

Visitor diversification in pilgrimage destinations:
A national segmentation study through means-end theory in
Nakahechi trail, Kumano Kodo

学位論文の要約

Chapter 1: Introduction

The first chapter describes the research backgrounds and objectives. Firstly, the background is presented in light of an increasing diversification of visitors to pilgrimage sites, as traditional religious beliefs lose their predominant position in contemporary society. At the same time, as sacred locations such as pilgrimage sites become tourism resources, international visitors, who may have few or no religious motivations, are visiting them in increasing numbers. Also, the Asia-Pacific area has the greatest number of pilgrims and travelers for religious events, for both international and domestic tourism. At the same time, Asia-Pacific has become the second most visited regions after Europe, as well as the fastest growing, registering a 9% growth in 2016, which accounts for 308 million arrivals. This shows the great importance of pilgrimage-related tourism in Asia-Pacific, as well as its immense opportunities to for academic research on the subject. However, research on pilgrimage tourism is considered scarce in the Asia-Pacific area. In this context of significant tourism development in Asia-Pacific, the Japanese government has been promoting tourism, particular inbound, to revitalize regional economies suffering of low economic activity and ageing population. In Japan, pilgrimage is both a centuries-old tradition and an important aspect of contemporary tourism development, principally in rural areas. Through an analysis of the research background stated above and literature review on pilgrimage tourism, the researcher found two main research gaps. Firstly, a lack of studies that utilize national segmentation in pilgrimage sites, despite previous studies demonstrating the importance of the guest's country of origin in tourism studies and the presence of inbound visitors in pilgrimage-related destinations. Secondly, a lack of studies about Asian pilgrimage sites, despite their importance in contemporary tourism. Taking into account these gaps, the present research aims to investigate the diversification in contemporary pilgrimage tourism regarding visitor's motivation and behavior in an Asian location, specifically in Japan, and thus contribute to the academic discussion on pilgrimage tourism. In order to accomplish this objective, the research presents a study based on national segmentation through a qualitative methodology, means-end. In order to carry out the study, the Nakahechi trail of the Kumano Kodo pilgrimage

was selected as case study to conduct fieldwork

Chapter 2: Research context: Nakahechi trail, Kumano Kodo

This chapter presents the case study for the current research: the Nakahechi trail of Kumano Kodo, located in Tanabe city, Wakayama prefecture. Firstly, an introduction to the history and characteristics of Kumano Kodo is presented to provide context for its subsequent tourism development. Next is a presentation of Tanabe city and its current tourism development, as well as a description on its domestic and international visitors. Finally, the rationale for choosing Tanabe city as a case study for the present research are explained.

Chapter 3: Research methods

Chapter 3 explains the current research methodology and approach to fieldwork. As it was mentioned, means-end, a qualitative methodology, was chosen to carry out this study. Therefore, an explanation on means-end theory, its methodology and the reasons for choosing it are described. Next, the details on fieldwork are presented. As the study's fieldwork would take place in an outdoor setting, the mountainous forests of the Nakahechi trail, choosing an adequate approach to fieldwork was of great importance for successfully carrying out the present study. It was also decided to carry out a simple questionnaire on the participants' socio-demographics in order to contextualize the obtained data. Consequently, the questionnaire's structure is briefly explained.

Chapter 4: Literature review

This chapter describes the literature review, focusing on two main areas. Firstly, spirituality in contemporary society and its relationship with pilgrimage tourism are explained in detail. It is argued that, in contemporary spirituality, traditional narratives have lost their predominant position for interpreting spirituality and sacred sites, leading to individuals to 'create' their own systems of beliefs from different sources. As a result, motivation to travel to pilgrimage sites has been noted to be increasingly diversified, and not necessarily connect to the traditional narratives. At the same time, pilgrimage sites have become important tourism destinations, attracting international visitors as well as visitors not motivated by traditional faith. This has led to a great diversification of visitors in pilgrimage-related tourism, who do not only show a diverse set of motivations and values, but also different nationalities, which has been described by previous research as a key feature to understand visitor profiles. In relation to this, secondly the importance of the tourists' nationality as a segmentation tool for both marketing and academic studies is explained by referring to previous studies.

Chapter 5: Theoretical framework

This chapter explains the study's theoretical framework by explaining the academic research that guide it in five areas: the concept of pilgrimage, visitor diversification in pilgrimage sites, local perception of pilgrimage tourism, national segmentation and methodology. By clearly explaining the theoretical framework, the researcher aims to make the study more cohesive and understandable. The utilized academic research for the theoretical framework is mainly drawn from Chapter 4.

Chapter 6: Findings

Chapter 6 presents the study's findings. Firstly, the results of the questionnaires carried out for both Australian and Japanese participants are shown. Secondly, the findings from the thematic analysis carried out on the laddering interviews are described. Next, utilizing the obtained data, the implication matrices and Hierarchical Value Maps (HVM) are built and shown. In particular, the HVMs constitute the main finding of the research and are of central importance for the academic discussion carried out in Chapter 7.

Chapter 7: Discussion

This chapter contains an academic discussion on the findings related to the literature reviewed, based on previous studies, secondary sources and the researcher's observations done during fieldwork. Firstly, a brief discussion on the findings from the questionnaires is carried out, although it is not the primary objective of this research. Next, a discussion on the HVMs is carried out by analyzing each of its attributes individually, along with their related elements. Similarities and differences between each sampled nationality are taken into consideration. During the discussion of the different topics, quotations from the participants are included to emphasize and support specific points.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

Finally, Chapter 8 presents the study's conclusions, in which the main findings are explained in response to the research objectives. Firstly, the main conclusions, drawn from the discussions in Chapter 7, are explained. The research findings demonstrated that, in the current context of individualized spirituality discussed in Chapter 4, international and domestic tourists show differences in their motivation and behavior. Pilgrimage sites have been increasingly becoming places with multi-layered meanings and behaviors according to the different nationalities that visit them. International visitors now assiduously travel to sacred sites not related to their own cultural spheres, without this implying a formal conversion to a particular faith. In this context, inbound tourists contribute to the sacred site by bringing with them new meanings, behaviors

and values, even though they may have few or no cultural links to it. The diversification process in sacred sites (such as pilgrimage locations), while initiated by the secularization process mentioned in Chapter 4, goes beyond a simple continuum of contemporary spirituality and traditional religion, and incorporates a diverse range of elements related to leisure, sports, intercultural exchange, nostalgia, escapism and relaxation, among others. Thus, while contemporary spirituality does play a role, research on pilgrimage sites cannot be simply reduced to it, which opens the field for numerous opportunities in both tourism development and academic investigation in this type of destinations. During this study, the overcoming of challenge, relaxation from daily life, nostalgia and inter-cultural learning emerged as themes found in pilgrimage tourism. In particular, when international tourists are analyzed, a wide range of themes may emerge when they bring their cultural and personal background such as needs, interests and expectations to a pilgrimage site, increasing diversification. The study also demonstrated the importance and applicability of visitor segmentation by nationality for the study of pilgrimage tourism. In a context of individualized spirituality, as pilgrimage sites are increasingly becoming international destinations, tourists from diverse nationalities were found to exhibit differences. These differences are related to context and should not be reduced to essentialist statements.

Research limitations are also mentioned to help understand the boundaries of this research. Next, implications for future researchers are mentioned. Implications for policy-makers are explained as well, to give practical consequences not only for Tanabe city, but for other pilgrimage-related destinations as well. To conclude the study, final remarks from the researcher are presented.