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A Shared Pilgrimage Road in Israel and Palestine: From Utopia to Reality

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Most pilgrimages on foot are not a journey undertaken for comfort. Pilgrims going on foot are challenged in multiple forms. Probably to have the physical energy to accomplish the distances of each pilgrimage day is a common goal, also having time to reflect and to meditate is a common characteristic, independent from each pilgrim's religious belief. Along the Way pilgrims live 'slow' experiences, involving themselves with what surrounds them. In those occasions, for most pilgrims, there is an opportunity for better understanding the importance of living in peace in a common world.

Having in mind the Israeli-Palestinian geographic area, the numerous holy places which are important for the Abrahamic religions, and the sustainable development of rural areas, this paper emphasises the importance of developing a Pilgrimage Road (for pilgrimages on foot) in these regions.

Most times a Pilgrimage Route is only linked to a specific religious belief. The one to be proposed would possibly be one of the very few pilgrimage ways shared by different religions; in this case, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, or in other words, shared by the Abrahamic religions.

Key Words: pilgrimage on foot, development of pilgrimage trails, Israeli-Palestinian area, understanding other, sustainable territorial development

Introduction

For anyone looking for God, the idea of going to where He has manifested Himself, seems quite natural. Also, the human deep-seated instincts lead one to look elsewhere for what they imagine cannot be found any closer. Pilgrimages are also exceptional opportunities to consolidate one's beliefs by meeting fellow believers in a festive and exhilarating atmosphere that leaves unforgettable memories (Malherbe, 1992).

The pilgrimage, when based upon spiritual assumptions, is essentially defined as the approximation of God by the human. According to Mattoso (2000), people seek to engage in such acts in order to discover a way to establish contact with hidden forces that they presume preside over all of existence. These are perceived to be concentrated into benign, edifying or protective clusters in specific privileged sites and as such exist in all, or the vast majority of, civilisations and almost always integrated into religious practices and concrete places with defined itineraries and rituals set out for preferred dates.

However, beyond this approximation to God, the faithful should also re-encounter themselves. Dispersed in the multiplicity of daily concerns and realities, humans have a need for re-discovery, which should be achieved through silence, meditation and prayer, in summary, through an examination of their conscience. Vukonić (1996) highlights the fact that pilgrimages appeal to every human capacity: emotional, audiovisual and motor.

Pilgrimage exists in all three Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Although the word is the same, each of the three referred religions looks at pilgrimage differently, as described below.

Pilgrimage in Islam

The fifth pillar of Islam is pilgrimage. Once in their lifetime, all Muslims who are physically and economically in a position to do so should go to Mecca, where the crucial revelation of God was unveiled for the first time. The basic objective of the pilgrimage is to reinforce the pilgrim's devotion to God and the revealed will, but the practice also has side benefits. It is, for example, a reminder of human equality. Upon arriving in Mecca, pilgrims remove

their usual clothes, which have social status marks and wear two robes made of simple white cloth. In this way, everyone dresses the same way when approaching the earthly centre of Islam. Differences in class and hierarchy are cancelled, and the prince or the poor stand before God in his undivided humanity. Pilgrimage also fulfils a useful function in the field of international relations. It brings together people from different countries, thus demonstrating the sharing of a loyalty that transcends loyalty towards countries or ethnic groups. Pilgrims gather information about other lands and people, returning home with a better understanding of each other (Smith, 2014).

Pilgrimage in Christianity

In Christianity, depending on the Church, pilgrimage is viewed differently (three examples will be given). For Catholics, pilgrimages are very important as they provide an opportunity to tread on the footprints of the saints and the Holy One, and therefore any visit to a shrine of spiritual importance brings blessing to the pilgrims. This has been the driving force for the huge inflow of pilgrims to different shrines across the world (Ambrósio, 2015; Alternative Tourism Group, 2016).

For Protestants, the practices of celebrating relics and creating shrines at certain sites is criticised - God is everywhere, and no one must confine His location. Today, many Protestants visit sites in order to feel connected to Jesus and reflect on their faith, but they still do not worship saints or visit corelated places (BBC – Bitesize, 2020; Alternative Tourism Group, 2016).

