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# Malta and Faith-Based Tourism: stocktaking and future perspectives

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## By way of introduction

Over time, numerous pilgrimage sites have come about, some for a short period, others for near-eternity – such as Jerusalem, Bethlehem (Israel), Mecca, Medina (Saudi Arabia), Rome (Italy), Lourdes (France), Santiago de Compostella (Spain), Guadalupe (Mexico), Kumbh Mela, Bodh Gaya (India), Shikoku (Japan) or Axum (Ethiopia), just to name a few of the thousands of significant pilgrimage sites in the world. For some of these sites, the place itself is of significance (Lourdes, Kumbh Mela), for other the travel to the site or sites is important (Santiago, Shikoku), and there are sites where there is travel within the sites (Mecca and Medina), or the journey and the site are essential for identity and ethnicity of the believers (Guadalupe). In view of Malta's size and being an island, the significance is in the present times is not in the travel to the island, but of being there and possibly in having short journeys of significance or processions. In the past, of course, the travel to Malta over sea could be a hazardous undertaking.

Pawlikowska-Piechotka et al. (2016, p.305) claim that 'in the European tradition, the most famous sanctuaries are Rome, Jasna Gora, Santiago de Compostella, Fatima, Kutná Hora, Zelena Hora, Medjugorije and Lourdes,' but that many pilgrims also like to visit smaller sites within rural environments, in order to come to a better

understanding of themselves and to get a more intense connection with the sites they visit. Such pilgrims are also curious about the local culture and tradition.

It is within such a framework that the attraction of Malta as a destination for pilgrimage, or in the wider sense, of faith-based tourism, become apparent. Malta has experienced a continuation of cultural heritage in religion, as it has been part of the Neolithic era, the Bronze Age world, the Classical civilisation, the Judeo-Christian culture, the Arabic realm and after all that, the Roman Catholic sphere till the present day. It is assumed, for the sake of argument of faith-based tourism, that all these cultures were familiar with pilgrimage and tourism in a variation of degrees and intensity; some are still of influence on Malta as a destination for faith-based travel. There are a variety of sacred sites in the island, both rural and urban; many are Christian. Other locations are used for secular pilgrimage related to World War Two. There are also those which are at the same time places of touristic and spiritual interest, such as the Neolithic Temples – of interest to both cultural tourists and the adherents of the New Religions Movements (NRM).

## Malta as a Sacred Island in faith-based tourism

At first glance, one may wonder why Malta, so rich in its authentic cultural and religious heritage, is not a main destination for faith-based tourism, notwithstanding its fully developed and functional tourism infrastructure. Similarly, many people and organisations have endeavoured, both in the past and in the present, to promote visits and pilgrimages to Malta, but it seems that the islands never managed to come out of the periphery of matters. It seems that the established tourism sector is too deeply rooted in the structures of mass tourism, to be bothered with viable alternatives. It is only the newer companies who do not wish to break into this old established mass market that are engaging in novel ideas and markets. Faith-based tourism would have a bigger chance to flourish within such a new infrastructure, since the global growth of faith-based tourism (WTO, 2019) has hardly impinged on the structuring or niche-forming of inbound faith-based tourism to the Maltese archipelago. Although tourism is a vital segment of the Maltese economy, the established sector has not been capable, or willing, notwithstanding its fully developed, tried and tested tourism

infrastructure, to foster faith-based tourism and to attract a larger number of pilgrimage tourists, especially in the off-season. Not even the three papal visits in 1990, 2002 and 2013 have led to growth in pilgrimages, as has happened in other countries (Reader, 2007). Malta is at present easily accessible by air through relatively inexpensive air connections. Moreover, Malta's vast potential, with 7,200 years of authenticity and rich local tradition (Bonanno, 2004), related to a distinctive historical, cultural and religious heritage, may present a broad appeal to many denominations, religions and philosophies of life. The UNESCO World Heritage List mentions various sites and cities in Malta. This lack of development is remarkable, since faith-based tourism is quite resistant to financial and economic crises. Timothy and Olsen have asserted that faith-inspired travel is 'one of the most significant types of tourism in the world today by volume and prevalence' (2006, p.276).

