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Interfaith Tourist Behaviour at Religious Heritage Sites: House of the Virgin Mary in Turkey

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This study questions selected behavioural aspects of travellers belonging to different religious beliefs during their religious heritage site visits. Tourist behaviour needs to be analysed in specific circumstances. This study aims to clarify in *situ* problems experienced by religious tourists, behavioural differences of tourists with different beliefs, and religious tourist behaviour regarding cultural heritage site protection. A qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews has been followed. Documentary analysis provided secondary data. On-site observation and face-to-face interviews with key-informants provided primary data. Snowball (referral) sampling was applied as non-probability sampling was convenient for data collection. Primary data suggest that visitor behaviour tends to differentiate based on religious faith and age of visitors. Young Turkish Muslim visitors (Gen Y) seemed to have superficial contact with holy sites especially when the site does not represent their own faith. This superficiality seemed higher for Euro Turks and young male students. Muslims and Christians exhibit similarities (deeper interest and respect with increasing age) and dissimilarities (more female interest in Muslims, more on-site praying for Christians).

Key Words: religious tourism, heritage management, House of the Virgin Mary, Turkey

Introduction

Travel for religious reasons dates back to the Roman, Greek, Egyptian and Indus Valley civilizations, and is perhaps the oldest and most prevalent type of travel in human history (Jackowski and Smith, 1992, in Rodriques, 2012). Every year, millions of people are attracted to visit major religious destinations around the world (Jansen and Kuhl, 2008), both ancient and modern in origin. According to the World Religious Travel Association, over 300 million travellers undertook journeys to sacred sites in 2007, and consequently the industry size was estimated at US \$18 billion (Wright, 2007). Rojo (2007) estimates that approximately 300 million people have been motivated by religion travel across the world, despite the fact that a majority of people actually live in a secular way. The majority of religious travellers emerge from the major religions, and identify themselves as Christians, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists (Gan *et al.*, 2000).

For thousands of years, people have been travelling to places which are considered sacred, to meet or to worship concepts around Divinity (Coleman, 2004; Chis, *et al.*, 2009). Religion is important in people's lives, and indeed it has been argued that human beings have always had a need to believe in a superior entity (Timothy and Olsen, 2006). From the beginning of

creation until modern times therefore, there have been many cults and beliefs relating to different Gods and superior forces, which were and are worshipped and venerated through statues, representations and buildings (Rojo, 2007).

Religious tourism is defined as the form of tourism whose participants are motivated in part or exclusively for religious reasons; the concept as a term has emerged as a result of the understanding of tourists' motivations. Therefore, religious tourism constitutes making a visit to local, regional, national or international pilgrimage centres, attending religious ceremonies, conferences and celebrations, and all other religious oriented meetings which do not take place in the home environment (Rinschede, 1992). According to Hinnells (1984), the concept of religion revolves around a system of recognizable beliefs and practices that acknowledge the existence of a 'super human' power that enables people to both address and transcend the problems of life. Therefore, religious tourism is linked to this system through the behaviour and motives for visiting sites, and their religious significance. Furthermore, religious tourism is commonly referred to as faith-based tourism which is accepted as one of the alternative tourism types. People travel for pilgrimage, missionary or leisure purposes individually or in groups.

Religion is an old but dynamic concept including ancient and living faiths with modern religious and quasi-religious movements (Raj and Morpeth, 2007). Religion is a motivation source for travellers. Religious narratives and texts provide examples of faith-based mobility. For instance, Islam suggests that Muslims should practice Hajj when they have resources and physical conditions. Most researchers identify religious tourism with the individual's quest for locales where they seek to experience a sense of identity with shrines and sites of historical and cultural meaning (Nolan and Nolan, 1989). Al-Amin (2002) states that religious tourism is not one type of tourism, as in the case of secular tourism and describes two different types: a tourism which is performed through religious duty, and; tourism which requires the recording of information and its quoting for wider dissemination. Another definition of religious tourism is: the evaluation of touristic travels which people make, with an aim of visiting religious attraction centres, practicing religious beliefs in tourism environments, which are different from places, where people reside, work or meet their regular needs.

In tourism history there is a shift from the concept of 'traveller' to that of 'tourist'. A tourist is considered as part of consumption space and therefore they need not only traditional must-see attractions but also new productive, experimental, and creative consumption designs (Richards, 2001). The pilgrim-tourist dichotomy on the other hand has been a frequently visited debate between theologians and tourism scholars (Olsen, 2010). Emotional dimensions of pilgrimage can vary based on behavioural patterns, for this reason pilgrimages are unique experiences (Lopez, 2013).

This study aims to understand how interfaith tourist behaviour is shaped at holy sites as regards three dimensions. These are:

- types of on-site problems observed and / or experienced during the holy site visit;
- behavioural differences observed and / or experienced between Muslim and non-Muslim visitors and;
- comparison of Muslim and non-Muslim visitors regarding their behavioural patterns concerning protecting and respecting heritage site management rules.

Turkey is the inheritor of a deep Anatolian and Asia Minor cultural heritage wherein, a lot of religious (cultural) heritage elements are accumulated. **Mother**

Mary House is currently a universal attraction for Christian pilgrims and tourists of other faiths.

This study starts with a literature review about religious tourism in Turkey and the role of Mother Mary House as a global religious tourism attraction. Muslim and non-Muslim visitor profiles at Mother Mary House are discussed, before presenting a qualitative research process undertaken at this religious heritage site. Finally, findings of the research are discussed to produce recommendations for academia and practitioners.

Religious Tourism in Turkey and Mother Mary House as a Holy Site

Not only did the first civilizations develop in Anatolia but also the defection of early Christian and Jewish people from their own countries to Anatolia as a result of severe repression and destruction policies, played a significant role in influencing the construction of many synagogues and churches, as well as structures belonging to Islam. The people living during the period of Seljuk^[1] and particularly the Ottoman period were allowed to live by their own religion, and build their own sanctuaries related to their own religions. A great number of the sanctuaries and temples built in Anatolia during those periods have survived to the present day. Turkey is an important Christian centre due to the fact that many of the Apostles and important religious saints lived in Anatolia during the early Christian period and the spread of this religion started from Anatolia.

In addition to being an important centre for Christianity, Turkey is also important for Islam. There are many mosques, shrines and sacred places belonging to people who are considered to be saints, with a high spiritual identity in almost every city of Turkey. Added to this are the religious structures constructed during the Ottoman Empire^[2] which was a worldwide empire (Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2012).