For Orthodox Christians, a pilgrimage is a journey or search of great moral significance; meeting one of their saints at a distant place has always been encouraged. Therefore, over the years, there have been several places of high importance named after a saint, with lots of happenings, healings and miracles at those pilgrim spots (Terzidou *et al.*, 2017; Alternative Tourism Group, 2016).

Pilgrimage in Judaism

Pilgrimage is not a foreign concept to the Jewish people, especially after wandering in the desert for forty years. This journey is remembered on Passover, but aside from that important pilgrimage, two other pilgrim festivals are commemorated, Shavuot and Sukkot.

Three times a year shall all your men appear before the Lord your God in the place that God will choose, on the festivals of Pesah (Passover), Shavuot (the Feast of Weeks), and Sukkot (the Festival of Booths). They shall not appear empty handed. Each shall bring his own gift, appropriate to the blessing which the Lord your God has given you (Deutromony 16:16).

Sukkot, is the festival of gathering crops in the land of Canaan; it celebrates the last harvest before winter arrives. Passover originally marked the early harvesting of Barley; it is the time of growth, when the land of Israel wakes up from the winter and everything begins to grow, it is spring harvest time. Shavuot, falling exactly seven weeks after Passover, marks the harvest of the wheat crop, the last grain harvest of the season and the beginning of fruit season (World of Judaica, 2018).

Discussion

Independently from the religion in question there are common issues that are pointed out by the different religious beliefs. A pilgrimage reminds its participants of human equality, erasing in many ways the class differences and bringing together people from different nationalities and ethnic groups. In fact, most pilgrims, mainly the ones who do the pilgrimage on foot, return home with a better understanding of each other.

The process of reflecting about human equality is achieved along the pilgrimage route and with the arrival at a shrine, neither being more important than the other (Murray & Graham, 1997; Tripp, 2016). Apart from the spiritual meaning of doing a pilgrimage on foot, pilgrimage routes also serve to connect attractions that would independently not have the potential to entice visitors to spend time and money, stimulating at same time a new tourist support system. Using a synergy effect, it creates a greater pulling power and it also disperses visitor money among a larger number of recipients (Meyer, 2004). Pilgrimage roads are a particularly good opportunity for less mature areas with high cultural resources to focus on a sustainable tourism plan which allows an increase in locals' income without putting in danger their traditions or environment.

Pilgrimage

The History of Pilgrimages doesn't receive, from academia, as much attention as the religious destinations or the pilgrims receive. Probably, Catholic pilgrimages are the ones more explored in scientific

works and above all the Saint James Way has been the most studied pilgrimage. In Judaism pilgrimages are not a sustained practice, although they are still remembered in the religious lectures on the days when they used to take place (see Deutonomy 16:16). In Islam, the pilgrimage to Mecca (the fifth pillar of Islam) has such a strong prevalent position that all other pilgrimages (even important ones) are shaded by the first.

In Islam, unlike Christianity, pilgrimage (mainly the one to Makkah) has always been an act of faith which even attributes notoriety to those who go to Makkah. In Christianity (mainly in Catholicism) the pilgrims' credibility has witnessed different socio-political attitudes over the centuries. Probably, it was in the Middle Ages that pilgrims achieved their best status when an international regulatory framework was set out both in terms of Church law (the canonical), and Civil law (whether the Roman or consuetudinary). This served to protect the pilgrim from arbitrary imprisonment as well as economic exploitation and to the extent such individuals were exempt from toll fees and other taxes. All these measures shared the objective of defending pilgrims against the vulnerabilities inherent to their condition abroad.

With the pilgrimages' greater demand, came the publication of good travel guides considering the most minute of details. The guest houses welcoming pilgrims were transformed into accommodation facilities, where food and wine could be purchased, and various forms of entertainment enjoyed in exchange for money. Many did not stand up to the temptations encountered *en route* and contributed towards the notoriety of the false pilgrim. Many behaved as if tourists, *avant la lettre*, displaying greater curiosity than devotion, not to mention those who assumed the behaviours of mundane adventurers (Rapp, 1982).