## Significance of the past

Many people have, throughout the ages, considered tiny Malta as a Sacred Island and the home of a succession of divinities, a palimpsest of divinities throughout its human existence. A long sequence of famous divinities (including those of the Neolithic and Classical periods) and saints can be observed at Malta through their tangible remains. Some older archaeologists, such as Themistocles Zammit (1930) called Malta 'the holy island of Neolithic Faith' while Zuntz (1971, p.4) labelled it *isola sacra* – a sacred island.

In the absence of any written evidence, but in the presence of archaeological 'foreign' material proof and anthropological evidence (Trump, 2002), it can be asserted, that Malta played a role as a significant albeit distant shrine for pilgrimage, isolated in the Mediterranean.

Rountree (2003), an anthropologist of religion, surmises that from Neolithic data arriving from disciplines such as anthropology, archaeology and architecture, the early inhabitants of Malta possessed a religion centred on an indigenous Neolithic divinity of vegetation, healing, fertility, predicting of the future and celebration of the cycles of life and death, which she regards as perennial human needs. The Neolithic goddess of Malta is, according to Zuntz (1971), connected to the Asia Minor mother goddess '*Mater Magna*' from previous times and connects to later goddesses in the Greek and Roman world, such as

the *Theotokos* of the Greeks (the Mother of God, *Mater Dei*). At present, the Asian connection of the notional *Mater Magna* is rather thought to be of an Indo-European origin (Renfrew, 2010, p.10). In the pagan Arabic world, the equivalent of the *Mater Magna* was *Al-Lãt*, literally 'the Goddess', the great mother Goddess of the Arabic realm before Islam (Guillaume, 1990, p. 7).

Malta has been also described in several treatises of Classical geography, medieval chronicles, maps and Christian theological sources. In Azzopardi and Freller (2010) one may find a comprehensive list of Classical scholars, such as Cicero, Silius Italicus, Diodorus Siculus, Pliny and Strabo, describing the island and its position in the Mediterranean.

## Development of niche markets

The idea or concept of the *Mater Magna* or Great Mother Goddess plays an equally important role in a number of New Religious Movements (NRM), which thus creates a modern connection to the Neolithic temples of Malta. A large number of NRM groups exist, and the most relevant for Malta are adherents of Wicca, an umbrella term for many such groups, among others, the Neo-pagans, druids, Goddess Spirituality and Traditional, Hereditary or Hedge Witchcraft, which suggests that many of these beliefs and rituals are fundamentally similar (Hutton, 1999, pp.389-390).

Increasingly, modern people, stressed as they may be by pressures of work or environment, are exploring alternative solutions in their search of some human essentials such as personal cleansing from bad experiences, healing for themselves or collectively for others or Nature, self-actualisation, empowerment, spiritual well-being, spiritual engagement or (re)discovering whatever one's faith was (Starhawk, 2011; Notermans, 2008; Scott, 2010).

The Christian religion is well documented and does not need any general explanation here. The first signs of a Christian culture in Malta appear around the fourth century and since then it has become solidly embedded in the religious fabric of Malta. Only during the period of the Muslim Arabic invasion and occupation 870 to 1091, Christianity was at its lowest level, if not completely removed from Malta (Wettinger, 1986; Brincat, 1995; Dalli, 2005). At present, the Roman Catholic religion is still the most important belief.