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1. The Seljuk or Great Seljuk Empire (also spelled Seljuq) was a vast medieval Sunni Muslim empire gathering Turkish and Persian populations under Turkish dynasty which lasted from approximately AD 1037 to 1194
 2. The Ottoman, or Turkish Empire was founded in AD 1299 and lasted until 1922. At its peak (16th / 17th Century, the Ottoman Empire was a multinational, multilingual empire controlling much of Southeast Europe, Western Asia, the Caucasus, North Africa, and the Horn of Africa.

There is major potential for faith-based tourism in Turkey considering that just over one hundred thousand religiously motivated tourists visited the country in 2011. Turkey has many religious and sacred sites as well as hosting religious events and conferences, and exhibitions of cultic treasure objects that appeal to many Christian, Islamic and Jewish religious adherents (Kartal, Tepeci and Atlı, 2013). Believers desire to see the places where the events described in their holy books have occurred and trace their cultural and religious roots in foreign lands (Kasar, 2002).

There are many significant religious sites and biblical stories linked to this region. In fact, The Holy Bible begins in Turkey with Abraham's vocation in Harran (Southeast Turkey) and it ends in Turkey with the book of Revelations (the letters to the seven churches in Anatolia) (Granella, 2011). Some of the most important sites are summarized in Table 1 which illustrates the breadth of experience available for religiously motivated tourists (Fant and Reddish, 2003; Go Turkey, 2012; Kartal, Tepeci and Atlı, 2013).

The peninsula of Anatolia has been the cradle of civilisations, cultures and religious beliefs for thousands of years. Christianity spread to Europe and the rest of the world through Anatolia. The settlements in the Aegean area have also served as holy places for Christians who fled oppression in Jerusalem.

The Turkish Republic is now the inheritor of cultural heritage fabric related to the evolution of multiple religious beliefs. Actually, Turkey houses many monuments regarded as sacred by Muslims, Christians and Jews. However only 1% of international arrivals to Turkey are motivated by religion (Aktas and Ekin, 2007). When it comes to Christian sites, Turkey is as important as Israel or Greece for religious tourism. For instance, St. John, regarded as the most important Apostle in the first years of Christianity and who played a considerable role in spreading the faith, passed to Anatolia from Jerusalem because of the pressure of idolaters. This event is accepted as one of the turning points of Christianity. Furthermore, the mother of Jesus Christ, Mother Mary, moved to Anatolia under the auspices of St. John. A number of archaeological proofs support this claim, which is accepted by the Vatican and by a considerable number of churches.

Despite the significant potential for religious tourism in Turkey, the current status of tourism development is far from valuing this heritage. The tourism industry of

Table 1: Religious and Biblical Stories Linked to Turkey

- Many locations in Turkey are mentioned in the *Old Testament*.
- *Ur* or *Şanlıurfa* is accepted as the birthplace of Abraham.
- *Harran* is the native town of Rebecca and Rachel. Abraham and Sarah moved there after leaving Ur.
- In the New Testament, *Antioch* was the place where the name 'Christians' was first used in reference to the followers of Jesus.
- *Mount Ararat* is where Noah's Ark was grounded.
- The *Garden of Eden*, is said to have been in the plain between the Tigris and Euphrates.
- *Constantinople* became the centre of the church in the east. *Hagia Sophia*, which was formerly an Orthodox patriarchal basilica, later became a mosque and is now a museum in Istanbul.
- *Cappadocia* is a region of exceptional natural wonders, and has a unique historical and biblical heritage.
- *Saint Paul*, the leading missionary of the Christian faith lived in *Tarsus*.
- The seven churches, which were the first places that the Apostle Paul visited in order to promote Christianity, are in the Western Anatolia Region of Turkey. These *Seven Churches of Revelations*: are *Ephesus*, *Sardes*, *Pergamum*, *Philadelphia*, *Laodicea*, *Smyrna* and *Thyateira*.
- *Ephesus*, is where Mother Mary spent her last years after Jesus was crucified. St. John fearing for Mother Mary's life decided to move her to Anatolia.
- Near Ephesus, another site of pilgrimage is the cave of seven sleepers (*Grotto of the Seven Sleepers*).

Turkey is highly dependent on mass tourism that creates congestion in Istanbul and the South-Western shores of the country. However, there is an abundant, yet, under-utilised and under-valued religious heritage both in traditional mass tourism destinations and undiscovered destinations in Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Anatolia (Egresi *et al.*, 2012). Sites such as the *Pool of Sacred Fish* in Sanliurfa province (South-East) and the *Church of St. Peter* in Antakya (ancient Antioch) are familiar to experts and amateurs (Tourism Review, 2012), but receive relatively few visitors despite their religious importance.

Mother Mary House located in Western Turkey, near Izmir, close to the ruins of Ephesus is one of the most successful religious tourism attractions in Turkey. The

importance of this area is a historical fact, dating back to Pagan times (before the birth of Christ) when the Temple of Artemis was constructed. The area where Ephesus is located was ruled by Carians, Lelegians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Seljuks, and Ottomans before modern Turkey was founded. The Temple of Artemis in the area is cited as one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. Ephesus city reached its peak period during the 2nd century AD, when it was listed as the 4th largest city of Eastern Rome after Alexandria, Antioch, and Athens (Ahunbay, 2009). After 350 AD, Ephesus became a Christian city and its Pagan buildings were converted to churches. Arab attacks on the city started after 654 AD, and Seljuk Turks arrived to the area in the 14th century (Ahunbay, 2009).

The modern history of Mother Mary House (Meryem Ana Evi in the Turkish Language) starts in the first half of the 19th century on the banks of the Rhine in Germany, at the sickbed of a peasant woman in a village near Dulmen in Westphalia. Anna Katharina Emmerick (1774-1824) suffered from an incurable sickness which confined her to bed for 10 years. In this period of time, she took comfort from visions which she had related to the lives of Jesus and Mary. These visions were very detailed and informative and they constituted facts, places and people who she could not have known (Granella, 2011). Following these visions, a house was discovered by a group of Lazarist priests (in 1891), which is believed to be the place where Mother Mary spent the last years of her life. The entire Christian world was interested in this discovery (Selçuk Municipality, 2012). According to Christianity, John the Apostle brought Mother Mary to Ephesus after the Resurrection of Christ and she lived out her last days there. This is mainly based on a Christian tradition, supported by the biblical statement that Jesus consigned Mother Mary to John's care (John 19:26-27).

