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Contagious behaviour or not? Tourists' skills and practices in a Norwegian church

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ABSTRACT

Tourist-to-tourist interaction takes place in many forms at attractions such as museums, churches and historical sites. In many settings, this interaction is a well-functioning part of the tourist experience, where tourists conform to the social norms that govern the attraction. However, interaction with other tourists can also devalue the experience; their presence may be perceived as challenging and perhaps provocative. This study examines tourists' skills and practices in Northern Norway's most visited church, the Arctic Cathedral in Tromsø. With a particular focus on visitors' behaviour, the study explores tourists' presence and activities in the church from the moment they arrive until they leave. The data for this study were collected through observation of 64 visitors' movement patterns and behaviour. One key finding is a distinction between the practices of the tourists who visit the church as 'one of several attractions on the road' and those who stay longer. With the church as an attraction, religion can influence the practice taking place, but my findings show that tourists' skills, or lack thereof, also affect other visitors' practices. The findings in this study enhance understanding of tourist-to-tourist interaction in various settings and provide insight into the contagious practices involved in the interaction.

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Introduction

Tourism is a set of ongoing practices that includes various institutional organizations, structures, objects and actors (de Souza Bispo, 2016; Mertena et al., 2022). Tourism as a practice mobilizes embodied interactions with humans, non-humans and various materialities (Van der Duim et al., 2012), and has an aspect of learning, skills, performance and absorption (Mertena et al., 2022). Tourism embraces a wide variety of activities that involve and engage tourists, and Reichenberger (2017) points out that tourism as a phenomenon often unfolds with or alongside other people. Tourists' interaction with each other and their environment can determine what seems natural in a given situation and how to react (Larsen & Urry, 2011), and interaction can function as a social order based on the context in which it takes place (Atkinson & Housley, 2003; Goffman, 1983). This can involve something as simple as sharing a look at the surroundings (Urry, 1990), where different people observe the same objects at an attraction such as a museum or a church. It may also involve a more protracted form of interaction, where tourists spend days or even weeks in the same environment, as on a cruise ship (Huang & Hsu, 2009).

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Few studies have explored the everyday tourist skills that pervade tourists' practices (Mertena et al., 2022). There is also a dearth of studies of the links between elements as part of some people's everyday routines and as part of holiday activities for others (Ren et al., 2018); religious sites can be examples of this. In this study, the church is at the centre of tourists' skills and practices, and many forms of interaction take place in the encounter between surroundings and visitors. The interaction may involve active engagement and participation in co-creation and tourist-to-tourist dialogue (Campos et al., 2018), but interaction can also be a question of tourists' effect on each other and their surroundings through their mere presence (Larsen & Urry, 2011). Much research has explored interaction between consumers/tourists and staff or organizations in the service sector, while far less attention has been paid to tourist-to-tourist interaction without involvement from service providers (Heinonen et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2020; Reichenberger, 2017). To address this gap, this study aims to draw attention to tourist-to-tourist interaction in a context with little or no involvement of staff. In a church, tourists mainly visit without any interference of service providers, apart from the fact that the church is open and accessible to visitors. Tourist-to-tourist interaction thus takes place without the church or its staff having any direct management or control over the interaction. This article contributes to the literature as it reveals how tourist-to-tourist interaction takes place in a religious setting such as a church. When a church is the venue for tourist-to-tourist interaction, various perceptions and understandings will arise. These may be grounded in the visitor's religious affiliation and cultural background (Francis et al., 2008; Smørvik, 2021; Voase, 2007), and the tourist's perspective and religion can therefore be key aspects of his or her approach to the interior of a church. The contribution of this article, however, is not to provide insight into the individual's perspective, whether religious or not, but rather to explore the actual tourist practices that take place in a church. Based on observations, this study seeks to examine the forms of tourist-to-tourist interaction enabled in the context of a church, and their influence on tourists' practices and skills.