In Malta, much is written from the devotional and theological point of view, but the corresponding academic interest regarding Our Lady in relation to incoming faith-based tourism has not attracted much academic attention, notwithstanding that Our Lady is a national patron-saint of Malta and dedication to Her is far and wide (Borg, 1983, 1988). In agreement with Hermkens et al. (2009, p.1), the Marian sites are among the most significant pilgrim sites in the world, and thus in Malta too, and 'intrinsically linked with topics that are of interest to contemporary scholars'. They interpret this as a consequence of globalisation and secularisation, although they argue that Marian pilgrimages are actually modernity and secularisation resistant, and therefore of great importance to faith-based tourism. Further to these thoughts, although religion is often regarded as of no consequence or irrelevant to modern secular societies, the vacuum it creates and the places secularism cannot reach, give rise to the role of religion for those for whom the secular society does not, cannot or will not cater for. Religious movements, such as the Marian cult and NRM are becoming more relevant than ever could have been imagined, as people seek supernatural help where the natural world fails to accommodate them. In the process of empowerment and improving life's qualities, many of the old and new Marian symbols are being employed (Starhawk, 1999; Notermans, 2008; Hermkens et al., 2009).

The missionary zeal of St Paul introduced Christianity far beyond its Judaic birthplace and boundaries. Christianity's advent in Malta is thought to be connected to the providential shipwreck of the later apostolic St Paul in the year 60, as narrated in the Acts of the Apostles, 27 and 28, of the New Testament. According to this popular belief, this not only established an early Christian community, but also brought about a cult of healing and celebration of life in a Christian context (Zammit Maempel, 2010). Obviously, this was an early oral Christian version, as the New Testament had not been compiled yet. What came to Malta was the Pauline vision of Christianity, as later on became known, once the New Testament was composed in the fourth century, as the Acts of the Apostles. Guillaumier (2006) writes that St Paul, during his stay in Malta, convinced people by healing, not by conversion (see the New Testament, Acts of the Apostles 27 and 28).

Freller (1995, 1996) states that although the actual location of St Paul's shipwreck is not a straightforward affair and other locations

than Malta made claim to this, the island of Malta remains the only logical candidate. Sant Cassia (1993, pp.358-9) claims that Malta's nationhood and national identity started with the arrival of St Paul, a point which had already been brought up by Cassar and Zammit (1990). This event was instrumental in creating a starting point of Maltese history and, with the comfort of hindsight, its inhabitants became the 'chosen people', as divine Providence seemed to deem them worthy to become the first Christians of Europe. When the Knights of St John were granted Malta, early descriptions of Malta suggest that the Order encountered a local Maltese population who were Roman Catholic all the same, but had their own islanders' perspective, whereby the cult of St Paul was rather central (Cassar, 2004). St Paul is the national patron saint of Malta.[1] Many people regard the Maltese Roman Catholic Church as the only remaining extant Apostolic See founded by St Paul (Bettetini, 2010, p.493).

The ultimate authority of Malta and St Paul obviously comes from the Act of the Apostles (27 and 28) in the New Testament, but as important is the mentioning of Malta and St Paul in the fourth century Apocryphal Acts of Saints Peter and Paul (Azzopardi & Freller, 2010, pp.79-168). A strong revival of the cult around St Paul started in the beginning of the seventeenth century. Research by Blondy (2006) and Azzopardi and Blondy (2012) on St Paul, from documents related to Marc'Antonio Haxac, a surgeon on the galleys of the Order of St John and a chronicler, discusses the role of the Jesuit Order and the Order of St John and their interest in promoting the cult of the Apostle. This revival of the Pauline cult had an origin in the activities of Juan Benegas de Cordoba, a Spanish hermit who between 1599 and 1624 settled in Rabat near St Paul's Grotto. De Cordoba diligently promoted this Grotto through diplomacy, supported by Alof de Wignacourt, Grand Master of the Order of St John, the Jesuits and the *Università* which was the local government of Malta. These combined efforts promoted the Grotto successfully both locally and internationally. The efforts were supported through the rule of the Order of St John, providing political and economic stability to the Maltese islands.