Mother Mary came to Ephesus towards the end of her life, (circa 37-45AD). In the Renaissance period, the trip was mentioned by church historians, and it is stated that local Christians venerated a small house near Ephesus as Mary's. St. John wrote in his Gospel that Jesus entrusted to him the care of his mother before dying on the cross when he said: *'Here is your mother'* and from that hour St. John took her to his own. In the *'Acts of the Apostles'* it is mentioned how the followers of Jesus Christ were persecuted in Jerusalem upon his death. For instance; St. Stephen was stoned in 37AD and St. James was beheaded in 42AD. Furthermore, the early Christians divided the world between them for

preaching the Gospel and St. John was given Asia Minor. Since Mary had been given to his care and with the persecution going on in Jerusalem, he is assumed to have brought her with him to Asia Minor.

Two facts support this historically:

1. The existence of St. John's tomb in Ephesus.
2. The existence, in Ephesus, of the first Basilica in the world dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. In the early days of the Church, places of worship were only dedicated to people who had lived or died in the locality.

In addition to the above mentioned evidences, Ephesus hosted the Ecumenical Council of 431 in this basilica, which defined dogma on the Divine Motherhood of Mary. There is one more evidence supporting this idea, which is in the oral tradition of the villagers of Kirkindje (currently Şirince Village). These people were the descendants of Christians from Ephesus who passed from generation to generation, the belief of Mother Mary's death in this place, which they called *'Panaghia Kapulu'*. This tradition was kept alive via the annual pilgrimage of 15th August (Sirince Houses, 2012). The site became a frequent religious destination for pilgrims, tourists and curious visitors, since both Christians and Muslims venerate Mother Mary, recognizing Her as the mother of one of their prophets. On the 15th August a ceremony is organized to commemorate Mother Mary's Assumption every year.

This small house has been visited by many important Christians. Popes such as; Paul VI visited in 1967 and Pope John Paul II in 1979, who declared the Shrine of Virgin Mary as a pilgrimage place for Christians. This has strengthened the belief that Mother Mary lived and died in Ephesus. Pope Benedict XVI also celebrated mass here on 29 November 2006, visiting the site as a humble pilgrim. He had no official appointments, just Mass in the Sanctuary to the memory of Mother Mary, where he prayed for peace in Jerusalem and all over the world in her name (Granella, 2011).

Mother Mary House is located on the top of 'Koreosos Mountain' (Turkish: Bülbüldağı literally meaning Mt. Nightingale), which is now in a nature park between Ephesus and Seljuk. The house believed to be the last residence of Mother Mary, Mother of Jesus was originally a two-storied house, which has an anteroom where today candles are offered, a bedroom and a praying room for Christians, and a room with a fireplace. A front kitchen which fell into ruins was restored in the 1940's. Today, visitors only have access to the central part and a room on the right of the altar.

In this context, one can understand that this building looks more like a church than a house. Another interesting feature is the 'Water of Mary', a source to be found at the exit of the church area where rather salty water, with curative properties, can be drunk by all (Ephesus, 2012).

Mother Mary is a mother of help and goodness. Regardless of religion, people visit the house for many various reasons. All people hearing that the water coming from the source at the back of the house is a healing and treatment-giving one for illnesses and disorders, come to visit the house of Mother Mary. Some patients claim that they got rid of their illnesses after drinking the water and some other visitors claim that their wishes came true after their visit. The wishes change according to gender, age and the economic situation of people. Any wish which comes to the mind of people is written in the guest book of the house (Türkoğlu, 1986 in Yitik, 2000).

Today, the Vatican recognises Mary House as one of the most sacred places in the world - it is a popular and holy place for Christians from all over the world. Furthermore, the House is also visited by Muslims, as Mother Mary is accepted and venerated as the mother of one of the prophets, Isa (Jesus) in Islam (Ephesus Museum, 2012). The divine nature of Mother Mary for Christians, results in great admiration and this devotion leads to a different level of reverence than would be the case for Muslim visitors.

Visitors to Mother Mary House

There is no Holy Mother Mary Cult among Muslims to equate with devotion to her by Christians. According to Islam, Mother Mary is not a mother who has giving birth to God, or protected from all kinds of spiritual dirt, or raised to God (*Assumption*) immediately after her death. Furthermore, there is no depiction of Mother Mary carrying Jesus (*Her son*) in her arms in any Muslim shrine. Also, unlike Christian examples, no Islamic country has a city or state devoted to Mother Mary - with names such as Virginia, Santa Maria and Mary Land. However, Muslims do not ignore Mother Mary in their beliefs and prayers. Because Mother Mary is the only woman who was chosen, cleaned and made superior to all women of the world. She is recognised in the verses (42-43) of Al-Imran, Sura in the Holy Quran (Yitik, 2000).

Behold! The angels said: 'O Mary! God hath chosen thee and purified thee - chosen thee above the women of all nations. O Mary!

Worship thy Lord devoutly: Prostrate thyself, and bow down (in prayer) with those who bow down (Quran 3:42-43).

It may be interesting for many people to know how much Muslims love Mother Mary, the mother of Jesus. In the Holy Quran, no other woman is given more attention than Mother Mary, in spite of the fact that all prophets with the exception of Adam, had mothers. Furthermore, the Holy Quran gives Mother Mary special consideration: numerous verses and suras give information about Mother Mary and Jesus Christ. There is also one surah in the Holy Quran named after Mother Mary (Surah XIX), describing her virtues and qualities.

Mother Mary has many names and titles in the Holy Quran such as:

She who was chosen, the greatest of Women, the Pure, The Immaculate, The Chaste, She of whom the Hadiths Speak, Interlocutor of the Angels, She who Bows Down to Allah in Worship, Receiver of the Good News of the Birth of Jesus.

Mother Mary and Jesus Christ are viewed as signs demonstrating the existence of God (Granella, 2011). Mother Mary is, in fact, mentioned in verses of the Holy Quran 70 times and her name is repeated 34 times in total, which makes her the 4th most mentioned person in the Holy Quran after Prophet Moses (169), Prophet Abraham (69) and Prophet Noah (43) (Smitt, 1989 in Yitik, 2000).