Within the scope of Protestantism, a connection between the believer and God was advocated, without having to pass through an intermediary or concrete acts, such as the veneration of relics. Consequently pilgrimage to sanctuaries where they were venerated, no longer made sense. Also, in the Catholic countries, the thinkers of the 17th and 18th centuries proposed that setting off into the unknown and breaking with daily routines for a period of time did not aid in finding some profound truth. According to the prevailing philosophy, if God existed, in order to satisfy Him a vague daily thought to thank Him for the life granted would suffice in conjunction with honest compliance of human duties and hence did the Encyclopaedia

perceive pilgrimage as a poorly interpreted and outdated voyage of devotion.

A reflection on these offensives are to be found in some descriptions in travel writings. In 1786-87, the English traveller Townsend emphasised in his tour of Spain, and while meeting many walking in the direction of Compostela, that enthusiasm for pilgrimage had fallen away greatly. Chateaubriand noted on his itinerary from Paris to Jerusalem (1806) that Latin pilgrims in the Holy Sepulchre were rare (in the previous century, the priests would not have seen over 200 Catholic pilgrims, including in this number, members of their own order and missionaries from the Levant).

Finally, the French Revolution and its spread to the rest of the continent (through the Napoleonic campaigns) destroyed not only the actual places but also the routines of popular pilgrimages. At the beginning of the 19th century, pilgrimage, spurned by the educated elites and persecuted by the civil and religious authorities, was effectively moribund.

Within the scope of Romanticism, a change of spirit began to break through. In Germany, Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano gathered the different forms of popular poetic expression in 'Das Knaben Wunderhorn', associating pilgrimage with a hidden soul. In the same period in France, Chateaubriand in his 'Genius of Christianity', far from sharing the displeasure of intellectuals in popular acts of devotion, he undertook to rehabilitate pilgrimages, affirming that they were more effective against unhappiness than all the desperate theories of dry hearted thinkers.

Within an ambience newly favourable to pilgrimages, many people resumed this practice, either in organised groups or at the individual level. However, in recent decades, this resumption of pilgrimage has seen changes. In addition to technical progress and the speed of new means of communication (cars, buses, trains and then planes), tourism sector professionals have taken on the logistics inherent to such dislocations and the accommodation requirements of the faithful while acting in accordance with the criteria stipulated by the members of the clergy responsible.

Also, pilgrims' behaviours and motivations have suffered modifications. In the Santiago Camino, for example, 'the experience' became central, with the objective almost peripheral – many of those walking the 'former route of the stars' are agnostic and, among believers, many do not believe that the body lying in

the cathedral is that of Saint James. However, this is no simple afternoon stroll and the solidarity, and the challenging tests of the route have served to produce a clearly spiritual effect in pilgrims (Vidal, 1996).

Bus Pilgrimages (organized groups)

Most religious site visitors travel with family members or organised groups, and their trip is highly seasonal, influenced not only by climate and weather, but also by the occurrence of holidays, ceremonies, and work schedules (Nyaupane *et al.*, 2015). Visiting the religious sites in Israeli Palestinian territories (as in many other international religious sites), one may verify that a large portion of pilgrims / tourists are formed of organised groups, being those groups spiritually led by a religious / spiritual leader, with the information about sites provided by a (licensed) local tourist guide.

As observed by Collins-Kreiner *et al.* (2006), there is a great consistency in the planning process of an organised group tour in the Holy Land. Priests decide to make a pilgrimage trip with their congregation. They decide on the trip contents and contact a local / national travel agency to organise it in the Holy Land. The local / national agency asks an agent-tour operator in Israel to send a proposed recommended plan for the pilgrimage. The religious and spiritual leaders make the final choices of places to be visited and may change the itinerary according to specific time and cost limitations of the group. The leaders of the group (head of the group, priest, spiritual leader) coordinate the final itinerary and the timing of the various visits with the local guide on the first days in the Holy Land.