When writing about pilgrims to St Paul's Grotto in Rabat, Malta, during the period of the Order of St John, Freller (1995) suggests that

[1] http://www.vassallomalta.com/Bishops.htm > Accessed on 10th February 2014.

the biblical story of St Paul was also capitalised upon to make Malta a significant pilgrims' destination. Malta featured as an important stopover in the age of the Grand Tour and a healthy tourism sector developed, Maltese limestone was a much sought after 'health product' throughout the whole of Europe. Zammit Maempel (2010) researched, among others, objects made from Maltese limestone, which were attributed with healing powers through the intervention of St Paul. As a faith-based tourism initiative, *Ċentru Animazzjoni u Komunikazzjoni* (Animation and Communication Centre, ĊAK) organizes local pilgrimages to all the sites that are attributed with the presence of St Paul during his sojourn in Malta.[2]

## Faith-Based Tourism as a growth market

Some commentators such as St Jerome in the fourth century (Sumption, 2003; Bitton-Ashkelony, 2005) had already concluded that pilgrimage and tourism go together. The relevance of pilgrimage and faith-based tourism is that they are very much growth-markets, although they may be regarded in some secular or scientific circles as *fin-de-siècle* features and therefore irrelevant (Davie, 2010). Reader (2007) remarks that pilgrimage centres worldwide, related to many religions, have been reporting increasing numbers of pilgrims. At the same time, Reader continues, this growth does not necessarily run parallel with a growth in faith or is a result of a religious revival, but perhaps is connected to improved travel accessibility, which allows not only more people to go on a pilgrimage than previously, but also to go more frequently. People engage in pilgrimage for personal reasons, searching for identity, self-discovery or meaning in life, spiritual encounters and therapy outside prescribed and organised religions. Serious growth is also noticeable in the NRM segment of faith-based travel (Reader, 2007). There are pilgrims' destinations, such as Malta, which were never accessible on foot, but only by boat and nowadays by air travel. Faith-based tourism and pilgrimages accounted for about 30 percent of total travel. The last decade or so also saw a rapid global increase in visitor numbers connected to faith-based tourism, which, notwithstanding the world's financial and economic crises in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, is still a growing economic sector (WTTC, 2012). Timothy and Olsen (2006) report that religion played an important role in the development of leisure time (Sunday off) and what to do in that free

[2] http://theshipwreckmalta.com/pilgrimages/

time. The economic potential of sacred places and pilgrims is also key to the increase in cultural tourism, and sacred places are now regarded as resources.

The average Christian group pilgrimage is a generic product, created by the supply side, such as to Lourdes, Medjugorje or even the Camino de Santiago. At present, one of the more important factors promising economic growth or stunt is the decision, or lack of it, to change one's religious tourism products from a supply perspective to a demand perspective, applicable to both mass tourism and individual tourism products. Usually, pilgrimage as group travel is a double-supply issue, the standard package offered by the hotels and tour operators, and the standard, prescribed experienced provided by the organising (Christian) church. On the other side of the spectrum is the double-demand, created, for instance, by the NRM groups and individual pilgrims of whatever outlook. Customising one's mass tourism product does not mean supplying 'everything to everybody' (Pine and Gilmore, 2013, p.24) but to produce only and exactly what customers want, and when they want it. Better values for pilgrims are created when they are less dependent on the restrictions of the suppliers. For instance, the shrine of the first Maltese saint, Dun George Preca, is closed daily between 13.00 and 16.00 hrs, the traditional siesta time. As an unwanted result, many organisers leave it out of the programme, since they often have a '9 to 5' restriction regarding overtime procedures with service-providers such as drivers. Perhaps, as an extreme example, postmodern pilgrims (see below) would like to visit a chapel when they want to, have masses organised to fit into their programme when convenient for them and have access to sites and shrines throughout the day.

## A rich mix of faith-based visitors

One may ask who visits Malta for a pilgrimage or a faith-based journey. Traditionally, there are three main groups – Roman Catholics, Protestants and NRM – although a wide variety of Christians visit the island for special purposes. For instance, some Syrians Christians families went to Malta in 2015 on an international peace-seeking mission for the troubles in Syria and Iraq. In these categories there are mostly families or organised groups with their priests, ministers or spiritual leaders, but also individuals.