Today, Mother Mary House is visited by Muslims, since Mother Mary is regarded as the mother of one of the Islamic prophets Jesus/Isa. Many Muslim visitors see Mother Mary as a respectful and helpful person, so they visit Mother Mary House, pray there and ask God for help via Mother Mary when they have some problems such as: crucial illness with no treatment, financial hardship and when they are searching for a spouse or job etc. Believers think that God will never refuse the prayers and wishes of his beloved servants and their prayers will be accepted by God if they are done with purity and sincerity (Yitik, 2000).

Historically, Muslim visitors followed the Christian visitors who first discovered Mother Mary House. Gradually, both Muslims and Christians visited this sacred area with an increasing interest. After the development of mass tourism in Turkey (in the 1990s onwards), Mother Mary House has welcomed visitors

Photo 1: View of Entrance Gate of Mary Mary House (December 2012)

from virtually all faiths, and it has become part of Ephesus tour itineraries. Despite the diversity of visitors, two groups form the majority of tourists to Mother Mary House: Muslims and Christians. Christians pay visit to Mother Mary House for pilgrimage reasons and the House is visited by Muslims to ask her for help and goodness. It is also visited by Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Shintoists and people without any belief in religion. However, there is no doubt that the site is most important for Christian Catholics who regard Mother Mary House very highly.

According to Christian Catholics who belong to Lazarist and Capuchin traditions, Mother Mary House and its surroundings are where Mother Mary came after the crucifixion of her only son Jesus Christ, spent the last days of her life and probably died (Yitik, 2000). Protestant Christians think that it is not right to accept Mother Mary as a mediator between God and people, whereas Orthodox Christians regard Mother Mary as a goddess with super human characteristics and qualifications such as being helpful and a healer. Mother Mary is a complex entity for Catholic Christians with many attributes and layers of importance: she is Teotokos - the one who gave birth to God; she is the Immaculate Conception - the one who is born without sin, and finally she experienced the Assumption - i.e. was taken bodily into Heaven after her death (Yitik, 2000).

The house of Mother Mary is primarily a place of prayer, silence and reflection; a place where groups of Christian pilgrims from all over the world celebrate Holy Mass in the memory of Mother Mary who was taken up into the heaven. It is a site where groups of pilgrims - Christian, Muslim and others stop to say a silent pray. Mother Mary grants grace to those who come with faith and a pure heart, cleansed of all sin (Granella, 2011).

Consumer Behaviour in Tourism

Tourists consist of a specific group of consumers who consume a variety of services and goods during their travels and site visits. Broadly speaking, tourists do not generally get organized to act as industrial (organizational) buyers. Instead, tourists generally tend to behave individually during their purchase decisions and preferences. In marketing literature, characteristics that influence consumer behaviour are outlined as: cultural, social, personal, and psychological. (Kotler and Armstrong, 1994). Within cultural factors, elements such as sub-culture, social class, and cultural shifts may influence consumer. Family, small group attachments, social roles and status, comprise elements of social factors. Groups (aspirational, reference, membership) can highly shape consumer behaviour, and religious groups are part of this category. Personal factors are generally about the demographic outlook of

consumers such as; age, occupation, life-cycle-stage, lifestyle, economic situation, personality, and self-concept. Age and life-cycle-stage change consumption patterns to a considerable extent. Finally, the psychological factor consists of elements such as motivation, perception, learning, beliefs, and attitudes (Kotler and Armstrong, 1994). Psychological factors are important for service industries such as tourism where consumers do not concentrate on purchasing and owning physical goods, but prioritize quality experiences which they keep as souvenirs of that particular moment of existence through consumption.

Visitor behaviour might be affected by several factors. Traditionally, consumer behaviour theory puts forward factors such as: situational conditions, family and household, personal characteristics, social class membership, socioeconomic status, and culture. Visitors experience psychological processes during their visits as economic or cultural (aesthetic, recreational) consumptions. Three of the best known processes are; attitudinal and behavioural changes, learning, and information processing (Engel *et al.*, 1990). Tourist or visitor behaviours have been widely analysed from the economic, marketing, and consumer behaviour perspectives and thus, we know that their behaviours regarding purchase decision are similar to other buyers in different markets. Typically, visitor purchasing decisions follow stages of: recognising a problem / need, research on the problem, comparing alternative decisions, decision-making for selected alternative(s), the action of buying / purchase and, post-purchase evaluation and behaviours (Boone and Kurtz, 1993).

In the tourism industry, tourist behaviour has been categorized from different angles (Hart and Troy, 1996). From travel motivation it is possible to classify them as business, pleasure, and personal motivation seekers. From consumption / usage rate or frequency they can be classified as: never users, old and new users, first time and repeat users, regular and irregular users, heavy users and light users. Loyalty is another criteria used for grouping tourist behaviours: some are loyal to one destination, one enterprise, one brand, some tourists demonstrate soft loyalty (2-3 brands), and some tourists are experience seekers who are never loyal to any destination or enterprise.

Since the tourist is the central actor of tourism consumption there is a need to understand the tourist from different perspectives regarding their consumption patterns and experimental characteristics. Consumer behaviour can be better analysed with input

