

# Religiousness as tourist performances: A case study of Greek Orthodox pilgrimage



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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to decipher ways of experiencing religiousness through tourist performances, intersecting textual approaches with the essential embodiment and materiality of the tourist world. Exploring the diversity of religious tourists' practices within the Greek Orthodox context, two dimensions underpinning religious tourist experience are highlighted: institutional performances and unconventional performances. Focussing on the embodied experience and drawing upon theories of performance, the paper critiques the interplays of body and place to re-conceptualise current understanding of the pilgrimage/tourism relationship. In doing so, the paper proposes that tourism and religion are not separate entities but linked through embodied notions of godliness sensed through touristic performances.

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## Introduction

Historically, authors have reflected upon the relationship between religion and tourism as linked through the institution of pilgrimage (Vukonic, 1996), this being understood generally as a religiously motivated journey to a sacred place that has been sanctified by the present or past action of divinity (Coleman & Eade, 2004). Almost all religions encourage travel to religious sites (Cohen, 1998; Kaufman, 2005; Reader, 2014), some of which have become popular contemporary pilgrimage destinations, such as the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem or Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Such travel is more pronounced in some non-western societies where religion and politics are strongly interrelated (Albera & Eade, 2017). In Saudi Arabia, for example, church and state are based on the Islamic law; all Muslims are expected to perform the hajj to Makkah as part of the fifth pillar of Islam, this being supported by government investment in infrastructure to control and reduce effects of crowding (Henderson, 2011; Jafari & Scott, 2014). The universality and puissance of such social movements (Albera & Eade, 2015; Boissevain, 2017; Eade and Albera, 2017), even in post-marxist countries such as China (Bingenheimer, 2017), has triggered researchers to investigate them from a tourism perspective. Several studies discuss the 'theology of tourism' (Cohen, 1998); that is understanding travellers' behaviour based on their affiliation (Boissevain, 2017; Collins-Kreiner & Klot, 2000), motivation, attachment and visitation patterns (Buzinde, Kalavar, Kohli, & Manuel-Navarrete, 2014; Poria, Reichel, & Biran, 2006). Others focus on the phenomenological (Andriotis, 2009), or explore the

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authenticity in the pilgrim experience (Andriotis, 2011; Belhassen, Caton, & Steward, 2008), the human geographical patterns in sacred spaces (Bhardwaj, 1973; Gartell & Collins-Kreiner, 2006), the impacts on hosts (Terzidou, Styliadis, & Szivas, 2008), management of sacred sites (Olsen, 2012; Shackley, 2001) or representation of religious heritage (Bandyopadhyaya, Morais, & Chick, 2008).

Where researchers address issues of experience and in-depth understanding of the religious tourism phenomenon, they tend to juxtapose tourism and religion; these being considered separate entities within the framework of meaning, constituting culturally erected divisions (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). Either comparisons are made between pilgrims and tourists based on their particular motivations and sociological functional perspectives (Boorstin, 1964; Nyaupane, Timothy, & Poudel, 2015; Smith, 1992), or they are linked based on mutual experiences in terms of existential and post-modern approaches highlighting spiritual elements (Eade & Albera, 2015; Gibson, 2005) that often propose the end of the sacred/secular binary. In particular, postmodern studies consider alternative forms of religious tourism; namely secular pilgrimages, such as dark tourism (Collins-Kreiner, 2016; Hyde & Harman, 2011), nature based tourism (Dunlap, 2006; Sharpley & Jepson, 2011), migration (Liebelt, 2010), literary tourism (Brown, 2016) and sport tourism (Gibson, 2005). These accumulate similar elements to religious journeys, such as feelings of *communitas* (Turner & Turner, 1978) that group members share. Such approaches allow scholars, such as Collins-Kreiner (2016) in her 'Lifecycle of Concepts', to assert that pilgrimage tourism in its traditional way has reached a stagnation point. Moreover, they limit research on religious tourism to providing typologies (Andriotis, 2009; Smith, 1992), categorizing tourists based on their motivations and experiences rather than extrapolating the complexities of a phenomenon that goes beyond strict categories (Olsen, 2017; Timothy & Olsen, 2006).

Departing from such notions, and accepting that tourism and religion co-exist in the pilgrimage experience (Timothy & Olsen, 2006), this paper aims to decipher ways of experiencing religiousness through tourist performances, intersecting textual approaches with the essential embodiment and materiality of the tourist world. Defining tourist performances as practices that occur away from home, it is argued that believers can enliven their institutionalised belief (religiousness); the trip providing the stage upon which believers can perform (Edensor, 2001). For example, while there are no specific references to tourism in the Bible, it can be inferred that a believer's behaviour and experience during leisure time could lead to a greater appreciation of God (Vukonic, 1996). More explicitly, the Qur'an often refers to travel as a means to contemplate the creation of God (Jafari & Scott, 2014). Attribution theory plays a key role within this respect as religious experience is any happening that an individual attributes at least in part to the action of supernatural forces (Proudfoot & Shaver, 1975). Through the process of sanctification (Pargament & Mahoney, 2005), believers as active performers may attribute godly intervention to activities other than the religious institutional ones, creating individualised spaces of religious experience. As part of an unfolding of cognitive and affective processes within the tourists experience (Scarles, 2010), God may be experienced through effects of the events to which people's body parts respond (Barsalou, Barbey, Simmons, & Santos, 2005) and in which they participate, like emotional states of happiness arising through helping others. While this resembles post-modern ways of belief (Collins-Kreiner, 2016; Dunlap, 2006; Gibson, 2005), individual spaces of religious tourism experience are created within the understanding of one's religious belief system. Thus, no matter how unusual the emotional or the physical sensations are, if the individual does not consciously connect them to godly intervention, then the individual has not had a religious experience.

