groans of gratitude mingle with howls and screams of the sick. Crowds are pushing ahead to check each new miracle after it is announced, and priests must barge themselves through to examine the patient personally... At the

back of the church there are the best places for a tiny bit of sleep, despite the noise and closeness of the heat from thousands of candles.

(Sumption 1975, p. 93)

Another place where a visitor can easily become a participant in spiritual experiences is the barren desert east of Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Few tours leave such an indelible impression as the one at sunset, leading from the Dead Sea to Jerusalem.

(Sox 1985, p. 213)

It is easy to see that in earlier times, the interpretation of holy sites was quite naturally combined with experiences of a mystical nature. Explaining the meaning of sacred space was done in a manner that integrated spiritual space and geographical space, or landscape and surrounding nature. During this period, numerous itineraries were created, which constituted descriptions of the path leading to known and universally recognized sacred sites. In the first half of the twelfth century, the text *Mirabilia Urbis Romae* was written. It was essentially a guide to the Eternal City prepared by a canon of the basilica of St. Peter in the Vatican and was intended for pilgrims coming to Rome. Some descriptions of pan-European pilgrim routes were penned even earlier, including the description of *Via Francigena* by the pilgrim bishop, Sigerica, or the famous *Codex Calixtinus* describing the route to Santiago de Compostela (Ron & Timothy 2019). Large portions of those descriptions were devoted to natural phenomena and the landscape. The interpretation of nature as a context for culture and spiritual experiences often begins with a specific phenomenon (e.g. beauty and misunderstanding of the genesis of natural phenomena, unusual events or the culmination of the relief), which recipients must discover for themselves, hence the key importance of implementing the narrative *in situ* and in circumstances facilitating active contact with the surrounding environment. This type of multidimensional interpretation, which marries the relations between the recipient, the sacral, and geographical space can be described as 'integrated interpretation'.

Modern times are a period of dynamic social, cultural, political and religious changes. In the context of migration and increasing human mobilities, it is also a period of intensive tourism growth. At the end of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century, various forms of leisure emerged. Along with this, active and leisure tourism appeared, including the trend of comprehensive sightseeing, such as the so-called Grand Tour. Within Christianity, largely because of the Reformation, pilgrimage motivated strictly by religious purposes ceased to be the dominant form of travel. The border between *the sacrum* and *the profanum* became increasingly blurred, and the pilgrimage phenomenon began to be perceived as shared geographical, historical, cultural and sacral spaces (Adler 2002; Ambrósio 2007; Burns & Holden 1995; Cohen 1998; Olsen & Timothy 2006).

Changes in the social structure of traveling translated into changes in perceptions of sacred sites and sacred spaces, as well as the interpretation thereof. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries were also a time for becoming aware of one's own heritage, identifying with it and creating a characteristic narrative around it. Thus, sacred space was increasingly treated as a combination of the *sacrum* and elements of cultural, religious and historical heritage. The visitor not only needed experiences of a spiritual nature, direct contact with holiness but also desired information on the genesis of the site and its past, as well as its relationship with the present. The visitor, regardless of his or her main motivation for reaching a holy site, also wanted to understand the significance of the place for its broader cultural and spiritual importance, as well as the timeless message that accompanied it. Therefore, the

interpretation of the sacrosanct was associated with local heritage and other assets and was carried out by independent interpreters. Through this process, many of the pilgrimage centers known to date have evolved into large tourist destinations of regional and global importance. Examples are the shrines of Fatima, Lourdes, Rome and Guadalupe, large pilgrimage centers, including Częstochowa, Santiago de Compostela, Mecca and Varanasi, or smaller centers of religious worship throughout the world. In addition, the popularity of guidebooks contributed to the broadening of narration and encouraged visitors to independently, yet supported by interpretation, focus on the educational and cultural values of religious tourism.

Since the second half of the nineteenth century, interpretation comprehensively covered the interconnectedness between past, present and future. Due to the nature and broad spectrum of impact of this approach, it can be described as ‘extended interpretation’. It includes not only educational and narrative on-site activity but also in the space surrounding the sacred site, such as on the pilgrimage route or in places more closely connected to the sacred central point (Kanaan-Amat, Crous-Costa & Aulet 2019).