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| I | The pious, ascetic and pure pilgrim, in groups or individual. |
| II a | Roman Catholic group pilgrimage with accompanying parish priest. These visit Malta also for cultural and touristic purposes, but have Holy Mass in Roman Catholic churches, sometime every day. |
| II b | Roman Catholic group or individual pilgrimage with a particular goal, Marian, Pauline or the Order of St John. These visit Malta also for cultural and touristic purposes, but have Holy Mass in Roman Catholic churches, sometime every day. They are guided by Scripture and tradition. |
| II c | Christians of other denominations, such as Greek Orthodox, Syrian Christians, who visit on a mission, such as peace-seeking, or to follow a particular saint, such as St George. |
| II d | Protestant religious groups are not called pilgrimage but are 'engaged' travels from the Protestant perspective. Catholic churches are visited for their cultural and not for their religious value. They would have a religious function in the evening in the hotel, a closure of the day, a Bible reading and prayer and singing. The Scriptures are their literal guideline. |
| II e | Protestants religious groups or individuals who are less literal but more allegorical in their Scriptural interpretation. These would possibly have a careful or exploratory interest in the Virgin Mary. |
| II f | Protestants religious groups who are in Malta to follow the Pauline trail as a main objective. |
| II g | Oecumenical groups are generally more open to the local Roman Catholic approach. |
| III | Sacred travel of the adherents of the New Religious and Spiritual Movements to Malta, for spiritual experiences and sessions in the Maltese Neolithic temples. Very diverse participants and groups of participants. Some visit churches to venerate Our Lady in their own manner. |
| IV | Followers of the Jewish religion, in all its degrees and varieties. Individuals, families and groups. |
| V | Adherents of other religions, who have escaped the radar of the researcher. |

**Munro's revised variation on Smith's Pilgrim-Tourist continuum: Diversification in Faith-Based Tourism to Malta – 2019**

Considering a more trend-following approach, one can also divide these groups in traditionalists and those who travel for an experiential visit. Besides that, the latter has been a rather persistent and growing phenomenon, it lends itself also for the proposing of new theories.

## New avenues in classification

In this article it is also acknowledged that not every one of those travelling to Malta within the segment of faith-based tourism is actively and consciously looking or hoping for an experiential journey or religious / spiritual fulfilment. Although the relationship between faith-based visitors to Malta and the opportunity of reaching fulfilment is extremely important for 'product Malta', each faith-based visitor falls within a different register and level of intensity. What has been noticeable in the sector of faith-based tourism over the last few years runs parallel to tourism, namely the abovementioned trend of experiential encounters. In the prescribed religions, pilgrimage was mostly engaged in from the supply perspective of the Christian churches (Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, and so on), while in the experiential sector, it is a matter of participants' demand.

Traditionalists are often the Roman Catholic and Protestant pilgrims, whereby these journeys are usually rather regimented in form and execution, mixed with a large proportion of 'being a tourist' too. There would be a daily mass in an attractive chapel, or an evening (prayer) meeting in the hotel, some guided tours to sites of significant religious or heritage value. Although Protestants do not engage officially in pilgrimage, they do visit places mentioned in the Bible, similarly to traditional Roman Catholic pilgrims and religious tourists. For them, the experience at a genuine Biblical site enforces their belief in the Scriptures. Such visitors go to Malta to enjoy the Christian legacy and customs, visiting the shrines of the Virgin Mary, St John the Baptist, or to follow in the footsteps of St Paul or even Abraham. These 'footstep' pilgrimages may also be regarded as invented routes, because they quite often blend in with tourism interests (Greenia, 2014).

Motivation for pilgrims and faith-based visitors to travel to Malta are as many and complex as there are visitors, but presumably fall into the same categories as at any other pilgrims' site. From the point of view of traditional and historical *prescribed religions*, such as Roman Catholic, Judaic or Protestant religions, pilgrimage follows a pattern of

planned activities, leaving little room for the individual participants for their personal fulfilment. Research has shown that fulfilment is exactly the one overall Leitmotif. Pilgrimage throughout all ages and religions have revealed the human yearning for fulfilment (Bender, 1998; Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Notermans, 2008; Rountree, 2002; Timothy, 2002, 2011).