The term pilgrimage is used throughout this paper. Acknowledging the terminological diversity in global landscapes and critiques of researchers that use the term as a given natural (Albera et al., 2017; Reader, 2017), it is considered that 'pilgrimage' preserves the holy essence and pinpoints the evenly sacred elements of tourism within. It therefore provides an antithesis to studies that use the term religious tourism as hybrid of two different phenomena (Timothy & Olsen, 2006) namely of the sacred religion and the secular tourism. In addition it is noted that although Hindu (Clayverolas, 2017) and Chinese traditions (Bingenheimer, 2017) have a rich vocabulary for travel to special sites, researchers commonly end up using the term pilgrimage as being the most dominant word. The paper therefore takes the position that 'pilgrimage' in its English use enables cross-cultural comparisons and remains a comfort to non-English scholars as it entails both the elements of mobility and sacredness; 'pellerin' being the one who makes a journey to a place of worship (Albera et al., 2017).

The contribution of this paper, therefore, lies in understanding religiousness not only through its institutionalised performances, but also through individual, unconventional performances embodied in tourist dimensions, thereby reconceptualising the pilgrimage/tourism relationship. Religion is not only a semiotic field of representation but also a theatre of enactment, performance and agency that entails spaces beyond the everyday sacred places (Edensor, 2001, 1998). In particular, influenced by scholars such Deleuze (1990), Crouch (2009), Edensor (2007), Cloke and Jones (2001), Thrift (2008) and Urry and Larsen (2011), the pilgrimage experience is considered to be much more complex. It is the result of a series of performances where movements intertwine with religious prescriptions, embodied spaces of production and consumption, inter-subjective interactions and material encounters in tourist spaces that bring religious tourists closer to God. The body is, thus, considered a medium through which people can expand their knowledge of the world and experience states of becoming (Barsalou et al., 2005; Crouch, Aronsson, & Wahlström, 2001) through doing (Cloke & Jones, 2001; Ingold, 1995). Pilgrimages should therefore be looked at from an emic perspective; exploring the understanding of religion, sacred and tourism through the investigation of identity, material religion and landscape from the pilgrims' perspectives.

Focusing on the specific tensions between fixity and fluidity within the context of pilgrimage, firstly, the paper establishes a theoretical framework reconceptualising the pilgrimage/tourism relationship. Within this institutionalised performances and the ways they organise and influence peoples' experiences are critiqued and the subjectivity in religious performances and expressions, namely unconventional performances, embraced. Next, the context of two pilgrimages to the island of Tinos

(Greece) and method used to investigate the phenomenon are outlined. The findings are then presented exploring institutional and unconventional performances. Lastly, reflective conclusions on key theoretical and empirical contributions are presented.

### Reconceptualising the pilgrimage and tourism relationship

The post-modern world of hypermobility through virtual encounter (Harrison, 2011) has, for some, diminished the need to confront the contentious notion of authenticity thereby encouraging the end of tourism (Lash & Urry, 1994). Indeed, media and associated signs hold the potential to erase both traditional and recent distinctions of culture (Baudrillard, 1981), leading to the de-differentiation of tourism and everyday life (Uriely, 2005) or what Larsen (2008, p.27) calls “de-exoticising” of tourism encounters and tourism theory. However, while it is imperative to position contemporary tourist behaviour and practice within such contexts, the power of physically being present in places and of the body within such presences are fundamental to religious tourists' experiences (Barsalou et al., 2005; Belhassen et al., 2008). As has been recognised in work on virtual worlds and virtual reality (Larsen & Urry, 2011; Rakic & Chambers, 2012), the intensities of such lived encounters continue to lie beyond the realms of the virtual alone. Rather, to appreciate the complexities of performances of religiousness, it is vital to reflect upon experiences as co-constructed in a fusion of textual or virtual (MacWilliams, 2002; Meyer, 2008) and lived performances (Larsen & Urry, 2011) in sacred places, distinguished into institutional and unconventional.

#### *Institutional performances*

Traditionally, most religious institutions have instructed people to visit particular sacred places and to engage in religious performances, acknowledging the power of places and the performances in them in generating particular experiences and establishing religious belief (Bourdieu, 1991; Reader, 2014). With their cultural scripts and associate materiality, religions mobilise a directed gazing of place reinforcing collective gaze and mediating discursive spaces of success stories (Badone, 2007; Kaell, 2016; Scarles, 2009; Selwyn, 1996; Urry, 1990). Thus, although sacred places usually differ from each other in terms of appearance, form and size, they share the qualities of stirring admiration and affection, creating what Tuan (1974) calls *‘topophilia’*, namely attachment to the place. Benjamin (1936) attributes this to the ‘aura’ of a place or object, which is understood as the sum of its historical, cultural and personal contexts for a visitor and can be experienced only if the place or object can be connected to a person’s own understanding of the world, in this case the religious world. Nevertheless, symbolic meaning of places is not sufficient in sensing religiousness as people live places not only culturally but also bodily (Crouch et al., 2001; Rickly-Boyd, 2013).

Bodily immersion in places facilitates moments of social, cultural and physical encounters (Rickly-Boyd, 2013) which are vital in generating religious experience (Belhassen et al., 2008; Bhardwaj, 1973; Nolan & Nolan, 1989; Reader, 2014). Therefore, most of the religions rely on prescribed practices intended to develop a religious ‘habitus’ in their performers (Bourdieu, 1990), producing a practical reflexiveness that helps them cope with unexpected happenings and make religious codes comprehensible and convincing, thereby maintaining and enhancing religiousness. Specifically, within the context of religious rituals such as the liturgical worship, meaning and authentic experiences emerge during the process of inter-subjective interactions and collective performing (Belhassen et al., 2008; Rickly-Boyd, 2013). Religions, through their points of aggregation, have been argued to provide individual as well as collective identity within the framework of a universal background (Durkheim, 1964), contributing to the creation of feelings, beliefs and values in humanity. Pilgrims, for example, connect to each other and their group through participation in rituals, and may feel a special bond, what Turner and Turner (1978) entitle *‘communitas’*, denoting an egalitarian association between people sharing a *liminal* state, in which they have symbolically exited one social ‘space’ or state but have not entered a new one.