Mikos von Rohrscheidt’s (2019b) publication on the history of heritage interpretation in tourism noted that in the second half of the twentieth century, a departure from the classical educational form was discernable in favor of ‘balanced and holistic interpretation’. This reflects a significant expansion of areas subject to interpretation and changes in the form of communication and participant involvement. Alternative narratives and new forms of interpretation emerged, also in religious tourism contexts, including places of worship and spiritual experiences. According to Tilden’s (1957) thinking, the main goals of interpretation are to stimulate engagement in the process of cultural self-development, to broaden visitors’ horizons and to convey a clear message and historical truths. The interpretation process is additionally subject to constant change (Kanaan-Amat et al. 2019), reflecting a response to the rapidly changing expectations of tourists, including pilgrims. Sites that traditionally emitted a ‘spiritual magnetism’ and attracted mainly religiously motivated people (Olsen 2019; Preston 1992) have become a locus of intercultural and inter-religious exchange, as well as a place of heritage (Duda 2019). Changes in perceptions of sacred sites, as well as the global trend of individualized tourist experiences, have contributed to significant changes in the interpretation of religious and spiritual tourism destinations. From the end of the twentieth century, ‘participatory interpretation’ has become popular. This is based largely on the interactive involvement of recipients in the educational and narrative process (Hodges 2020).

Special examples of this type of interpretation include engaged sightseeing, combined with the experience of the hardships of the pilgrimage route, stories about ancient pilgrims and accommodations in former monasteries, such as along the Way of St. James, the Way of St. Olaf, the Route of the Templars and the old routes to Jerusalem in several European countries. Participatory interpretation, at least in its initial form, did not take into account the notion of authenticity, which so many tourists seek. The most important were personal impressions affected by appealing interpretation (Beck & Cable 1998; Uzzell 1998). At sites of a religious or spiritual nature, the *genius loci* also matters. Interpretation of the sacred must be done more carefully than in other situations and with more appropriate media to avoid distracting from pilgrims’ personal experience (Kanaan-Amat et al. 2019; Morales Miranda 2001). Duda (2019) similarly concluded many sacred site visitors do not need additional interpretation, for their encounters are extremely personal and individual: ‘personalized interpretation’.

Forms and rules of interpretation in religious tourism

The tourist's encounter with the sacred, irrespective of his or her origin, cultural context or spiritual involvement, is incomplete and devoid of authenticity if it does not include an appreciation of the heritage of the region and its people (Mikos von Rohrscheidt 2019b). On the other hand, the vast majority of religious heritage includes non-material spiritual elements, which are difficult to interpret and are characterized by distinct features of individuality. Everyone perceives holiness differently, and therefore, religious motives and manifestations can be comprehended differently (Kaelber 2002, 2006; Olsen et al. 2018; Różycki 2016)

Despite certain conceptual differences, religious tourism is frequently identified with pilgrimage. In this sense, the *sacrum* zone increasingly penetrates the *profanum*. The pilgrim undertaking a trip for strictly religious purposes is no longer only involved in ceremonies, worship services or rituals, but also a keen consumer of the destination locality with a desire to broaden her or his knowledge of faith, religion, culture and history (Duda & Doburzyński 2019; Mikos von Rohrscheidt 2016; Olsen 2011). The study by Duda and Doburzyński (2019) indicates that there are differences in the perceptions of sacral space among people traveling to consecrated destinations for strictly religious purposes and those who, aside from the religious significance, also sightsee the other historical, cultural and social values of the destination. Therefore, the types and forms of interpretation, as well as the narrative media used, are closely related to the needs and expectations of the recipient.

Castells (2001) identifies three basic spheres of influence of interpretation in the broader heritage context:

- The *emotional (or sensual) sphere* refers to the multi-sensory presentation of a site being an attractive space and affecting the recipient's senses, which translates into the perception of the site by the recipient with its aesthetic values. Using appropriate narrative tools and forms, the interpreter helps give the site a specific atmosphere, refers to the character of the site and emphasizes its cultural, aesthetic and spiritual values;
- The *ideological sphere* refers to the nature of the site and the conditions of the functioning thereof in a social, economic, political, cultural or religious context;
- The *instrumental sphere* uses a variety of tools (including schematics, engravings, photographs, models, animations and modern multimedia) and narrative forms (reconstructions, fictionalized narratives, storytelling and games).