What has just been observed for a trip to the Holy Land is that it does not suffer many changes when analysing organised trips to other countries / sanctuaries. In fact, the freedom to change the 'traditional itineraries' in many religious destinations is very low because, on one hand, the trips / programs tend to be shorter in time (avoiding higher prices), on the other hand, there are the 'compulsory visits' which completely fill the trip program (sometimes almost exceeding common sense, not leaving enough time for reflecting and praying). The result is that most programs look alike and, due to the lack of time, it becomes quite difficult to promote alternative resources / itineraries.

Considering the means of transport, one may observe that, in international trips, organized pilgrim groups mostly use the airplane for reaching the destination country where the pilgrimage will take place. From the moment they land, until departure, the most common

transport used is a private / hired bus for the organised group. The program foresees the time to be spent on the road (the time needed to move from one place to another), for meals and comfort stops and other times that are not possible to avoid (as for example the time needed to cross a border). The time left is shared between the different daily visits. When any constraint arises, for instance an unexpected delay on the road, it is almost compulsory to recover that time in shortening one or more visits programmed for that day because in all other mentioned program items it is quite difficult to shorten the time.

Pilgrimage packages have been quite popular in the last decade (as they also are in other kinds of tourism segments). In fact, these packages are very convenient for pilgrims / tourists who have difficulties in planning a trip, who don't deal well with foreign languages, who don't want to have any kinds of worries while in a foreign country, and many other reasons. As the organised groups visit the same places in the same periods of the year, they are in large part responsible for the seasonality problems and for exceeding the tourism carrying capacity of those sites.

Pilgrimage on Foot

Although there are weaknesses in Victor Turner's model, notably that Turner's *communitas* thesis is based on the generalisation of a few examples from Christian pilgrimages, many authors still use Turner's works, focusing on the liminal period in rites of passage, to characterise the effects produced on someone who walks a long Pilgrimage Route. First, the separation: individuals leave their previous state. Second, transition or liminal phase: the daily social routines and hierarchies are abolished, and the individuals are prepared for their new status. Third, reaggregation: through a ritual transformation the individuals acquire a new social status (Mendel, 2010).

According to Nyaupane *et al.* (2015), Turner and Turner's (1978) ideas about *communitas* suggest that pilgrims undergo similar liminal experiences, on the one hand, camaraderie and unity prevail during the pilgrimage, on the other hand, the unity erases divisions based on ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or political views. In fact, what is expressed by many pilgrims (walking alone or in small groups) is that what makes that kind of journeying so exceptional are the mutual feelings of solidarity, togetherness, security as well as the community spirit. This is expressed by many participants as the 'pilgrimage family' (Mendel, 2010).

No doubt most of those who walk along a Pilgrimage Road (mainly the ones who do it for several weeks) fit into the categories / typologies of tourists who avoid mass tourism. They might be named explorers or experiential tourist (Cohen, 1972; 1979), allocentrics or near allocentric (Plog, 1974; 2001), adventurous (Perreault *et al.*, 1979), contact-minded holidaymakers or nature viewers (Westvlaams Economisch Studiebureau, 1986), off-beat or unusual tourists (Smith, 1989), explorers or belonging seekers (Fan *et al.*, 2017).

In any of these categories / typologies, tourists are described as people who make their own travel arrangements and look to meet and be received by local people. They search authentic experiences and do not mind taking risks, seeking for more adventurous holidays. In the main, these tourists are well-educated, and value making new friends, also enjoying beautiful landscapes. Most of them are independent and confident and like to try new activities, making side trips to experience local culture. The majority are experienced travellers, they interact with the residents and seek to know more about the locals' life; some even participate in their daily life. These contacts may change their original image of the destination or of the hosts in the destination and enhance their cross-cultural competence.

We have in mind here the characteristics of the independent tourists which are in the main the attributes of the ones who choose to walk a Pilgrimage Route. Despite following a defined route, it is possible to promote points of interest in the vicinity of the trail, especially in places where pilgrims / tourists stay overnight.

Another advantageous characteristic is that while the organised groups visit the same places and in the same period of the year, many times exceeding the tourism carrying capacity of those sites, on the pilgrimage roads, the pilgrims / tourists walk, all year round, through other areas of the territory. This facilitates both, the combat of seasonality and the diversion of pilgrims / tourists from the most crowded places.