Participation in religious performances enables the transmission of mental states that are religiously essential (Ransom & Alicke, 2013) for people in order to open up to the unexpected grace of the Other (Dewsbury, 2000; Wearing, McDonald, & Ankor, 2016). The embodied performances of the ritual of meditation is, for instance, not accidental. A tranquil human body is a metaphor for a still mind, this being what meditation seeks through various techniques in order to achieve communication with a believer’s God (Barsalou et al., 2005). Religious performances are further capable of producing kinaesthetic effects (Cloke & Perkins, 2005); encouraging various emotions and extraordinary, ecstatic experiences (James, 1960). Kneeling individuals have, for example, been found to judge events as more miraculous compared to others who simply sat on a chair (Ransom & Alicke, 2013). Equally, slow pilgrims are considered true pilgrims, their lack of concern about time and speed being a pre-condition to enter into liminal space (Howard, 2012). Another peak religious experience exemplifies Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi’s (1988) notion of flow, which is the holistic sensation present when people act with total involvement, and which entails profound concentration, a lack of self-consciousness and of time passing, a transcendence of the sense of self, wonder and intellectual challenge as a result of fusion of self with the moment. Such experiences can result in epiphany, thereby being life-altering (Wearing et al., 2016).

The materialities of a place further intensify a person’s experience as the smells, sounds and happenings, invoke sensual qualities that cannot be replicated virtually (Rakic & Chambers, 2012; Small, Darcy, & Packer, 2012; Tilley, Keane, Kuechler, & Spyer, 2006). Material aspects (objects) of places, have use-value and affect, enhance bodily movements and permit people to do things, sense realities (Haldrup & Larsen, 2006; Latour, 2005; Picken, 2010) and remember moments

(Cloke & Pawson, 2008; Tilley et al., 2006). Enwrapped with symbolic meanings (Keane, 2003; Shenhav-Keller, 1993), religious objects such as relics are religiously constructed signposts (Urry, 1990) that direct believers' gazes and embodied performances (Elkin, 1997). The agency of such religious objects is not only manifested in their ability to mobilise people but also in materializing their performances. Although human-made, they generate feelings of awe, and are therefore not handled as common objects, but call for special treatment (Appadurai, 1986). Objects such as miraculous icons, images of Jesus (Morgan, 2005), lithographs of Hindu Gods (Pinney, 2004), saint relics or statues, such as Buddha, are approached with respect and worshiped with a bow, being imbued with divine aura and posited beyond the order of ordinary things (Meyer, 2008; Morgan, 2005). In addition, sacred buildings, such as temples, become embodied spaces of performance that construct peoples' appearance and acting (e.g. prescribed dress codes) that are meant to optimise their experience (Belhassen et al., 2008).

Nevertheless, what contributes to a person's religious experience may not always be related to the officially sacred. Performances can extend beyond the guiding structures established by religious producers as pilgrims engage in in-between spaces; religious, tourist and everyday life spaces. The religious tourist experience as such is not considered as predetermined but comprises a collection of dynamic, unstable and intrinsically multifaceted, complex performances as both humans and non-humans have affect and agency (Haldrup & Larsen, 2006; Scarles, 2011) that enable unpredictable becomings (Wearing et al., 2016). The following section explores how individuals as performers and human bodies as vessels of belief, move through the tourism experience to enliven their belief.

### *Unconventional performances*

Air travel, coach tours, guided visits as well as staying in hotels, and purchasing souvenirs and craft items have become familiar practices to pilgrims (Eade & Sallnow, 1991; Gartell & Collins-Kreiner, 2006; Kaufman, 2005; Paraskevaidis & Andriotis, 2015; Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005), influencing their overall religious experience. Tourism portrays itself a producer of experiences, its institutional and humanly controlled nature being widely acknowledged in the tourism literature (Edensor, 2001, 2007; Scarles, 2004; Tucker, 2007). Stage managers as choreographers support tourists' performance, guiding tourist along particular routes (Edensor, 2009), controlling aesthetics (Tucker, 2007) and arranging their collective gazes and photographic performances (Scarles, 2004). Such controls are intensively performed in strict dramaturgically staged tourist spaces, such as cruise ships (Weaver, 2005) or theme parks which undergo 'McDisneyisation' (Ritzer & Liska, 1997), to ensure consistency, predictability and certainty, as they intend to guarantee known satisfaction. Similarly, tourists on packaged religious guided tours (Tucker, 2007) are usually obliged to pursue tight itineraries (Bruner, 2005) because of time constraints.

Religious tourists are, however, not only influenced by the human tourist agents, including guides and travel brokers but also by the tourist materiality and landscape. Religious tourists' bodies similar to other tourists are open surfaces (Deleuze, 1990) becoming affected by the world around them. Therefore, engaging in other activities such as visiting places, drinking and communicating with other people can generate vast diversity in religious tourists performances on a site (Crouch, 2009; Edensor, 2001, 2007; Franklin & Crang, 2001), that cannot be easily controlled by religious or tourists producers (Veijola and Jokinen, 1994). Within such touristscapes (Edensor, 2007), individuals as sensual, active and reflexive beings (Cloke and Perkins, 1998; Crouch, 2009; Perkins & Thorns, 2001) construct themselves part of the religious experience selecting significance amongst a complexity of relations, objects, actions and feelings. Traditional pilgrimage activities meld with a newly developing commercial mass culture that can produce fresh expressions of popular faith (Kaufman, 2005). This is especially the case within the Hindu context in which the sacred and the everyday commercial intermingle (Clayverolas, 2017). As Holloway (2003, p.1967) suggests "embodied subjects ... turn onto and articulate objects in their spacing and timing of the sacred, and in so doing open up a space-time, or a field, for achieving their spirituality".