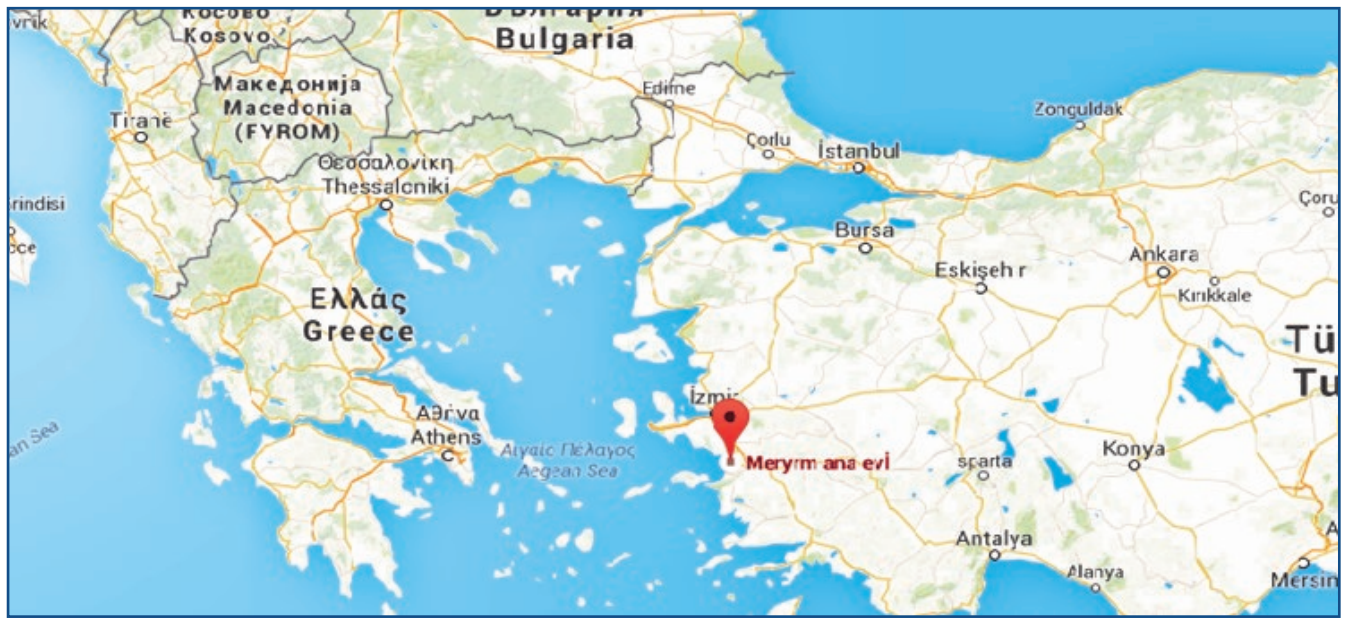
from economics, psychology, sociology, social-psychology, and cultural anthropology. Needs, desires, and demands lie at the heart of efforts driven to understand consumer behaviour (Valsecchi, 2011). From the consumer's point of view, consumption processes can be analysed in three stages; pre-consumption, consumption, post-consumption (Solomon, 2004). Consumer behaviour in tourism becomes much more complex than most other industries, due to the characteristics of the industry and characteristics of the tourist as a consumer. In order to better understand consumer behaviour in tourism, multiple issues are to be analysed, including personalization of tourism products, specificity of tourists as consumers, the role of geography in tourism consumption, difficulties about the control of destination quality, and the intangible, perishable, heterogeneous, inseparable, variable nature of tourism products (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2007).

The literature presented above can partly help us to understand and explain visitor behaviour at holy sites. The personal characteristics of holy site visitors may vary from other types of visitor / attraction couplings. For instance, it is natural to expect Christians to visit cathedrals, churches and Christian temples, while Muslims are expected to visit Islamic heritage areas. However, a great majority of holy sites and buildings are open to visits from different faith holders. Therefore, it is quite natural in Selçuk-Ephesus to see Muslims, Christians, and other spiritual groups visiting Mother Mary House.

Experience at Holy Sites: a qualitative exploration of interfaith tourist behaviour at Mother Mary House (Ephesus / Selçuk-Izmir)

According to the religious visions of a German nun named Anna Catherina Emmerich (1774-1820), recorded and published by Brendano, Mother Mary lived near Ephesus for three years after her arrival with St. John, but because she missed Jerusalem she went back with St. John and St. Peter. During this last stay in Jerusalem she became seriously ill, and people thought she would die. However, she recovered and felt strong enough to return to Ephesus to live her last days at her house on Mt. Koressos, before she died at the age of 64. Her coffin was put into a cave 2km. away from her house (Kuşadası Biz, 2012). Most of the house we see today dates back to the 6th and 7th centuries, however, its foundations date back to the 1st century. Before its 'discovery' in the nineteenth

Figure 1: Location of Mother Mary House



century, the site had long served as a place of pilgrimage for Orthodox Christians from the surrounding area (Sacred Destinations, 2012).

Currently, Mother Mary House is a globally important religious attraction, with visitors from diverse faiths (and none). The House is open for visits all year round. In summer, visitors are accepted from 07.00 to 17.00. In the winter period, visiting hours are from 07.30 to 17.00. The location of Mother Mary House is shown in Figure 1. The number of the visitors both international and domestic are indicated in Table 2.

Research Method

In this study, an inductive approach is applied to gather primary data from the field. After collecting and analysing data, outcomes of the research are discussed, to contribute to the general body of knowledge. From an epistemological point of view this study follows an interpretative tradition rather than a positivist one; the use of an interpretative approach is necessary when

there is need to understand the nature of humans in social spheres. Humans need to be studied in their social action situations. Furthermore, ontological orientation of the study is constructionism. To summarise, it can be said that this research adopts a qualitative strategy (Bryman, 2008: 30-36). Related data were gathered in three ways: firstly, documentary research provided secondary data from printed and online resources; secondly, primary data were collected from the field via semi-structured interviews and thirdly; non-participant observation techniques were applied during site visits.

After an intensive literature search on themes such as: cultural heritage management (Toksöz, 1974; Mollard, 1999; Patin, 2005; Aksit, 2009; Smith and Akagawa, 2009; Ahunbay, 2009; Oğuz, 2010;); qualitative research methodology (Churchill, 1992; Yıldırım and Simsek, 2005; Dawkins, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Northey and McKibbin, 2009; Glesne, 2011) and; religious tourism in Turkey (Collin, 1962; Simon, 1967; Contenau, 1968; Blake and Edmonds, 1988;

Table 2: Number of Visitors of Mother Mary House in Ephesus (Selçuk-İzmir)

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014
International Tourists	630.630	573.922	592.521	573.795
Domestic Tourists	173.000	154.116	146.324	186.726

Source: Data compiled by authors from Selçuk City Municipality (İzmir-Turkey)

Ceram, 1994; Lloyd, 2000; Freely, 2004; As-Sibaaie, 2005; Armstrong, 2008; Finkel, 2012), seven themes were developed to collect data about behavioural, visitor satisfaction, and managerial process related topics. In order to provide focus for this paper, 4 themes are eliminated from the current discussion. The remaining three dimensions, related to visitor behaviour at religious (cultural) heritage sites, were chosen for analysis. These dimensions were examined through semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. Two interviewers undertook face-to-face conversations with interviewees at Mother Mary House Heritage Site. Before and after the interview process the two researchers carried out a structured observation around the study zone and in the heritage site.

During the semi-structured interview process the following (Table 3) open-ended themes (and their sub-themes) were explored and the entire process was recorded with voice recorder:

Table 3 : Open Ended Themes and Sub-Themes

How does interfaith traveller behaviour relate to on-site problems encountered?