Finally, as most of those who walk along pilgrimages routes like and appreciate landscapes, while also respecting the local heritage and the locals' way of life, they can easily integrate with sustainable tourism projects.

Motivation for Research

The idea of developing a Pilgrimage Route, in Israel and Palestine, had its origin in an invitation to take part in this International Research Seminar, organised by the Swedish Theological Institute, in Jerusalem.

Bearing in mind that my research and publications for the last number of years have had a strong focus on pilgrimage roads, I would like to consider this utopian project. The intentional use of the word utopia derives from the unstable political and security situation in this geographical area which has been reported by the international media for decades.

The field visits during the referred Seminar, reinforced my information about the physical divisions, more precisely about the Israeli-Palestinian Separation Wall. On the other hand, the lectures given by the three Abrahamic religious leaders and finding a generally healthy and peaceful coexistence among the population that professes different religions, made me think that the creation of a Pilgrimage Way, despite the many difficulties, might be possible.

In fact, the most predominant message in the different communications (by both religious and institutional agents), despite the religious diversity of the presenters, was to build bridges to promoting a peace process.

Methods

In the proposal to be presented it is important to point out the most important physical aspects of the Pilgrimage Road, as well as aspects related to satisfying the motivations of those who walk a Pilgrimage Way.

Considering the *physical aspects*, it is necessary to identify the main stakeholders (public or private) who must be involved in the process of developing and managing the Pilgrimage Route. The role that each of them must play has to be well defined in order to assure that each one is fulfilling his / her responsibilities and that, at same time, none of them is interfering with the others' functions.

If in the physical aspects the concern is more on the *tangible* elements, it is also true that the success of a Pilgrimage Road depends a lot on *intangible elements*. The experience of a desire to deepen the practices that strengthen the soul and the body or the invitation to introspection and existentialism are some of the

aspects which are often underlined by pilgrims. Having this in mind, the five distinct dimensions categorised by MacDonald (2000) to express spirituality will be considered when proposing the Pilgrimage Route.

Nyaupane *et al.* (2015) stated that, it is important to understand the relationships between people of different faiths visiting the sacred sites of others. This concern must also be present when proposing the future Pilgrimage Road and, as mentioned by the referred authors, Social Distance Theory is useful in guiding research on this topic. Following the authors study, the concept of social distance between religious adherents and non-adherents who visit sacred sites will be considered, to understand their closeness or distance to tourists of other faiths.

Apart from the referred aspects, which are similar in most pilgrimage roads, the Pilgrimage Way to be proposed must also contemplate a sustainable tourism project, having in mind the respect for tangible and intangible aspects of the crossed areas' heritage. It must still help populations of that geographical area (despite each one's faith) to better understand the diversity of creeds and behaviours of 'others'; it should also help foreigners / tourists to gain a better and more positive perception of the peace process which is attempted for the Israeli-Palestinian territories.

Elements to have in mind when developing a Pilgrimage Road

The first step to developing a Pilgrimage Route is an inventory of resources and equipment associated with the Way. Although the resources' inventory only shows their spatial distribution in a geographical sense, it has the advantage of delineating the boundaries of a Pilgrimage Way.

The responsibility for the inventory of the different kind of resources must be shared among the Institutions associated with the Pilgrims Road's development. The religious resources inventory must be done by the religious authorities. The logistic issues inventory should be done and monitored by public and / or civic organisations.

According to Ambrósio (2019) and Decreto-lei n.º 51/2019, all agents who play a role in this process must unite their efforts to achieve the success of a Pilgrimage Road. Table 1 outlines the most important issues and challenges, which all agents involved must consider.

Having in mind good practices from other pilgrimage roads, namely in the Santiago Camino, apart from the referred concerns, some other issues should be considered. The route should only follow nature trails and / or rural roads; when it is not possible, solutions should be implemented. The accommodation for pilgrims should be mainly provided in hostels operated by municipalities or civic associations; when it is not possible, accommodation in hotels, or similar, should offer discounts for pilgrims. The restaurants, along the way should have a pilgrim's menu with affordable prices. A pilgrim passport should be given to all who walk the Pilgrimage Way - the pilgrims would collect stamps from the various sites as occurs on the Santiago Camino and others. Also, a certificate should be granted to all who walk a minimum number of kilometres / miles decided by the manager entity.