Thus, religious tourist performances rather than being fixed, create an ontology of doing (Crang, 1997; Franklin & Crang, 2001), which may contain the transformative (Roach, 1995) and the creation of new elements of self-identity (Wearing et al., 2016) as a result of co-performance of both human and non-human in the tourism field (Franklin, 2003; Haldrup & Larsen, 2006; Latour, 2005; Wearing et al., 2016). Dynamics of *affect* and *affected* that unfold in places, what Scarles (2011) calls 'interplays of agency', may even reconstruct, break, adjust or negotiate well established performances and meanings (Butler, 1990; Thrift & Dewsbury, 2000) as human bodies acquire themselves culture, power for resistance, politics and agency (Butler, 1990). Edensor's (1998) tourists, for example, protested and negotiated the itinerary proposed by their guide in order to allow themselves more time to see the monument. Post-tourists mock the predictable performances expected from tourists, performing cynically in front of the camera (Edensor, 1998) in an attempt to differentiate themselves from the institutional behaviour of mass tourists. Tourism, thus, provides the stage for interpersonal authenticity (Rickly-Boyd, 2013; Wang, 1999) on which new cultural texts can be produced through lived cultures that are underpinned by social relations.

Having provided the theoretical background that highlights the complexities of the religious tourism performances and experiences, the paper now presents the research method used to decipher the ways of experiencing religiousness through tourism performances, after first shedding light on the Greek Orthodox belief system, as providing the context through which to understand the religious experience. Whilst the authors recognise and are sensitive to the existence of a multiplicity of religious affinities and discursive debates around God, Gods and religion, however, to extend these are beyond the scope of this particular paper. Rather, for the purposes of this paper, the research context reflects that of the religious positioning of God within Greek Orthodoxy as shared through the experiences of respondents.



## The Christian Orthodox church and Tinos

Most religious tourist or pilgrimage studies (e.g. Eade & Sallnow, 1991; Nolan & Nolan, 1989; Turner & Turner, 1978) summarise different theological views and religious experiences in Christianity, making reference to Protestantism and Catholicism. They rarely mention Eastern Christian Orthodoxy, whose adherents rank second within the Christian world in terms of population (taking into consideration that Protestantism comprises many different groups), after the Roman Catholic Church. Christian Orthodoxy, which is the principal religious faith in Greece (95%) and Eastern Europe, has approximately 300 million adherents in the world (Ecumenical Patriarchate, 2013). Acknowledging the momentousness of the Christian Orthodox belief in Greece and its influential role in peoples' everyday life, as well as recognizing its dramaturgical, colourful religious rituals, this paper uses the Christian Orthodox context as the vehicle for looking at religious tourists' performances in a new way.

Unlike Protestantism, which supposes that salvation is obtained by grace through faith in Christ alone and thus that believing in God intellectually constitutes salvation, in the Orthodox Church salvation is the result of hesychastic life that refrains and protects from sinning, and the divination by grace (Ware, 1995) the latter being expected by believers throughout the moments of their lives including religious travelling. Moreover, spirituality, referred to here as godliness, is not subjectively created but the result of the uncreated grace of God that resides in the church in the form of the Holy Spirit. In particular, holy relics and miraculous icons acquire special graces as the Holy Spirit, the living God, is believed to dwell in them (Christian Union of Kavala, 0000). The most famous, charismatic icon in Greece is the icon of Panagia Evangelistria in the Church of Annunciation in Tinos, which is the main setting under investigation here.

### *Panagia Evangelistria*

Tinos is located in North Cyclades and has a population of approximately 8600 people (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2013). Though small it attracts thousands of visitors annually to see the miraculous icon, located in the Church of the Annunciation, which is believed to have therapeutic qualities, there being 225,000 tourist arrivals to Tinos over the summer months in 2016 (Tinos Port Authority, 2017). It is said that in June of 1822, a nun named Pelagia in Tinos had a series of visions of the Virgin Mary, who indicated to her where the sacred icon was to be found. The icon, excavated in 1823, is called Panagia Evangelistria, meaning Our Lady of Good Tidings and illustrates the Virgin Mary kneeling in front of a small stand. On the stand is an open book, with the words pronounced by the Virgin herself after the Annunciation by the Angel Gabriel (Panagia of Tinos, 2013). The Church of Annunciation, which is built on the place where the icon was found, has increasingly gained fame after numerous reports of miracles fulfilled by the icon. Today the sacred icon of the Panagia Evangelistria in Tinos (Fig. 1) is the most venerated pilgrimage item in Greece, Tinos being equal to Lourdes in France and Fatima in Portugal.

### *Study methods*

Considering that pilgrims are reflexive, active beings (Crouch & Desforges, 2003; Thrift, 2008) entangled in a tourist complex world of multidirectional flows and agencies of humans and non-humans (Crouch, 2009; Edensor, 2001; Tribe, 2005), this paper adopted an ethnographic approach. Data were collected throughout two organised religious coach trips from



**(Authors' own photographs)**

**Fig. 1.** The miraculous icon of Panagia Evangelistria in the Church of Annunciation, Tinos.



Fig. 2. Trip's route.

Kavala to the island of Tinos in Greece (Fig. 2). Pilgrims' subjective experiences (Hammersley, 1992) in the host environment for the selected pilgrimage practice (Fielding, 1993; Spradley, 1979 on natural environment) was captured principally through their personal narratives and observations. The island was selected as a purposive case study being considered the most important pilgrimage centre in Greece (Dubisch, 1995) and, as such, provides a critical case (Saunders, 2012) through which is to decipher ways of experiencing religiousness through tourist performances. Additionally, the lead researcher's religious and national background were similar to that of the participants enabling her to engage with them (Andriotis, 2009), sharing inter-subjective experience of pilgrimage and thus, allowing a more thorough understanding of the particular group of believers.

Participant observation was employed at the first phase of fieldwork to capture deeper, embodied nuances of experience. Meticulous field notes were kept (Spradley, 1979) recording observations and reflections only where, in accordance with ethical approval, permission had been given (O'Reilly, 2005). The setting of the research was not restricted to the island, being greatly influenced by modern ethnology, where 'field' is considered to be everywhere (Dubisch, 1995). Observation, therefore, involved four days of contact with participants on the island of Tinos and in the mobile time-spaces to and from the island, in bus and on ferry, to permit observation of the repetition of patterns, the tourist trip providing the boundaries of the field.