The article is organized into five main sections. The introduction is followed by a literature review on tourist-to-tourist interaction and tourist practices and skills. The third section presents the methodology used in the data collection, and the fourth section presents the analyses. The fifth and the final section discusses the findings and summarizes the study, as well as presenting limitations and possibilities for future research.

Literature review

Tourist-to-tourist interaction, practices and skills

Tourist-to-tourist interaction is a familiar phenomenon in service-related environments, but is often seen as an almost unpredictable and uncontrollable part of the attraction and service environment, although it can be of high social value to the tourist (Rihova et al., 2018). Consumer-to-consumer interaction may be central, supplementary or absent, depending on the particular service environment (Martin & Pranter, 1989), but is, in connection with tourism, often a regular part of the tourist experience. Tourists' approaches to each other and their surroundings are often based on their particular social practices (Bourdieu, 1995; Rihova et al., 2018), where their social and physical presence can be said to form part of the attraction (Baerenholdt et al., 2004). When a place is perceived as or becomes a tourist site, it is appropriated, used and made part of the people performing tourism (Baerenholdt et al., 2004), and a church can thus change – from being a place of worship – to a tourist attraction in a short space of time. In the encounter with the 'servicescape' (Bitner, 1992) or the material, man-made settings sought by tourists, visitors meet other visitors who can influence tourist practices. The contact between visitors within the same experience such as a church, can both raise or diminish the experience (Adam, 2021; Casais & Sousa, 2020; Han et al., 2021). Tourist-to-tourist interaction may thus be positive or negative (Nicholls, 2020).

Urry's (1990) 'tourist gaze' places the tourist's view of the surroundings at the centre (MacCannell, 2001). The tourist's gaze is coloured by the particular situation the tourist is in and emphasizes the

tourist's subjective perspective. As part of the tourist gaze, Urry (1990) points out the difference between observing something alone or with others. Through the distinction between what Urry refers to as a *romantic gaze* and a *collective gaze*, the importance of the presence or absence of other tourists is emphasized as part of the tourist's impression there and then. The collective gaze refers to observation with others, such as inside a church or a museum, while the romantic gaze refers to experiencing something alone or in a setting with few significant others. Larsen and Urry (2011) emphasize how the sense of sight can be understood as an organizing sense. The sense of sight can thus make tourists adopt certain ways of acting or behaving by observing each other. Based on the recognition of the tourist gaze as a socially structured form through which tourists see and make sense of situations (see MacCannell, 2001; Pearce et al., 2013), it seems natural that the gaze can affect tourists' behaviour and practices in a church. In the attempt to understand how people do tourism (Abram, 2014), one notes the contexts in which tourists act and how they are influenced by these, and how tourists' practices are established.

While the use of practice theory has been relatively widespread in the social sciences, especially in organization studies and consumer research, it has been less commonly applied to tourism research (Ren et al., 2018). The limited use of practice-based theories in tourism research appears to be due to the emphasis on routine-based activities in practice research and to the focus in tourism on holidays and holiday life as a clear contrast to routines and routine-based activities (Larsen, 2018; Ren et al., 2018). In previous research, the almost inherent dualism between everyday life and holiday time, or tourist and non-tourist (see Larsen, 2008) has led to ontologies where everyday life and leisure time have been complete opposites (de Souza Bispo, 2016). However, the study of tourism as a field of research free from the impact of everyday life has been criticized by several authors (Edensor, 2001, 2007; Larsen, 2008; McCabe, 2002, 2014), and research has shown several examples of how the distinctions between holiday time and everyday life are becoming increasingly blurred. In the same way as tourism research has tended to distinguish between categories, research on tourism to religious sites has operated with categories such as tourist and pilgrim, or religious or secular aspects (Hughes et al., 2013), but it can be difficult to distinguish between people's practices when visiting churches as tourists on one side, and attending church services at home, on the other. Similarly, it is difficult to categorize church tourists as religious or not. Several authors therefore emphasize the importance of avoiding predefined categories when describing tourism to religious sites (Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Hughes et al., 2013; Olsen, 2010).