As the number of agents involved in the process of developing a Pilgrimage Road is quite wide, to promoting the success of the Pilgrimage Route, it is necessary that each group of players feel their voice heard. In this sense, an assembly with representatives of each group must be established and must meet regularly. The Pilgrimage Way's manager entity must always consider the articulation of the various wills when proposing or implementing actions.

For assuring and monitoring the development of the Pilgrimage Road, a diagnostic matrix should be used. The development of matrices plays a determining role in the strategic planning processes, enabling the definition, in a more clear-cut and effective manner, the priority actions that need to be achieved if a balanced development of the conditions is desired throughout the several municipalities / territories which the Way crosses (Ambrósio *et al.*, 2019).

The Pilgrimage Road in Israeli Palestine Territories

With the founding of the state of Israel in 1948, and the construction of faster and more spacious vessels, visits to the Holy Land gained a new lease in life with cruise liner pilgrimages fanning out around the entire Mediterranean basin. In the late 1960s, travel agencies were flourishing, with some specialising in religious tourism. Furthermore, with the rising costs of maritime transport, many tourism operators simply turned to the plane to achieve synergies in cost and time and therefore have been able to broaden the potential scope of the market given the length of the tour could be cut to around ten days. In the present century, many

Table 1: Key Issues and Concerns when Developing a Pilgrimage Trail

- The design of a Pilgrimage Route logo;
- The cartographic delimitation of the itinerary, with its start and end point, and respective stages;
- Identification, characterisation and justification of the cultural heritage (immovable, movable and / or immaterial) and natural patrimony associated with the itinerary;
- Consistent use of the pilgrimage itinerary, proven by historical sources, material traces or documented tradition;
- Agreement and involvement of all municipalities crossed by the itinerary;
- Agreement regarding the use of alternative routes in the pilgrimage itinerary for reasons of safety, landscape attractiveness, proximity to points of interest, location of support equipment or others;
- Articulation of actions with local and regional partners;
- Demonstration of safe and secure accessibility throughout the year;
- Identification of the security conditions existing in the itinerary;
- The existence of directional approved signage along the whole itinerary;
- Availability of shaded rest points, endowed with drinking water (at least every 10 km) and the availability of support equipment, including places to sleep, places to prepare or serve meals, bathe and wash laundry (at least every 20 km);
- The maintenance actions of the itinerary, including signage and cleaning;
- Promotion of new tourist services aimed at improving the experience;
- Compliance with certification criteria decided by the entity manager;
- Production of a report every three years, with evidence of maintaining certification criteria;
- Availability in a small book, digital supports, and in places considered most appropriate, of the following information (in English and in the required languages decided by the management entity) –
 - ◊ Pilgrimage Road name and logo;
 - ◊ Cartographic representation of the itinerary with indication of the distances between the stages in kilometres and in miles; characterisation of the stages (altimetry, degree of difficulty);
 - ◊ Indication of cultural and natural heritage (and opening hours) associated with each stage;
 - ◊ Information about places of worship and opening hours;
 - ◊ Location and contacts of support equipment such as hospitals, medical care services, police, tourist offices and pilgrimage road civic associations;
 - ◊ Identification of resting, sleeping and meal places;
 - ◊ Safety recommendations.

Ambrósio (2019) and Decreto-lei

packages have been shortened to one week. Many city-break programs have appeared on the tourism market, as well two-days and even one-day tours (e. g. round trip from Cyprus) including Bethlehem - visiting the Church of the Nativity and Manger Square, and in Jerusalem visiting the Old City, the Wailing Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Via Dolorosa and the Souk [editor note - for discussion on one-day trips, see paper by Bozonelos in this Issue].

Although 'fast tourism' has invaded the tourism market, many people are looking again for alternative ways of 'slow tourism'. Among the most sought after 'slow tourism' products are pilgrimage roads. These are usually, on the one hand, an opportunity for ones walking the pilgrimage ways to enjoy more deeply the countries and the communities visited, on the other hand, they provide sustainable tourism projects in less explored areas.