Davidson and Gitlitz (2002, I p.xvii) explain that, 'pilgrims are persons in motion, passing through strange lands, seeking fulfilment.' In particular, Morinis (1992, pp.ix) says that pilgrimage is:

> a paradigmatic and paradoxical human quest, both outward and inward, a movement towards ideals known but not achieved at home. As such, pilgrimage is an image for the search of fulfilment of all people inhabiting an imperfect world.

This leads to the difference in prescribed and lived religious experiences. The former is structured and rather inflexible, while the latter leaves the participant much freer in creating a personal fulfilment experience, such as arriving closer to God in their own way, achieving closure of a bad passage of life, coming to terms with grief, healing and devotion.

A fulfilment-centred experiential approach, both for individuals and groups, would allow participants a much wider choice of fulfilment. Such occasions have been observed during ongoing fieldwork on this topic in Malta and abroad.

The term 'post-pilgrimage' (Munro, 2017b), as a key concept to the theory of pilgrimage, applies mainly to the Western Christian point of view. As we apparently live in a post-modern world, in which 'post-tourism' and 'post-secularism' are well-known models in the theoretical field of tourism research, the idea of 'post-pilgrimage' is perhaps overdue.

Post-tourism relates to consumers who accept that tourism is an illusion of reality, often carefully arranged by commercial interests (Smith, Macleod & Robertson, 2010). Post-pilgrimage, then, belongs to the era of individualism, and to a certain measure, of secularism, where there is a paradigm shift from traveling to seek God to traveling

to seek one's self. Emphasis is instead on the reality of the illusion, carefully arranged by spiritual interests, but also acknowledging that commercial interests belong to pilgrimage as much as they do to any other kind of tourism. Post-pilgrimage may also be regarded as a self-healing tool, because only when the self is fixed, one may be able to discover the further fulfilment offered by pilgrimage.

In view of post-pilgrimage, lived religion and achieving fulfilment, the NRM adherents take these to new limits. Their sought experience is very much about a reliving of a religious experience at ancient sites, hoping to connect to the mystery of their symbolic origin or purpose. These adherents regard the Maltese temples both as an idea and object which houses their divinities. An overriding motivation for the NRM adherents is to heal themselves and the world. According to Rountree (2002), such groups regularly visit Neolithic sites in Britain (Cornwall, England, Wales), Czechia, France, Germany, Hawaii, the Himalayas, Italy, Greece, Mexico, Peru, Sicily, Turkey, Russia and south-western U.S. Tate (2006) lists 108 global destinations where followers of the Goddess Spirituality go. Malta has been included as a destination and thus an element of competition with the other destinations presents itself.

## Motivation

Unchurching rather than secularisation of the Christian faith underpins that pilgrimage and faith-based travel have become more consumer-oriented in the sense that the pilgrims have empowered themselves to make their own experience. In faith-based tourism, this also fuses with the privatisation of tourism services, which allows pilgrims to make more personal decisions where to go and where to have their experiences, grounded on web-based offers and decisions, rather than decisions by their traditional church leaders. Since pilgrimage and faith-based tourism are forms of tourism, certain dynamics of tourism push and pull factors also apply to this sector (Crompton, 1979).

As in standard tourism, a thorough preparation is half the work. According to Diener et al. (2009) there are internal, personal conditions that can lead to happiness and fulfilment. It is thus hypothesised that, as a faith-based tourist to Malta, one's intentions can be influenced by external factors providing incentives for the same. In other words, when the faith-based traveller is well-prepared and the destination