- * How can the on-site experience of Muslim and Christian visitors be improved?
- * What type of arrangements can be developed in the physical surroundings and procedural aspects of the site?
- * What type of problems have you discovered / observed / experienced during your tour / visit.

Please evaluate / compare the behaviour of Muslim and Christian visitors of all types (women, men, old / young, children, different nationalities...) during their visits.

- * Are there differences among Muslims?
- * Are there different behaviours among Christians? (E.g. Catholics, Protestants...)

Please differentiate the behaviour of Muslim and Christian visitors regarding the protection, and obeying rules, of Mother Mary House as a cultural heritage area?

- * How should visitors and Holy Site managers protect this heritage area during visits?

After preparing their data collection instrument, the authors of the study undertook a study trip to Mother Mary House during December 2012. Before visiting the Holy Site of Mother Mary House, notebooks, pens and pencils, voice recording equipment and cameras with adequate storage memory and batteries were prepared. The authors spent an entire day at Mother

Mary House and interviewed 25 persons with experience and information about visitors to the Holy Site. These interviews were completed with tourist guides (with intensive guiding experience in Ephesus and Mother Mary House), visitors (Muslims and Christians), and personnel employed at Mother Mary House site (workers, sales staff, gardeners, security, religious representatives). In the main, interviewees were male, ranging from 20 to 60 years of age. Tourist guides' experience level ranged from 5 years to 16 years. As a note - tourist guides rarely lead single-faith groups, rather, they guide groups of a mixed nature (having members of different religious affiliations).

Data analysis followed various stages of categorization and classification, the nomination of categories and finally conceptualization / interpretation (Merriam, 2009).

Results

During the categorization and classification phases different data patterns emerged in relation to Muslim and Christian faiths. Muslim and Christian visitors experience and behave differently at the religious heritage site of Mother Mary House. It may not be that surprising that different faith groups exhibit different behavioural patterns. However, a close-up analysis can reveal better understanding of the differences. The following sections summarise the findings under three main themes.

On-site problems and tourist behaviour (Muslims and Christians):

There is a sign on the left side of the inner door at the entrance to Mother Mary House indicating that the written prayers and printed brochures at the site belong to the Christian religion, which inherently proposes that the House is primarily serving visitors who belong to Christianity. This type of visual stimulator pushes Muslim visitors towards a short visit, with limited opportunity to feel the spirituality of the site.

During the access and visiting period at Mother Mary House, no visual clues help Muslim visitors to perceive that this area is a place of worship which has meaning and importance for the Islamic faith alongside Christianity. This is not only inside the House but also in the garden area - there is limited signage about the association of the House with Islam. The bookstore in the garden (see Photo 2) was closed during the data collection process, but all the books and objects displayed seemed to be produced by Christian authors.

Photo 2: Bookstore selling Christian Books and Souvenirs to Visitors

It would be enriching to include books of other authors including those presenting the Islamic perspective. Regarding this as a problem, few Muslim visitors displayed awareness and even fewer of them were personally motivated to find a solution, such as writing a petition letter to improve this situation.

The management of Mother Mary House heritage area belongs to a Christian Association: thus, Mother Mary House is primarily associated with Christianity, despite its importance and recognition by Islam. This is evidence of the poor awareness of Mother Mary and Jesus, according to Islamic sources, among visiting Muslims. In fact, during visits by Muslims, an opportunity to provide information about Christianity and the similarities between Islam and Christianity could be created. Sunday worship takes place in the gardens of the House of the Virgin Mary in a peaceful atmosphere (see Photo 3). This is one of the rare chances for many Muslim visitors to witness and learn directly about Christian rituals.

Muslim visitors are conflicted about their feelings of the sense and meaning of the site during their visit. They only feel a slight sense of belonging to the heritage area while visiting this holy sanctuary. On the other hand, for Christian visitors, visual elements facilitate perceptions and feelings of belongingness to the heritage site. Therefore, among Muslim visitors those who have deep knowledge about Mother Mary and those who are conscious of Mother Mary's religious importance can feel more attached to the location. Thus, visitor satisfaction of Muslims seemed

to be lower than Christians but, in the future, this assumption needs to be systematically tested.

Comparison of tourist behaviour according to demographic profile (Muslim / Muslim, Muslim / Christian, Christian / Christian):

When the motivation (purpose) of Muslim visitors is compared with that of Christian visitors, it appears that Muslim visitors are in general far less conscious and informed about the history, meaning, and cultural importance of the place. Most Muslim visitors' aims related to recreational / tourism foci, instead of religious visitation. For most Muslim visitors, Mother Mary House was perceived as one of the must-see attractions around Izmir.

Photo 3: Worship Area Reserved for Christian Faith (Left side of Mother Mary House)

Some visitors could not explain why this House is important and why people visit the area. Among tour participants a certain segment of visitors pay a simple touristic visit to the Holy Shrine, since they have to pass this stage quickly to catch other attractions. In general, Muslim visitors knew that Mother Mary is the miraculous mother of Prophet Jesus (Isa) but they had little knowledge about what Mother Mary meant for Christians and other belief groups. Nevertheless, a very small group of Muslim visitors are well-informed on the subject. These can be seen as true faith travellers, trying to discover and interpret the heritage area. Christian visitors who are closer to pilgrim than tourist seem to have a deeper knowledge about the meaning of Mother Mary and Jesus for Muslims.

According to the research, the majority of young (less than 35 years old) Muslim visitors such as students from universities and high schools behave in an inappropriate way during their visits. The worst case seems to be groups of students from secondary schools and lychees (aged between 14-18), where children and adolescents come in large groups and do not pay attention to the rules. Age and education level seem to be important influencers of desired behavioural patterns (keeping quiet, respecting, living the atmosphere . . .).

Another interesting fact is how technology changes the perception and experience of religious heritage sites for young generations. A group of Turkish university students noted the following:

. . . Well, we are just rolling around with our car. We do not know much about this place. For us the important thing is to take photos from places we visit and share them on social networks. We love to make comments on photos shared on social media. We are Facers, (addicted to Facebook, in a way like Rockers living Rock style); you can call us Facers or Facebook user generation . . .