Pilgrimage roads have been trekked for centuries by believers of different religions. In recent decades, many others with different motivations have been joining the 'faithful'. This latter group walk the pilgrimage ways not for religious purposes but instead they are driven by spiritual motivation or even considering it as a life challenge (among many other reasons).

However, an authentic pilgrimage route cannot be artificially created. It is only possible to think of developing a pilgrimage way if for decades and / or centuries believers have walked the same road to reach a Holy place. More important than the tangible elements, natural beauty and built patrimony along the way are intangible elements, but mainly the spirituality left by many thousands and even by millions of pilgrims who have trudged that same road is vital. Those pilgrims' emotions and feelings are not visible, but their energy is felt by those who walk along the pilgrimage way (Ambrósio, 2019).

The Israeli-Palestinian territories probably have the largest concentration of Holy places in the whole world. In addition, these sacred places cover several religions, namely the three Abrahamic religions. Also, the fact that, for many centuries, the Holy places have been the destination for countless pilgrims, makes it evident that the basic conditions to developing a Pilgrimage Road have already been achieved.

Although Collins-Kreiner *et al.* (2016) focus in their book on Christian Tourism to the Holy Land, they also provide a short list of the main pilgrimage resources of the three Abrahamic religions in the Israeli-Palestinian territory, some of them being joined to more than one religion. The main holy sites classified by religious affiliation are the following.

Judaism - The Kotel, the Western ('Wailing') Wall, the last remnant of the retaining wall of the Second Temple, and Temple Mount, in Jerusalem, Rachel's Tomb, the Tomb of the Patriarchs in the Cave of Machpela in Hebron, the Tomb of Maimonides (Rambam) in Tiberias, the Tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai in Meron, and many others.

Islam - Haram al-Sharif building complex on Temple Mount, including the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa mosque, in Jerusalem, the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, the El-Jazzar mosque in Akko.

Christianity - the Via Dolorosa, the Room of the Last Supper, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and other

sites of Jesus' Passion and Crucifixion in Jerusalem, the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, Shepherds' Field, the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth, the Mount of Beatitudes, Tabgha, Cana, and Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee.

Without being exhaustive, this listing is already a good starting point to be improved by the leaders of the different religions. Those must make the inventory of all religious sites which might be important as religious references (having in mind their religious texts). Another concern of the religious leaders should be to use those religious sites for developing a propaedeutic (or introductory) teaching of their religious philosophies for people with other beliefs (or even agnostics). That would increase the knowledge of each one's faith / belief and it would also help an understanding of 'other's' behaviours which are often linked to religious precepts.

In fact, the success of a Pilgrimage Route is largely attained when pilgrims / walkers fulfil intangible spiritual features and, according to MacDonald (2000), spirituality is expressed by five distinct dimensions:

- Cognitive orientation towards spirituality, which includes beliefs, attitudes and perceptions linked to the nature and the meaning of spirituality;
- Experiential / phenomenological dimension of spirituality, related to the meaning and the true value of life;
- Existential well-being, associated with the way individuals view the meaning and the purpose of their own individual existence;
- Paranormal beliefs, standing for belief in supernatural phenomena;
- Religiousness, connected to religious behaviour and practices.

Although it depends on the open-mindedness of each of the ones walking the way, apart from being possible to accomplish (in large part) each of the referred distinct spirituality dimensions, the proposed Pilgrimage Road (covering the three Abrahamic religions) also allows one to be aware how people from other beliefs look at the different spiritual dimensions. The possibility to compare and to find common points in the different spirituality dimensions, will enrich any of the pilgrims / walkers and it will also help to bring people together.

It seems that all of the conditions are gathered to develop a successful Pilgrimage Route in the Israeli-Palestinian territories but the lack of security and the political restraints (in particular the difficulties imposed on people's freedom of movement), have prevented even the thought of developing a Pilgrimage Way. But, times are changing and the inhabitants (excluding radicals), from both territories, aspire to peaceful coexistence, which includes increasing the ordinary people's freedom of movement.