has all the necessary qualities in place, it may provide a great incentive for the visitor to reach fulfilment. It is expected that most people embarking on a faith-based journey to Malta are sufficiently motivated, prepared and positively charged to actively seek happiness and fulfilment (following the arguments by Diener et al., 2009, p.152), rather than passively waiting for a miracle. Their motivation to prefer Malta as a faith-based destination might have been kindled by reading or hearing about the island or was triggered by a web search or social media. A thorough preparation for a forthcoming faith-based journey or pilgrimage is a prerequisite, as few go on a pilgrimage without a cause or without preparation. Those who, unprepared or without any expectations, stumble upon fulfilment, can count themselves very fortunate. It is also acknowledged that not every one of those travelling to Malta within the segment of faith-based tourism is actively and consciously looking or hoping for fulfilment. Although the relationship between faith-based visitors to Malta and the opportunity of reaching fulfilment is extremely important for the success of 'product Malta', each faith-based visitor falls within a different register and level of intensity. Fulfilment outcomes remain unpredictable. An unfortunate waiter spilling a glass of red wine over a brand-new white silk blouse at the first evening, can set the tone for the whole stay.

## Push & Pull factors

Several factors have come about which partly contain certain essentials to generate fulfilment (pull factors), while the push for fulfilment, sociopsychological issues, must be created by the participants themselves. Push & pull factors are intrinsic and extrinsic motivations which push someone to go on a holiday, being pulled in by the offers broadcasted by the destination. Although there will be as many push & pull factors as there are people, Crompton (1979, p.408) distinguished seven sociopsychological motives, unrelated to the destination or goal, namely: escape from a perceived mundane environment, exploration and evaluation of self, relaxation, prestige, regression, enhancement of kinship relationships and facilitation of social interaction; and two general motives: novelty and education. In the sociopsychological motivations, escapism scores high (Crompton, 1979; Diener et al., 2009). Concerning faith-based tourism and pilgrimage, one needs to add religious or spiritual motives, such as piety, healing, closure among others, as discussed above (Starhawk, 2011; Notermans, 2008;

Scott, 2010; Reader, 2007). In addition, Pine and Gilmore (1998) have established four similar motives for experiential tourism (their four realms of experiences or 4Es): educational, aesthetical, escapist, and entertaining experiences. In summary, these identified motives are part of the human quest for fulfilment, as stated by Davidson and Gitlitz (2002, I, p.xvii) and others earlier mentioned. Translated into 'push and pull' factors for faith-based tourism to Malta, the following five issues can be noted (Munro, 2017a):

- authenticity
- interpretation
- visitor perception and self-definition
- site and destination management (including sustainability issues)
- spirit of place

- to which one can add the 'experiential' experience itself, which is subject to several conditions, before it is transferred into fulfilment.

Within this context of post-pilgrimage and experiential tourism, faith-based visitors partly rely on the possible realisation of their fulfilment on such factors. For example, many people are aware of the notion of authenticity. For the Neolithic temples of Malta, the authenticity question is easier to answer then the issue of the shipwreck of St Paul.

That Malta is mentioned in the New Testament as the island of *Melitη* is, at least in Malta, indisputable. More problematic is where this shipwreck took place. When there is no watertight evidence, then custom takes the place of evidence supplier and localises the tradition of the shipwreck site. St Paul's Bay becomes then a real place mentioned in the Scriptures and not a tourism invention. The Neolithic structures of Malta, on the other hand, have been indisputably there since Neolithic times, although not everyone is convinced these were temples. Nonetheless, many academics are willing to accept that they were, at least in part, used as a place of worship. Other archaeologists, such as Malone et al. (2009, p.1) refer to the Neolithic stone edifices as temples, as a traditional shorthand for 'formal ritual monuments in the Maltese islands.' Worries of the NRM adherents are that the exclusivity of the Temples as modern places of worship, and their experiential nature, are not always understood by service providers and

authorities. Authenticity, according to Pine and Gilmore (2013, p.28) is either regarded by consumers as fitting their self-image or inauthentic when it does not meet their expectation, standards or their personal price-quality matrix (that is, their budget). Authenticity in (faith-based) tourism is seemingly not something which needs to be acquired at all costs. This becomes noticeable when one sees individual visitors hesitate to purchase entrance tickets to the Hypogeum or St John's Co-Cathedral, for example (this, of course, does not happen when one has booked a package, as the individual costs of entrance tickets remain hidden).