Among Muslim visitors, those belonging to Generation Y seemed very different in their behaviour. These young groups are highly dependent on technology use and friendship circles during their visit experience (see Photo 4). They generally have very limited / poor knowledge about the heritage they visit as in the case of Mother Mary House. This raises questions about the education system and the content of religious education in Turkish families and schools. In general, young Muslim visitors (predominantly Turkish citizens in this research) have limited or very little information and

Photo 4: Facers or Gen Y youth with little Interest to Interpret Religious Heritage



education about the Mother Mary Phenomena. In this regard, Euro Turks deserve a deeper analysis since their cultural connection with their Turkish homeland can be problematic. Even if these young generations know that Jesus Christ and Mother Mary are accepted as Holy personages by Islam, their knowledge is very superficial.

The age of Muslim visitors is connected to their behavioural characteristics. Visitors over 35 years of age are more conscious, have pre-planned, and have more respect for the rules for visiting the holy shrine of Mother Mary. This situation can be explained by their growing interest for meaning in life via religion and their increased maturity level. There are similar behavioural patterns between mid-age and senior Christians and Muslims. Both behave more politely, more respectfully, more silently, and in a more careful manner during their visit. Among young Muslims there is a variance between young male and female visitors. Young female Muslims behave similar to older and mid-aged, mature visitors, unlike their male contemporaries (see Photo 5).

Among Christians a differentiation is noted regarding Catholic and Non-Catholic visitors. These are specialist market segments or visitor categories.

Photo 5: Young Female Muslim Visitors of Mother Mary House

Christian visitors belonging to Orthodox and Protestant sects visit the house of Mother Mary for leisure reasons, as the house is included in their tour program, rather than for religious reasons (i.e. pilgrimage, spiritual seeking). However, it is occasionally possible to observe passionate visitors from Non-Catholic groups. This evidence for differences among Christian visitors supports Olsen's (2013) new market segment who undertake quests in faith tourism.

During the data collection process no evidence of *Stendhal Syndrome* was noted.^[3] All visitors behaved with an appropriate level of consciousness during their visits. Among Christian visitors, behavioural differences are observed between sects. Accordingly, Christian Catholics have deeper interest and respect and they feel much more impressed by their visiting experience than other Christian visitors. Visits of Popes from the Vatican might have stimulated the interest of Catholic visitors. Related to this deep contact with the site's spiritual atmosphere, Catholic visitors have expressed a higher level of satisfaction.

3. A psychosomatic response - tachycardia, vertigo, fainting, confusion and even hallucinations - when the 'victim' is exposed to particularly beautiful, or large amounts of, art in a single place; the response can also occur when a person is overwhelmed by breathtaking natural beauty or exposed to an experience of great personal significance

Tourist behaviour regarding heritage protection and obeying visiting rules (Muslims and Christians):

Students in general visiting the heritage site have caused many on-site problems for personnel. This type of group is not mindful about the presence of other visitors and does not keep silent in conformity with the area management's principles. Many Turkish schools visit Mother Mary House in their touring programs and this creates problems for site managers when these visits take place at busy times.

Silence is the most valuable comfort element during religious heritage site visits. Another inappropriate behaviour stemming from young visitors (both Muslim and Non-Muslim), is speaking loudly in the holy Shrine and in its vicinity (garden, parking, shops etc.). Talking aloud, disturbing other visitors, and taking pictures in the inner part of the house are prohibited acts. This problem affects visitor satisfaction and tourism professionals and heritage site managers need to develop better rules. Another prohibited act is attaching wish papers (notes) with chewing gum. This gum melts on warm and sunny days and creates pollution. Photos 6 and 7 draw attention to this problem.

Attaching wish papers is a common act among Turkish visitors since they have a tradition of this Shamanist ritual tradition, which also extends to attaching clothes on sacred trees. Despite the fact that this tradition is not allowed in Islam, popular interest goes on.

Photo 6: Warning About Chewing Gum and Environmental Pollution (Close Left) / The Holy Water Spring (Closer Right) / Wish Paper Wall (Far Right).



Alongside the Turkish visitors a significant number of foreign visitors also attach various wishes and prayers. Some ask for money, a house, marriage, love, a baby, a cure for an illness, success in approaching exams, a good job and so on.

Observations on heritage site management crystallized three issues of importance. The first issue is about access to the site. Religious tourists may accept discomfort and difficult conditions especially during a pilgrimage experience and they may feel that their

Photo 8: Transport Difficulty - Access to Mother Mary House is via a Steep Road



efforts are more meaningful and valuable in that way. However, many visitors are secular tourists and they have issues in the areas of transport problems - no pedestrian zones, no cycling lane, and a need for signposting at many points of the route (see Photo 8).

The second issue is related to the commercial centre close to the Holy Shrine. These shops offer souvenirs, food and drink services, post office, ATM machines and so on. Better spatial planning is needed in this area. Souvenir shops in particular look like ordinary shops in the city centre where one can find several low quality imitation products un-related to the site (see Photo 9). Tourists sometimes spend time in these shops and do not even enter the Holy Shrine area, and during

Photo 7: Closer View of Wish Papers (Notes and Letters)



Photo 9: Souvenir Shops at the Entrance Gate of Holy Site

peak season, commercial activities sometimes overshadow the holy atmosphere of the site.

The third and last remark about heritage site management and tourist behaviour relates to the payment of an entrance fee. Entrance tickets are bought at the outskirts of the religious heritage site and these payments are collected by the local municipality. Meanwhile the Association responsible for the internal organization and management of Mother Mary House need financial resources. Therefore they ask for donations from the visitors. Their resources seem fragile and inconsistent.

Most of the times Muslim visitors are of Turkish origin, other nationalities of Muslim visitor are not noted much in Mother Mary House. A higher level of awareness and compliance with cultural heritage management principles is observed in Christian visitors, both tourists and pilgrims. Generally this group have a higher interest and awareness for cultural heritage protection concerns. This may be due to an improved level of consciousness regarding environmental issues and sustainability in their respective countries of origin.

Conclusions and Policy Implications

A broad range of conclusions and recommendations are derived from the research findings (see Table 4 for

summary of findings). Firstly, In order to improve the on-site visitor experience, the amount of visitors should be strictly controlled during peak season (summer in Turkey). There should be a limit to the number of visitors as the carrying capacity is exceeded during the summer, and visitors complain about congestion in the house of Mother Mary during their visit. High season for this holy shrine is during July and August. Currently, there are no restrictions at peak periods, and tour guides communicate among each other to plan their visiting hours and decrease levels of congestion. Tour guides generally interchange the timing of their visits to Mother Mary House, the ancient site of Ephesus, and / or Ephesus Museum. Tour guides and heritage site personnel regularly confront each other with on-site problems during or after the visits.