Discussion and Conclusions

Pilgrimage is experiencing a resurgence around the world, and shrines act as magnets for those in search of spiritual goals (Digance, 2003). In this growing phenomenon there is an increasing number of people of different faiths visiting the sacred sites of others and, although religion is sometimes a major source of conflict, tourism at holy sites has the potential to promote more peaceful relations and augmented tolerance between different faith groups and individuals (Nyaupane *et al.*, 2015).

Pilgrimage roads are environments where people of different religions interact and learn to better know and respect each other. Furthermore, they are a way of creating sustainable tourism projects, promoting less-known areas and resources of a region. They also help to fight seasonality and to divert tourists from places that have already exceeded or have threatened their carrying capacity.

The proposed Pilgrimage Route in the Israeli-Palestinian territories would probably be one of the few cases where three different religions (the Abrahamic religions) share the same route, while also ensuring access to religious sites of these different faiths.

The coexistence of pilgrims / walkers from different creeds, races, nationalities, ages, and political ideologies (among others) would help people to cope better and hence, to diminish the social-distance relationships. According to Nyaupane *et al.* (2015), the greater the social distance between groups, the higher the possibility of misunderstanding, which may lead to annoyance and discord. Religious leaders (or the religious sites' managers) can play an important role in mitigating potential dissonance by instructing visitors on appropriate behaviour. The interpretation of the religious sites may be used to lessen social distances by providing information about the primary faith associated with the location and likewise by

highlighting the commonalities between religions, creating at the same time a conducive environment for interfaith interactions between visitors. Marketing efforts can also be valuable in this regard by appealing to adherents to visit places of their own faith, as well as promoting sacred sites to people of other faiths as holy places that have religious, educational, and cultural appeal.

Apart from the religious issues, the correct management of a Pilgrimage Road should also induce local and regional development. As highlighted by several authors, this is a reality attested by many studies and academic works. Some authors have explored the efforts and investments made by different stakeholders to enhance the pilgrimage route's features and to augment visitors' / pilgrims' experience (Murray & Graham, 1997; Devereux, 2003; Richards & Fernandes, 2007; Ambrósio, 2015; Fernandes *et al.*, 2017). The coordination, through concerted actions between the various public and private sectors, is essential for preventing conflict zones with other activities and, at the same time, to promoting the social and economic development of the communities and regions that might integrate a Pilgrimage Road (Decreto-lei n.º 51/2019). The coordination of an Israeli-Palestinian Pilgrimage Road should be a joint work, led by the ministries which regulate tourism affairs (on both sides).

Although in theory it does not seem difficult to create a Pilgrimage Route, the truth is that it is always a bold project, even when it is developed within a country or between countries with identical religious beliefs and analogous kinds of government. To develop a Pilgrimage Way in two territories which have been so troubled throughout the last decades, with political and religious divisions, it is undoubtedly a true challenge.

Among the many difficulties to turn this Pilgrimage Road into reality, probably the greatest obstacle it is to find a way to allow pilgrims / tourists and inhabitants (from both sides) to cross frontiers without restrictions. Finding solutions for this situation is beyond my knowledge / skills, but History is always helpful in providing tools. Back in the Middle Ages, an international regulatory framework was set out both in terms of Church law (canonical), and Civil law (whether Roman or consuetudinary) to protect pilgrims from arbitrary imprisonment as well as economic exploitation, to the extent that such individuals were exempt from toll fees and other taxes. All these measures defended the pilgrims against the

vulnerabilities inherent in their condition abroad. If, over eight centuries ago, it was viable to produce an international regulatory framework for pilgrims, why can it not be possible in the 21st century?

With or without the intercession of other countries, many bridges have been built in recent years in the Israeli-Palestinian territories (unfortunately also walls have been built). The development of the proposed Pilgrimage Route would be an opportunity to build an ambitious bridge and, above all, it would be an opportunity to attain more freedom of movement in those regions. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, it would be an occasion for understanding each one better despite the different traditions and religious beliefs.

As already written, this Pilgrimage Road, under the present political situation, is a utopic idea, but, as Victor Hugo states in *Histoire d'un Crime* (The History of a Crime) [written 1852, published 1877]

One resists the invasion of armies; one does not resist the invasion of ideas.

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