Interpretation is the next connected topic. Does the interpretation delivered on-site meet the expectation? Is there place and space for the faith-based visitors' own interpretation, and can they be the authenticator of their own religious and spiritual experience? Again, the NRM provides and encourages their participants' own interpretation to achieve fulfilment. In the prescribed religions this seems unlikely, although in the last decade or so, a shift is noticeable. Recently more space has become available in Christianity for pilgrims to be the authenticator of their own religious experience, following the trend of experiential tourism. Due to a less rigorous and dogmatic approach, it seems easier for people to come closer to God and achieve fulfilment in their pilgrimage then before. It is a kind of privatisation of religion: where in the past only a few people were able to achieve this and were regarded as holy persons and saints, at present this has become available for many people. This might be one of the reasons why organised religions are bouncing back. One of the reasons given by a visiting priest to Malta is that people fear God less and are regarding Him more as an intimate companion, in combination with less fear for Damnation and a greater hope of Salvation. Whether this direction of the Catholic faith is shared by many Church leaders, remains a question.

For Protestant visitors to Malta, visitor perception and self-definition are important. Many adherents have difficulties with being called a pilgrim, because that links them, in their mind, to Catholicism. And since they are in a Catholic country, they are asking themselves if they have to be called pilgrims per se or can they just call themselves faith travellers or similar appellations, to avoid the old disagreement with Catholicism regarding the Damnation-Salvation dichotomy.

However, in a previous research (Munro, 2017a & b, 2020), it was demonstrated that pilgrimage is much older than Christianity, and therefore Protestants can safely call themselves pilgrims engaged in a pilgrimage without touching upon their theological differences with Roman Catholicism. The need for comparison is understandably linked to identity and social identity theory but is actually unnecessary. Having made this link, the second argument is that, at this day and age, it is thought that Protestants should simply concentrate on being themselves, and doing things their way. The present author has noticed great results of pilgrims' fulfilment when Protestants allowed themselves to discover the human aspect of pilgrimage, rather than seeking fulfilment through the scriptural demands many of such denominations make.

For all pilgrims, proper site and destination management is crucial, and this increasingly includes sustainability issues. Furthermore, are the participants accepted as pilgrims on this site, is their visit not contested in space and time and, most important at present, can they have our own experiential visit to a site. Related to this is the spirit of place. Is it maintained and respected, or has it become commercialised or neglected? Have the surroundings of the site fallen into disarray or are these ruined by encroaching beautiful villas or ugly industrial estates?

## Concluding considerations

Pilgrimage, in the sense of *prescribed* religious group experiences, remains an important activity because it provides numerous advantages to the participants, such as common identity and goal, a sense of belonging, security, achieving fulfilment and having a place in the world. Most of the time, these are collective in nature. However, there are many restrictions keeping participants from a deep fulfilment and true experiential pilgrimage, enduring the service provision rather than enjoying it. In contrast, the *lived* religious experience takes fulfilment a step further by individualising and privatising the experience, thus creating the experiential pilgrimage. In this experiential mode one is free to seek fulfilment where other modes do not reach.

This also has consequences for the tourism sector. Whereas first established, larger companies dominated the market, new, smaller companies and individuals, such as tourist guides, can react quicker to

enter the demand side, offering made-to-measure programmes. This change to the demand side has also allowed faith-based tourism to share in the web-based phenomenon of service provision. Global sites, such as Airbnb, are very strong in the concept of experiential tourism, and monitor closely the quality of the service provision rendered, since the visitors' appraisal of their experience shall not only affect the performance of the destination, but also their own. It is just waiting for that bright soul which applies this to pilgrimage too, and offers a larger number of services and possibilities in faith-based tourism to cater for an increasing set of participants' needs and demands. Fulfilment is also about lasting memories of the experiences enjoyed, worthy of a repeat visit, making the difference between a deeply satisfying experience and cheap thrills, the same disparity as between customised and commoditised. The field of experiential versus traditional pilgrimage and faith-based tourism is a rich field of investigation, Experiential faith-based tourism is a rather new phenomenon, but with an envisaged long duration, and much further research awaits.

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