

Interpreting Ecclesiastical Heritage: Meaning Making and Contentious Conversations

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Abstract : In our post-Christian societies, ecclesiastical heritage acquired a new extrovert profile aiming to reach out an increasingly diverse audience. In this context, the various motivations, interests, personalities and cultural exchanges, found in the 'post-modern pilgrimage', bequeath a hybrid and multidimensional character to religious tourism education. In consequence, churches have acquired the challenging role of enriching visitors cultural and spiritual capital. Despite this promising diversification to relate, reveal and provoke constructive discourses, due to the various 'conflicting interests', practitioners attempt to tame the rich in symbolism and meanings religious environment through 'neutral interpretations'. This paper aims to present the results of an ongoing developing strategy related to the presentation of contentious meanings in English churches. The paper will explore some of the underlying issues related to the capacity of 'neutrality' to spark, downplay or eliminate contentious conversations relating to the cultural, religious, and social dimension of Christian cultural heritage thematology. In an effort to understand this issue, the paper examines the concept of neutrality and what it stands for, executing a discourse analysis in the semantic context in which the theological lexicon is interwoven with the cultural and social meanings of sacred sites. Following that, the paper examines whether the preferable interpretive strategies meet the post-modern interpretative framework which is marked by polysemy and critical active engagement. The ultimate aim of the paper is to investigate the hypothesis that the preferable neutral strategies, managing the 'conflicting' demands of worshippers and visitors, result in the uneven treatment of both, the religious and historical spirit of the place.

Keywords : contentious dialogue, interpretation, meaning making, religious tourism

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