In the case of sacral spaces, however, more spheres of influence are identifiable. The list of tools used by the interpreter at this type of site will also be different and slightly more selective. In holy places, there are different restrictions than what other heritage localities might face, such as the inviolability of the *sacrum* zone, which highlights the specificity of interpretation in religious and spiritual tourism. Considering these unique and delicate conditions, sacred space includes the spheres distinguished by Castells (2001) as follows:

- The *symbolic sphere* includes the interpretation of sites particularly sensitive to specific religious or denominational groups, sites full of symbols and meanings, which, on the one hand, require some explanation and proper narrative supporting their comprehension (in particular for visitors belonging to different religious groups, non-believers or people from different cultural and social domains). On the other hand, they constitute a

kind of closed semantic circle reserved for a given religious group and enter into direct relations between the believer and the *sacrum* surrounding him/her;

- The *spiritual* sphere is the individual sphere of the recipient, which translates into difficulties in its identification and proper interpretation; it is worth emphasizing that the spiritual sphere does not refer only to the internal experiences of believers, but reflects the whole spiritual heritage of the site and its universal message identified with the given cultural circle of the site. The spiritual sphere is also an integral part of the site's authenticity the process known as 'searching self-identity through travel', described by Olsen (2008, 2012) and Collins-Kreiner (2010) as the so-called 'third space'.

To comprehend better the ideas that guide the development of sacred space as a tourism asset, one should be aware of the fact that the vast majority of cases are not purposely planned to be tourist attractions. As Millar (1999) indicates, such sites originated as social spaces where individual religious groups expressed their faith, cultivated spirituality and met the needs of communion with the *sacrum*. Over time, these relationships have created features, symbols and material and non-material characteristics that identify them with the specific cultural and religious heritage of the surrounding societies. In addition, they reflect current social, political or cultural and religious conditions (Olsen 2019). Examples from around the world show that sacred space can be a venue for contestation and inter-sectoral or inter-faith disputes between different religious groups (e.g. Jerusalem or Ayodhya) (Tahan 2020; Timothy & Emmett 2014), as well as a place where personal identity, solidarity or opposition related to certain political, social or religious groups manifest (Hassner 2003; Jackowski & Soljan 2000). Olsen (2019) suggests the notion of 'sacred spaces in motion', in which pilgrims or tourists may look for alternative spaces to avoid conflicts or even displays of aggression in politically charged or socially divisive sacred sites.

Tourism focused on the heritage of faith and broadly conceived spiritual values, treats non-material resources (e.g. ideas, symbols, universal messages) as basic elements of place. The more universal their meaning and the more widespread they are outside their place of origin, the more diverse their tourist audiences will be. Therefore, they are interpreted in the context of the social and cultural religious conditions of the era. Interpretation often uses an extensive inventory of methods and techniques that can be attractive and accessible to a wide audience. Their use largely depends on the nature and spatial assumption of the sacred place or object, as well as the profile of the recipients themselves. Interpretation at sacred places or other localities of a spiritual nature should follow the main principles and goals as defined by Tilden (1957) and Beck and Cable (1998). Due to the nature of sacred space, however, interpreters should take into account the individual needs of the recipients, particularly with regard to maintaining their private perception of the site and personal relationships with holiness. The interpretation of religious and spiritual attractions should not interfere too much with the deep meaning of the *genius loci* and the authenticity of the site. It should take into account the specific sensitivities of religiously involved people. The approach to presenting elements of spiritual heritage allows visitors to learn and understand the universal message that is shared with visitors. Hopefully, it also translates into better protection and preservation, but also to show certain processes involving identifying one's relationship with the *sacrum*, the development of beliefs, as well as shaping attitudes and building close relationships with the surrounding environment.

The specific, individual and often unique features of sacrosanct places necessitate a very precise and well-planned interpretive program. The diversity of techniques and tools and the technological capabilities depend both on external factors (e.g. size and significance of the

site, trail or object being interpreted, its development, architectural value and even financial condition) as well as internal factors (e.g. religious and cultural influence, heritage transfer, the relation of *sacrum* to the *profanum* or the authenticity and universality of the transmitted messages). The elements connecting these factors are the tourists/pilgrims themselves and their preparation to receive the interpreted content—religious, spiritual or cultural involvement, willingness to accept the narrative addressed to them, individual perception of the site, as well as their interpersonal relations and the ability to use new technologies.