At the second stage, interviews conducted with the 38 participants were used to gather further information about key topics, triangulate findings emerged in the fieldwork (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015) and to complete the pictures of the pilgrims' performances as interpreted by pilgrims themselves. These semi-structured interviews addressed issues of motivation and meaning of place to the participants. They also included questions about experience and behaviour, feelings, values and sensory. Each interview lasted an average 75 min (ranging from 50 to 120 min), and was digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim, and then translated into English retroactively (O'Reilly, 2005) to make sure that their idiomatic meanings were the same. Pseudonyms were used to preserve interviewees' anonymity and non-relevant details were altered (such as family members' names, place of residence) to ensure their personal information could not be disclosed (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Data were analysed manually recognizing patterns and thematic matrices that identified key issues (Boyatzis, 1998), reflecting the subjectivities of the experiences shared by participants. Specifically, thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) was used to discern themes and aggregate dimensions through the examination and comparison of happenings and ideas discussed by the participants. Adapting Corley, Gioia, and Hamilton (2015) this involved three stages: The identification and categorization of first order concepts which enabled the emergence of second-order themes; lastly these themes were compared and contrasted and the final aggregate dimensions underpinning the conceptual and empirical contributions of this paper identified (Fig. 3).

Participants were aged from early 30s to early 80s, being predominantly women, since in the Greek tradition it is usually the woman who connects the family with the sacred through her religious institutional performances (Dubisch, 1995). The role of the 'participant as observer' was employed to gain trust in a natural manner. Full participation in the group members' activities demonstrated the researcher's shared commonality with pilgrims, thus becoming co-equal (Seaton, 2002).

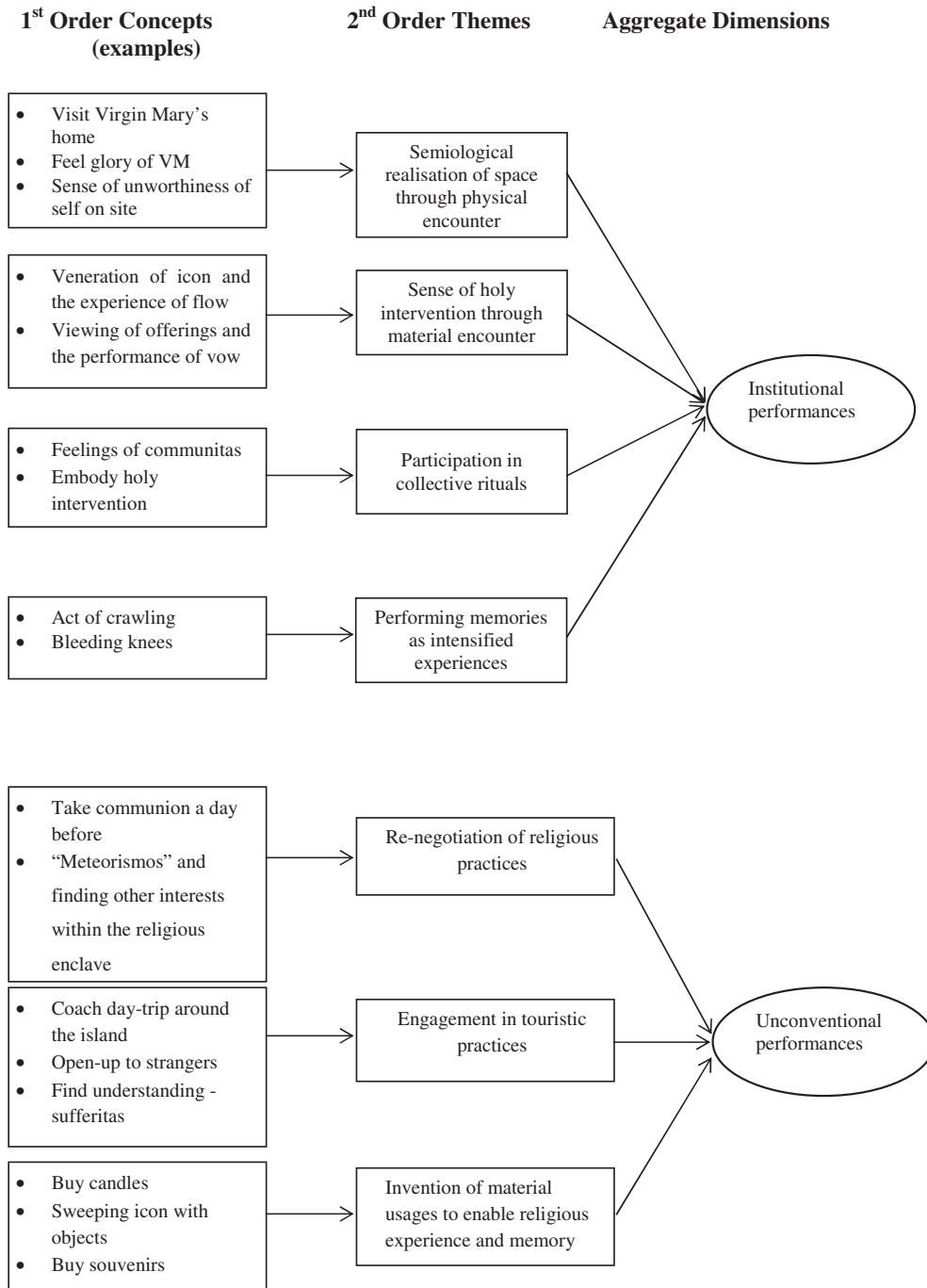


Fig. 3. Data structure.

### Reconceptualising religiousness in tourism

Empirical data collected on two religious oriented trips to the island of Tinos, Greece, is now used to decipher ways of experiencing religiousness in tourist spheres. In doing this the paper first considers the *Institutional performances* understood as a series of prescribed, habitual practices that religious tourists unreflexively obey. This is followed by a consideration of the *Unconventional performances* that extend beyond the guiding structures established by religious producers being subjective, reflexive and unpredictable.

### *Institutional performances*

Religions direct adherents to particular places and choreograph their performances (Edensor, 2009; Reader, 2014) in an attempt to generate important religious feelings. With their scripts and material regulations they mobilise a directed gazing and routinize performance of places to invoke particular sensations and experiences that help in remembering rituals, and in enhancing and perpetuating belief. Four themes are identified and discussed that exemplify this, namely: The semiological realisation of space through physical encounter; the sense of holy intervention through material encounter; the participation in collective rituals and the performing of memories as intensified experiences, which will be analysed next.