The house of Mother Mary has visits from all age groups. Some visitors, especially older ones, have a great difficulty in reaching the mountain where the house of Mother Mary is located. This problem could be overcome with a cable car (lift) which could be established like at the Acropolis archaeological site in Pergamum. Furthermore, the establishment of a cable car would enable visitors to see the view of Ephesus, an ancient city founded as a port city in ancient times. Public transport to the hill where Mother Mary's House is located is not well-designed. Someone who tries to visit the House must either take a taxi from

Selçuk District centre or from the gates of Ephesus ancient site. This can be expensive and an impossible service to secure during peak seasons. Dolmuş (minibus for collective transport), city bus, and cable lift should all be put into service for visitors. The current road is narrow, and needs protective barriers for pedestrians and vehicles. There is no track reserved for cyclists and visitors coming with motorbikes.

The information and warning signs in the vicinity of Mother Mary House should be reorganized. For example; warnings like; 'Please do not smoke here' and 'Please speak softly here', 'Please keep to the right during your walk' should be provided in different languages.

New arrangements are needed to prevent objects from being destroyed in the holy structure. Protecting the garden of Mother Mary House is also critical. For example; food and beverage provision, parking areas for tour buses and other cars and indeed the actual entrance area could all be moved a little farther away to prevent noise pollution at the site.

Multi-lingual information panels educating visitors about the holy sanctuary could be placed at the entrance and there could be audio recordings informing visitors about the holy sanctuary of Mother Mary House.

Solutions are also required to increase the awareness levels of Muslim visitors (such as seminars, mini booklets, signage with explanations etc.). This is especially important for young visitors and students, who should be informed about the house of Mother Mary before their arrival to the heritage site. Society would be more aware through these measures and the level of respect would increase. The timing of visits could be better planned for Muslim and Christian visitors. For instance, during special celebrations of Christian and Muslim calendars, more capacity could be offered. Forecasting future arrivals and visitor profiles should be done, but this requires efficient data collection about visitors - which is not available for the moment. A well-structured questionnaire should be designed and undertaken with visitors.

Attaching pieces of paper and cloth nearby the holy spring a few meters south of Mother Mary House is a questionable tradition in terms of environmental concerns.

Tourism industry stakeholders need to work in close coordination with the Association responsible for

management of this heritage area. Currently, there is a gap and lack of cooperation between stakeholders. Another key relationship - between the local Municipality and the Association needs development.

In the long term, cultural heritage management principles should be developed for Mother Mary's House. Visitor management principles should be applied in conformity with heritage management cases from all over the world.

In more general terms, Turkey needs to promote its valuable faith tourism resources efficiently. All of the Ecumenical Councils between the 4th and 8th centuries took place in Anatolia (Iznik, Istanbul, Ephesus, and Kadıköy). Many of the early saints (fathers and mothers of the Christian ideology and rituals) are compatriots of people living in Turkey (Bartholomeos I The Greek Patriarch of Istanbul, 2002). The tourism industry should be used to stimulate understanding of the various religious traditions which otherwise seem to be exclusive. This would decrease the phobias and prejudices of spiritual seekers. Faith-based tourism can transform voyeuristic tourist behaviour into responsible and participative tourism which provides refreshing insights regarding the self, the other, and the places visited (Sharma, 2003).

Limitations

This research had limitations. First of all, convenience sampling was used to collect data. In future, more rigorous sampling techniques can be used in cooperation with the Association responsible for site management. Another limit is the number of faiths represented, since only Christian and Muslim visitors were encountered on the study date. Jews, Buddhists, atheists and other types of faiths need to be analysed. In future, new research is needed about other profiles and segments of religious traveller.

Table 4: Summary of Comparative Findings (Muslim vs. Christian Regarding Visitor Behaviour)

Research Theme	Christians	Muslims	Sub-patterns
<i>In situ</i> behaviours & problem issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong feeling of belongingness • More visual aid for perception • Long visiting time • Bookshop opening hours • Noise and crowds sometimes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak feeling of belongingness • Inadequate signposting, visual stimulators • Short visiting time • Despite complaints no attempt for remedy • Inadequate sources about the significance of Mary & Jesus for Islam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal welcome for all faith holders • More chances of self-learning for associated faiths (i.e. Muslims) • Limiting access during overcapacity periods • Provide written sources during all visits • Visiting timetables and schedules for different visitors
Visitor profile differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher level of consciousness about the Shrine • Visitors from all age groups, but age differentiates the experience • Visitors from various nationalities • Groups and individual visitors • Tourist visitor vs. pilgrim visitor • Catholic vs. Non-Catholic visitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less informed about the spirituality of the House. • More recreational mood, less spiritual motivation • Mostly young visitors • Mostly visitors in groups • Generational interpretation • Mostly Turkish visitors • Female/male difference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilgrim visitors older, better informed, understand meaning of Mary for Muslims too. • Visitors aged over 35 - more respectful to the Shrine area for both Muslims and Christians • Similarity between Orthodox & Protestant & Muslim visitors • Catholics - deepest interest in religiosity • Higher level of visitor satisfaction among Catholics versus all other faith holders • Sub-group of Muslim visitors - young female visitors with higher interest and respect for the Shrine (gender and Mother Mary association needs further research) • Visitors in large groups create more noise and improper behaviour • Young student groups most noisy • Generation Y includes intensive use of technology to mediate the experience • Euro Turks, especially of Generation Y, are techno-savvy, but poorly informed on religiosity • Muslim visitors are predominantly Turkish, while Christians are represented with diverse nationalities
Heritage site management & protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupation and age • Faith-based environmental pollution • Transport & accessibility • Commerce & spirituality dilemma • Entrance fee & charity donations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low level of heritage awareness • Faith-based environmental pollution • Lack of explanations in Turkish language • Accessibility • Unauthentic commercial products • Cost of entrance and parking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty of transport results in richer visitor experience for seekers of spiritual meaning • Difficulty of transport results in group arrivals with bus instead of individual visitors. Groups decrease quality of visitor experience. • Wish papers on the wall - are they really significant for Muslim and Christian visitors or is it a secular tradition joined to the experience? • Commercialization of the holy shrine or selling goods and souvenirs at religious heritage areas, how to find the balance? • Entrance fees: who deserves them? Is requesting financial support in contradiction

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