Due to the large diversity of religious and spiritual tourism destinations, as well as the developing profiles of visitors, there are many standard techniques and tools used in interpreting sacred sites. Some of them are interpersonal, relating to direct narration between the interpreter and the recipient. Others use modern technology and narrative multimedia tools. They are mainly used by individuals who engage with interpretive media by themselves based on prepared narratives. The scope of interpretation and its physical location may be temporarily or permanently limited because of the presence of the *sacrum* zone, which is the physical area of a pilgrim's personal relations with holiness (Duda 2019; Duda & Dobrzyński 2019). This mainly applies to guided narrations, wherein guides explain the meaning of individual sites in the sacred space in a professional manner.

By compiling all of the above elements that shape the appropriate narration and create an interpretation of the sacred destination, the following are the most important forms, tools and goals of interpretation in religious and spiritual tourism.

Interpersonal interpretation

Heritage places have long utilized a wide range of interpersonal interpretive tools to educate visitors and help them create experiences. Such tools involve live people acting as guides, information brokers and re-enactors. All of these approaches to heritage tourism have been effective and are now widely used in religious tourism settings (Timothy 2021).

Oral communication

Often comprised of fictionalized legends, storytelling and thematic narratives, oral communication techniques focus on a specific topic related to works of art or stories about the genesis of the place, its development and meaning, or the character (e.g. saints, former spiritual masters, spiritual guides). Oral transmission is usually carried out *in situ* by a guide and refers to a specific place, environment or element of the destination. It is usually used for a larger group of recipients, most often for those not directly related to the place or even a given religious, cultural or national group. Due to the ease of falling into a routine during the so-called systematic or repetitive interpretation—common in the case of the guide's work, oral communication should be conducted so that it is easy to read and understand and be respectful of the worldviews of recipients. Due to the nature of the destination, oral communication cannot be delivered everywhere and at any time even during the site's opening hours. Restrictions apply to, among others, the presence of the *sacrum* zone and during religious practices and worship services.

Lectures, sermons, hagiographic narratives

These include thematic speeches focused on a specific topic related to the place, its symbolism and/or its physical characteristics. The narrative, which is much longer than in the case

of traditional oral communication, aims not only to provoke thinking but also to increase interest in issues directly or indirectly related to the place being interpreted. This type of interpretation is addressed to certain recipients who, because of their own interests, decide to participate in the narrative. Some kinds of this type of narration are fictionalized meetings, including staged characters, where the interpreter plays the role of a character from a specific period and actively presents information about the issue, for example, a visit to the family home of Pope John Paul II in Wadowice, Poland. Actors dressed in period costumes, such as at Nazareth Village, narrate stories about events and living during the time of Christ. Another example is multimedia lectures, in which the interpreter's narration is complemented by films and other such media.

Participatory interpretation

Participatory interpretation emphasizes the interaction between the interpreter and the recipient (pilgrim, tourist). The idea of the participatory narrative is to draw the recipients into the interpretation by jointly discovering its secrets, searching for elements of the narration in the place, participating in thematic workshops, competitions or discussions. This type of interpretation is present, among others, on pilgrim routes or so-called prayer paths, where spiritual guides engage the pilgrim or other tourist in participating in religious practices, explaining at the same time their meanings and symbolisms. This type of interpretation includes, for instance, organized meetings referring to old religious traditions (e.g. Feast of Tabernacles—Sukkot in Israel). A special type of participatory interpretation is the thematic workshops often organized at large monastic premises, sanctuaries or other religious places. Examples include icon writing workshops in Cistercian monasteries and illuminating incunabulas in Benedictine monasteries. A specific form of interpretation participation is multi-day stays of an educational, contemplative or formative nature in the area of a working temple or monastery, or among a religious order. Such stays include not only educational components but also creative exercises of spiritual or contemplative values (e.g. the Taizè community in France).