#### *Semiological realisation of space through physical encounter*

Religions' stage-managed directions guide pilgrims around, and establish particular meanings to sacred places and performances. Like many, Janna shared how her religious mentor (the so called *pneumatikos*) encouraged her to visit Tinos, telling her: "go to Tinos to get Virgin Mary's blessing". The need to visit sacred places physically, as opposed to engage in local religious rituals or even virtual pilgrimages, was considered essential to participants to sense religiousness and holiness more intensively. As Sophia stated: "I was crying and crying for being deemed worthy by the Virgin Mary to come to Tinos [she cries]. . . I don't know. . . you live it. You touch it, you feel it!"; her visit mobilising affective relations to the site.

Given that aura can be experienced only if the place or object can be connected to a person's own understanding of the world (Benjamin, 1936), pilgrims were found to be fully committed to the particular sacred place, due to the site's position in their religious belief system, which enabled affective states and influenced their sense of identity. As Janna shared: "I suddenly have tears in my eyes. . . without my will. . . I just realize how unworthy I am being in such a place". The semiological realization of space, with the island and the Church of the Annunciation being regarded as "the Virgin Mary's home" (Sophia), creates imagination and a new connection between place, people and holiness, transforming space into a meaningful place and steering powerful emotions. Equal to Tuan's (1974) 'topophilia' Tinos being covered by the Virgin Mary's aura acquires unique attractiveness. As Lia, stated about the Church of the Annunciation:

*"When you disembark. . . and you see this. . . it is magnificent! You feel the glory. . . and you bring in mind the Virgin Mary, thinking that 'she really deserves this!'"*

Pilgrims' immediacy to the Virgin Mary as a result of their very being in Tinos, and thus, of their entrenchment and involvement in the sacred world through embodied practices (Crouch & Desforjes, 2003), allows them to experience not only the sacred site but perhaps also themselves in an uncommon and unpredictable way. For example, Lia, who had no previous intention to crawl, said: "when you arrive at the port and you look up the hill where the church stands. . . this splendour excites you. . . it motivates you to reach it on your knees". Such feelings/experiences were even stronger when encountering materiality directly linked to the subject of veneration.

#### *Sense of holy intervention through material encounter*

Within places, individuals move, work, learn and make sense of their symbolic religious contexts, picking significance amongst a complexity of relations and things (Crouch, 2009; Thrift, 2008) that exercise power on them. For example, the power of the icon of the Panagia Evangelistria on the visitors to Tinos is so intense that it forms dramaturgical embodied performances that can generate extraordinary experiences. Kaliopi, being so absorbed from the sacred atmosphere and the icon experienced flow (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988), in terms of a lack of self-consciousness and loss of sense of place. As she said:

*"It was so weird. . . I engaged in the veneration ritual three subsequent times entering the church and coming out from its basement, only to realise at the end that there were sooo many steps and that I had ascended all of them three times to enter the church, it's unbelievable!"*

The material extensions of affective, embodied and existential encounters are further apparent as religious objects do not possess only present value but also future and past value. Wrapped in symbolic meanings, they 'speak' and denote things to people (Elkin, 1997) embracing sensual qualities that are religiously essential. For example, the presence and tangibility of the numerous offerings in the church, usually in form of small metal plaques (with an embossed image symbolising the subject of prayer for which the plaque is offered) or hanging oil lamps mobilise an intense sense of holy intervention as they represent miracles already experienced. Danay commented:

*"I saw various things. . . I saw many hanging ships, which are said to be offerings made by fishermen, as well as all those things around the icon. . . the embossed metallic plaques. . . with feet. . . And I saw also gold jewellery. . . and I thought that the people who brought all those things to the church. . . their wish must have been realised. Hence something really exists. . . it's good to believe in something."*

As religious objects such as the offerings inscribe sacred places with memories of happy endings (Tilley et al., 2006), pilgrims reaffirm their belief through subjective interpretation of the offerings performed by others, as well as become affected by the object's power that creates human agency. For example, while Katerina was initially performing a third party vow on behalf of her mother, in view of the icon and the numerous offerings that envisage holy intervention, she also made a vow to realise a wish. She recounted:



*"In fact, when I went there [in the church] I was so much... I mean I was enticed from the various... the crowd I saw... the offerings that were all around the icon, the golden ones, and all those things... that I made a vow too."*

Moreover, by attending physically settings that include the embodied presence of others, pilgrims enjoy common understanding and empowerment that brings them closer to God.

#### *Participation in collective rituals*

Participating in religious rituals, such as religious services, in which many people worship together, can be a compelling context and a peak experience for pilgrims generating a sense of being together in the presence of a higher realm. Collective rituals create affective connections between pilgrims, raising profound feelings of togetherness, the so called *communitas* (Turner & Turner, 1978), based on the sharing of faith; they embody and celebrate symbolic reality. Sophia, similar to other participants, stated:

*"You see so many people, each with his [sic] own history, and you see how all of them sing together with devoutness, and you feel so nice!... Feelings that cannot be expressed with words."*

Ritual performances, such as prayer and singing together, become, thus, essential symbolic capitals as they are perceived and recognised as unique and authentic (Bourdieu, 1989). Through pilgrims' performative synchronisation, the crowd obtains considerable power and forms a useful tool for manifesting and sensing godliness. As Elsa commented: *"the more devotees pray together, the more will God respond to our prayers'... This is what my religious mentor always says"*. In particular, based on Christian Orthodox teachings, the spirituality that rises through collective practices is attributed to the Holy Spirit, which grants people with values such as love, joy, peace, goodness and faith (Ware, 1995). Babis explained *"when the Holy Spirit visits you, it forever changes you, it changes your way of thinking..."* a notion resembling Wearing et al.'s (2016) transformative notion of the epiphany of the self. Accordingly, the performing pilgrims become part of the religious landscape, constituting a lived expression of holy intervention on-site. Pilgrims in Tinos are the living paradigm of the Virgin Mary's enormity on-site, and are therefore regarded as being beyond the ordinary. Helena recounted:

*"When you see an old woman on her knees, you realise that it is impossible... that she surpassed herself... You see, people entrust themselves to the Virgin Mary, she is our doctor. And there, without realizing it, human weakness is surmounted and so you see people like old women crawling."*

[Fig. 4]

#### *Performing memories as intensified experiences*

Equal to slow tourism (Howard, 2012), embodied performances and especially dramaturgical performances, such as crawling, often allow pilgrims to feel more intensively and subsequently to remember. Irene, reflected on her own crawling: *"It helps you remember... to keep it in mind... Yes, because you feel it more intensively"*. Bodies, as canvas of holy intervention, become transformed into living memories of the places visited and the experiences felt there. Elsa, for example, showing her wounded knees commented:

*"Those signs... you see there are two... when I ascended to the church... on my knees, two signs [wounds] occurred. Anyway, she [her friend], noticed my signs in the hotel and said to me 'hey look at your legs!, how they are!'... 'What is wrong?' I*



**(Author's own photograph)**

**Fig. 4.** Crawling pilgrims in Tinos.

replied. . . And she said 'you have two, two signs on each leg! On mine there is only one'. . . And I said 'It's because I prayed and begged for my two children, that's why!' And you know what? my religious mentor confirmed it!"

Nevertheless, as discussed next, while religious rituals and texts are usually designed to produce particular responses, emotions and repetitive practices, new performances or understandings can arise even in carefully staged places as spaces are constructed through doings (Edensor, 2007; Ingold, 1995).

### *Unconventional performances*

The restricted, fixed and formalized ways in which pilgrims are supposed to experience their bodies and particular sacred places ignore the self-conscious, reflexive and biological nature of human beings (Crouch & Desforges, 2003; Dewsbury, 2000; Thrift, 2008; Wearing et al., 2016). It is not only the arrival at places, but it is a way of living in them and apprehending them through embodied practice, which lies beyond the conscious and the structured. Accordingly, even though pilgrims may be tempted by the religious narratives of places, believing that their experience will match their expectations, they may also construct part of the experience themselves and encounter unpredictable moments through their physical emergence in places. Three themes were identified that exemplify this: Re-negotiation of religious practices; Engagement in touristic practices; Invention of material usages to enable religious experience and memory. These are now discussed.

#### *Re-negotiation of religious practices*

Religious tourism performances involve diverse spaces and new acquaintances, which enable individuals to open up and refigure self and space. Accordingly, religious processes amongst pilgrims can be continually challenged and constructed anew as some pilgrims may endeavour to change or negotiate existing norms, proposing alternative political agencies (Butler, 1990). For example, two participants, preferred to take communion one day before the official day, and asked for approval by others on their trip. Surprisingly, everyone encouraged them even though, as Irene explained, it was religiously improper: "It is not correct to take communion the day before because it is fasting time. Only on the celebration day you can". However, most agreed with Maria who said: "you came from so far away to visit the Virgin Mary, so it should be fine. . . because Virgin Mary sees your effort"; the tourism element (distance) facilitating the re-negotiation of religious practices. Consequently, religious continuation not only rests on the intra-pilgrim gaze, which is understood as an authoritative power, appraising and regulating other believers' behaviours (Holloway, Green, & Holloway, 2011), but also on the forming of inter-subjective reality with intra-pilgrims' approval of their practices. The performing of shared religious alterations has the potential to re-construct religion by enclosing worldly and often individualised elements into the religious play.

So, while Bourdieu's 'habitus' (1990), with routinized practices, helps pilgrims remember rituals, it is nonetheless capable to produce monotony, boredom and lack of affinity, especially among younger pilgrims. This, according to Lina, allows moments of "meteorismos", meaning daydreaming. As she explained further: "you feel bored because you already know the prayers and the religious procedures in the church and it doesn't make you feel impressed". Accordingly, it has been observed that while the standardisation of practices intends to restrict people's reactivity (Bourdieu, 1990), inter-subjectivities create themselves significance by influencing each other and making rituals more appealing. As Lina admitted "the bodily contact doesn't leave us indifferent", noting religious practice is everyday and self-pervading:

*"Especially within enclosed spaces, like churches, where no restrictive measures exist, an unwitting interest evolves for the human beings standing next to us. You always observe other people. . . what they wear. . . what they look like. . . you may see someone and think 'oh, he is good looking."*

In the same way with which everydayness and its secular elements can emerge in religious spheres, religiousness and its human connectedness are experienced beyond places of worship.

#### *Engagement in touristic practices*

The everydayness of tourism with the mundane tourist moments, the so called 'touristscapes' (Edensor, 2007), such as the time spent in the bus, the daytrips, the restaurants or cafés, were considered 'special' by some participants, offering immanent potential for new appreciations of religion. As Sophia observed:

*"You get to know people, you talk to them. . . you have common interests. . . you laugh, we even danced together! When we were eating, we were all laughing, but we all knew at heart the real purpose of our visit. . . and the love we have, and everything was shared and you feel joy. . ."*

Such sanctifying moments of *communitas* (Turner & Turner, 1978) filled with feelings of togetherness and comradeship were observed especially during the scheduled bus trip to the picturesque village Volakas that took place on a day with no explicitly religious practices identified in the itinerary. Most of the pilgrims were clapping their hands and shaking their bodies in the rhythm of the pop music that the bus driver played, sharing a moment of joy. While one of the oldest members complained about the inappropriateness of such music on their trip, all the other group members continued laughing and reassuring each other that such modern practice is acceptable within the religious context of their visit. As Eleni responded: "God wants us to have fun! As soon as we do nothing sinuous, this is totally acceptable!" Tourist activities within a religious oriented trip should therefore be understood as an essential *liminal* state and anteroom before returning back home. Indeed, the

happiness transmitted points towards religiously important sensual pleasures and values the Holy Spirit grants people with, such as love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness and faith that Christian Orthodox people are to follow in their lives (Ware, 1995).