Intercultural narratives

These narratives are found in places where various religious or cultural-religious groups dominate, as well as in objects that constituted an important historical spiritual center. Many such places are found in the Holy Land, where the three monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—dominate a small area. Some places in Germany, Scandinavia, Poland and the Czech Republic exemplify these. In areas that were once the regional domain of Protestant, Orthodox or other Christian sects but which are currently managed by the Catholic Church, a double interpreter has been introduced. In this instance, two guides may be involved in explaining the meanings of church architecture, decor and symbolism from an inter-denominational perspective. Interpretation from each of these faiths or denominations allows the recipient to become acquainted with diverging views of the same heritage. Together these perspectives provide a more holistic picture of the place as a spiritual center of societies that inhabited the region through different periods of time.

Staging and stylized narrative

These are less common in religious tourism than in other forms of heritage tourism. They rely on the staging of an event, a person's life history, a legend or an historical event related

to the place or object being interpreted. Events partly staged in religious tourism include various types of church fairs, processions or sacralized representations of past events. Examples include La Festa dei Ceri (Gubbio, Italy), Misteri d'Elx (Elx, Spain), El Cant de Sibilla (Mallorca, Spain) and the annual passion play in Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, Poland (Sawicka 2007).

Extended interpretation

These types of methods go beyond the interpersonal ones and are more dependent on the visitors' own use of certain media. These include printed material, placards, displays and technologies that assist visitors in understanding the cultural and religious significance of the place they are visiting.

Educational information boards

Interpretive plaques or information boards display facts, knowledge and information in an accessible manner. This often includes pictures, diagrams, explanations and stories in textual form. The most accessible interpretive panels include braille and audio options for visually impaired visitors. In religious tourism, this medium is most often used for objects and sites that have significant architectural or aesthetic values, or displays in a museum setting. The advantages of this medium are low cost, no additional fees, easy maintenance, the personalization of the message and access to wider audiences, regardless of the time or number of visitors. The main disadvantages of this tool, however, are the difficulty and expense of making changes when the information needs to be updated and the limited surface space for typesetting.

Multimedia exhibits

These include various types of dioramas, information kiosks, touch screens or interactive games and videos. In faith tourism and in broader religious heritage contexts, such tools are often used in cultural and sacral heritage objects or temples, which, in addition to sacral functions, also have museum functions. New technologies provide multidimensional presentations, as well as multi-sensory and interactive learning. Augmented reality is an important component of this category, which can benefit users by virtually rebuilding parts of churches and temples that have disappeared over centuries or millennia. Such technologies allow visitors to see what certain structures, features and artworks might have looked like during their heyday or when they were first constructed, such as at the Abby of Cluny and in the Romanesque Churches of Catalonia (Fusté-Forné 2020; Rueda-Esteban 2019). Thanks to new audio and video technology, visitors can create their own sightseeing paths, supported by stationary or mobile interpretation devices. In some facilities such as the Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi, Italy, triggered illumination of the main features of the church (e.g. Giotto's frescoes from the thirteenth century) combined with a simultaneous explanation of their history and message, adds considerable interpretive appeal and value.

Personal digital interpretation

Recent advances in information and communication technology (ICT) have significantly influenced the interpretation and management of cultural heritage (Hausmann & Weuster 2018; Timothy 2021). ICT has spurred the development of many different technology-driven

interpretive media as noted in the section above, but much of the change has resulted in highly personalized tools that utilize new forms of narration and modern technology. GPS-powered mobile phone applications are the best current example of this. Phone apps provide many personalized interpretive media, such as site guides which the user controls freely, QR code readers, and virtual and individualized augmented reality technologies (Bohlin & Brandt 2014; Solima & Izzo 2018). An example would be the Benedictine Abbey of Montserrat in Catalonia, Spain. Modern digital interpretation also allows for learning about places and objects that have been destroyed over the centuries and have not survived to modern times, or for various reasons visiting them is not possible (e.g. some Aboriginal sacred sites in Australia or the unapproachable hermits of the abbots in the Apennines). Despite the many advantages of modern technology and its educational capabilities, it contains a number of disadvantages that are often unacceptable for religious tourism and pilgrimage. The main concern is the potential for ICT to shallow the message, or overshadow the message. It may also help create mass narratives devoid of deeper reflection on the symbolisms of the sacred locale, reproducing stereotypes and blurring the authenticity of the site. Nevertheless, this type of interpretation is frequently used at religious centers for its cognitive value and to function as an additional attraction.