Tourist moments and spaces, moreover, enable pilgrims to talk and to share personal problems, thus creating feelings of solidarity. Indeed, Tinos being famous for its therapeutic values attracts many people with health problems who visit the island to confront with their everyday life problems. Tourist spaces play a significant role in this matter as they allow time to freeze, creating space-times (Holloway, 2003, p.1967) that enable conversations and empathy, as well as friendships which contrary to the highly structured everyday life back home can have a long lasting effect on pilgrims' lives. Sophia, being herself a cancer patient, recounted:

*“You know on trips like this one, you openly speak about your pain, about what you have been through... because other people have the same problems as you... you get courage, you think that you are not alone... in this problem... for me, making those acquaintances was a benefit for my life... how can I put it... I sometimes cannot really express what I feel... it is... at these moments you see the real other person... because in our everyday lives outside, we are different... not completely different, but the daily pressure and stress makes you... in Tinos you have in depth discussions... They open up here... it is easier here to express your pain... it is, some things are difficult to explain.”*

Freed from structures, discrimination and inequality embedded in the capitalistic society (Baudrillard, 1981; Wearing et al., 2016) pilgrims in sacred places open up and find happiness within themselves and in their relations with others. In particular, a specialised notion of ‘communitas’ is observed here, namely of ‘sufferitas’, as it was witnessed that pilgrims formed sub-groups according to their particular problems. People embodying similar health problems, such as suffering from cancer or having fertility problems became closer during the trip in an attempt to overcome their sufferings together.

#### *Invention of material usages to enable religious experience and memory*

Pilgrims' engagement with religious places and the re-working and inventing of material uses (Crang, 1997; Ingold, 1995) enable particular ways of experiencing the religious world. Many items that were purchased have use value, which supports the ritual procedures. As Vaso, for example, explained: *“we buy our candles depending on the vow we have made... some people for example buy candles as tall as their height, in order to thank the Virgin Mary”*. Metallic plackets of *tamata* (votive offerings) bought earlier in the shops are also left behind (in the church) as a thanksgiving, depicting a particular miracle that happened.

Other objects may be bought for personal use. A common practice observed, for example, among pilgrims in the sacred site, is the ‘sweeping’ of the icon with a piece of textile or with other items such as religious tokens (like small crosses), rosaries or gifts bought on the island for family and friends (i.e. toys, shoes etc.); the commercialized form of religion being a fundamental feature of modernity (Kaufman, 2005). According to Elsa *“they are doing this so as to have the blessing always with them, in their bag, always with them.”* Equal to Cloke and Pawson's (2008) memorial trees, sacralised secular items carry ideological messages about the site and spread memory as they tell their own story. As Babis stated: *“I am so proud when I feel or even can tell others that my rosary went to such-and-such a saint...”* Accordingly, through objects encountered in and collected from sacred places, memory becomes materialized and past and present co-exist simultaneously in relation to a desired future.

## **Conclusion**

Influenced by scholars such as Deleuze (1990), Crouch (2009), Edensor (2007), Cloke and Jones (2001), Thrift (2008) and Urry and Larsen (2011), this paper critiques ways of experiencing religiousness through tourism performances, intersecting textual approaches with the essential embodiment and materiality of the tourist world. It proposes that becoming a religious tourist should be considered a fusion between performativities as a series of prescribed, habitual practices that religious tourists have unreflexively to obey (institutional performances), and becoming as subjective, reflexive, unpredictable, which encompass a plethora of different enactments (unconventional performances). Accordingly, performances by religious tourists are not only mimetic and predictable in terms of imitating prescribed actions, but also exhibit sense and flow, as people and performances are both constructed but also constructing. Specifically, it has been argued that while religious tourists are already oriented toward actions in the world (Heidegger, 1978) following religious teachings, they also organise themselves around the materiality, immateriality and subjectivities of the places that exercise power on them (Cloke & Jones, 2001), thus, affecting but simultaneously also being affected by the complexity of the world.

This paper re-conceptualises the position of tourism within the religious experience. Rather than viewing it as a new expression of belief (as post-modern studies propose e.g. Dunlap, 2006; Gibson, 2005), tourist moments and activities are considered an essential part of a religious journey, holy intervention being experienced in both sacred places and spaces beyond religious worship. In particular, tourism's undetermined nature, comprising a collection of dynamic, unstable and intrinsically multifaceted, complex performances (Edensor, 2001; Haldrup & Larsen, 2006; Picken, 2010), becomes an extraordinary, unique, sacred experience. The tranquillity of tourism moments appears to freeze the hectic time of religious tourists' everyday lives allowing them to internalise basic doctrines, to feel togetherness and to create spaces of ‘sufferitas’. Thus, contrary to previous studies that differentiate pilgrimage from tourism (e.g. Boorstin, 1964; Smith, 1992), tourism

constitutes a necessary anteroom from which to return to the previous but simultaneously new life back home. In particular within the religious context the two are related, thus confuting the sacred/secular differentiations. Believers as tourist performers become vehicles of belief that activate, enliven and (re)construct religion.

Such findings are important for future studies indicating the value of adopting an emic perspective in religious tourism research and being open to the unexpected. Indeed, while our participants regard themselves as pilgrims, which etymologically in Greek represents the very act of worshipping and obscures the aspect of travelling, research findings suggest that participants also view many tourist moments and activities as special and necessary to their religious experience. Indeed, while religious tourists engage in Bourdieuan performances as ‘holding on’ to their belief (1991), they simultaneously appear to enable themselves to the unexpected being active rather than passive entities, and thus open to multiple affects (Thrift, 2008).

Therefore, although this study was based on the less studied Christian Orthodox segment, following Albera and Eade (2017) suggestion, further research is still required to understand similar pilgrimage experiences from a multi-cultural perspective. Future research could benefit from investigating pilgrimages’ unconventional performances within other religious contexts to identify alternative space-times that allow religiousness to unfold in various tourist spaces. Such results can form/make up a unique map of the multiplicity and colourfulness of religiousness illuminating specific moments, places and relations that comprise part of the religious self and explain pilgrims’ needs and expectations.

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