Fictionalized experiential interpretation

This relatively new form of narration in religious tourism has many features in common with participatory interpretation, encouraging the visitor to participate in co-creating the experience and knowledge of a region's religious heritage. It also uses tools characteristic of multi-threaded fictional narratives (e.g. printed descriptions, mobile apps, riddles, games and competitions) (Champion 2008; Ćosović & Brkić 2019). For example, to learn about the history of the Cistercian order in France, visitors can utilize 'fictionalized touring' (so-called 'questing') of the former monastery in Cîteaux (Burgundy) and the Abbey of Chorin (Germany). There, visits are staged and involve the creation of a medieval atmosphere through choral music, burning torches and tasting monastery beers.

Conclusion: the future of interpretation in religious tourism

With the growth in the need for more educational and more experiential immersion, the interpretation of cultural heritage, including religious and spiritual heritage, is one of the most important characteristics of tourism development throughout the world. On the other hand, sacred space is one of the most important elements of religious destinations and religious landscapes, constituting the subject of interest for tourists and pilgrims. Its functioning, shape and boundaries result from the influence of both the elements of the *sacrum* and the broadly understood *profanum* (Cohen 2006; Duda & Doburzyński 2019; Puşcaşu 2015). One of the bridges linking these two elements is an adequate and appropriate interpretative program that will engage participants and explain the place's religious and spiritual values, and its cultural heritage role in the region. In many cases, the full understanding of the *sacrum* involves the use of an appropriate narrative, the origins of which derive from the tradition of the *profanum*. The elements of the *profanum* have therefore impacted the character of sacral spaces, as well as the manner of understanding and perceiving the *sacrum* itself. This impact does not necessarily reflect negatively or raise conflict between these seemingly two different worlds. Research by the author among sacred site visitors has even pointed to the interpenetration of these profane elements (Duda 2019).

One of the basic aims of interpretation, as indicated by Tilden (1957), is the universality of the message and the reference to the whole site, strongly related to its surroundings and larger region. Interpretation should also be addressed to everyone, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. However, there are some barriers or limitations that must be overcome by using more universal narrative techniques and methods. An example of such a barrier is cross-border religious heritage. In this situation, religious heritage and faithscapes are divided by a political boundary, which in many parts of the world strongly deters transfrontier collaboration, including in tourism. So what should the interpretation of cross-border sacredscapes look like in light of the barriers raised by political boundaries? One solution might be to use a common intercultural narrative to present a fuller picture of the site's diversity in terms of nationality and culture. Unfortunately, in many cases, the lack of cross-border cooperation becomes an insurmountable barrier. Another question is how we should interpret sacred places and objects in conflict, such as in the case of a community that currently occupies an area that is sacred for another group. In the literature, this phenomenon is described as 'difficult heritage', 'dissonant heritage' and 'contested heritage' and applies to sites where one community (culture, religion) does not recognize, or is in conflict with, another (e.g. Mikos von Rohrscheidt 2019b; Olsen & Timothy 2002; Timothy & Emmett 2014; Tunbridge & Ashworth 1996). Well-organized interpretation can help mitigate interfaith conflict and may lead to greater understanding and ultimately mutual tolerance and common ground. On the other hand, the implementation of a common narrative may be difficult because of the overlapping identities associated with the site.

It is difficult to predict the future of interpretation in religious and spiritual tourism contexts. At many sites, interpretation is so unique to a heritage of faith, that it lacks equivalents in other areas of heritage and tourism. Authenticity is also understood somewhat differently in such places. In the case of holy localities, authenticity is more often reflected in non-material values (e.g. communion with deity and the spirit of the place). In addition, it is important to remember that the *sacrum* zone in many cases constitutes an inviolable membrane between different interpretations of faith heritage. It is the very personal zone where visitors interact with holiness. Interference in this space and state of being may be perceived as interference in people's most private and deepest emotional states. It is this understanding of sacred space that should determine the extent, content and media of interpretation. The overall values shaping sacred sites and their messages as part of a region's cultural heritage derived from the original religious significance of that locale. This should underscore the look of interpretation at places of faith, religion and spirituality.

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