Tourism to religious sites covers a wide range of religious and secular practices, and the tradition of pilgrimages existed for several hundred years before the phenomenon of tourism became established (Fleischer, 2000). While previous journeys to religious destinations were mainly driven by religious motives (Rinschede, 1992), today's tourism to religious sites is considerably more multi-faceted, including a variety of interests such as art (Lupu et al., 2019), architecture (Jackson & Hudman, 1995; Lupu et al., 2019) and history (Bideci & Albayrak, 2016; Gutic et al., 2010). Other motives are a desire for restitution and contemplation (Bond et al., 2015; Smørvik, 2021) or just having been somewhere (Bideci & Albayrak, 2016; Smørvik, 2021). When a church is a setting for tourist-to-tourist interaction, different practices can unfold, and in the church, people who rarely attend church services and regular churchgoers meet. Practice theory distinguishes between *dispersed* practices which relate to common and singular (inter)actions such as greeting and texting and *integrative* practices, which are complex entities joining multiple actions, projects, ends, and emotions (Schatzki, 2002). The latter can often be characterized by complex activities in specific settings, where visitors in a context such as a festival area or a festival (see Tjora, 2016) develop skills in attending festivals. In a symbolic interactionist perspective, society can be seen as a set of connected actions, where individuals act towards each other based on their understanding of expectations of how people should act and based on how others act in similar situations (Tjora, 2018). Tourists can thus use other tourists as a reference point for their own experiences and actions (Pearce, 2005), where tourist-to-tourist interaction influences their behaviour.

Practice theory offers various ways of theorizing both larger socio-cultural processes and small-scale undertakings by paying attention to everyday, habitual, routine-based and non-discursive

rules in daily life (Nicolini, 2013). One can therefore zoom out to study networks of practices or a bundle of practice-arrangements (Ren et al., 2018; Schatzki, 2016) or zoom in on specific practices to closely describe the activities involved within a certain context (Nicolini, 2013) such as a church. A practice-based approach departs from the notion of ‘social affairs as mere symbolic exchanges between humans (as in the symbolic interactionism tradition) or that suggest that the social world is talked into existence through signs and texts and semiotic processes’ (Nicolini, 2013, pp. 8–9). The great advantage of a practice-based approach is therefore the possibility to explain a social phenomena in a procedural manner, without losing focus on how everyday life affects the activities in which people are involved (Nicolini, 2013).

All practice requires the acquisition of skills (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and every tourism practice is skilled (Mertena et al., 2022, p. 1). Studying tourists’ practices in a church will thus include a study of the tourists’ skills. When skills are considered as part of tourism practice, it can be tempting to focus on skills and competencies that have been acquired over time, but skills can also be understood as commonplace skills based on quite ordinary, practical, everyday knowledge that is essential to all tourist practices (Mertena et al., 2022). Skills are not things in themselves, but are what is created in interaction between people and their environment (Ingold, 1996). Furthermore, skills are not to be passively repeated in the same form in particular contexts, but are instead an individual adaptation to a here and now situation (Ingold, 1996; Mertena et al., 2022). The tourist’s ability to adapt to the environment and to understand what skills are needed in a specific context is thus an important aspect of interpretation of a tourism practice, as Edensor (2007) mentions when he points out that ‘tourism is an interactive and contingent process which succeeds according to the skill of the actors, the context within which it is performed and the way in which it is interpreted by an audience’ (Edensor, 2007, p. 204). By zooming in on how tourists actually do tourism, not what they say they do or think about their behaviour or actions, this study addresses tourist-to-tourist interaction, and explores tourists’ visiting practices and skills in a church.

Methodology

Ciesielska et al. (2018) emphasize that observation is one of the most important research methods. Entering an environment by seeing, evaluating, commenting and concluding based on interaction and the context involved, is essential to gain insight and understanding of a phenomenon (Ciesielska et al., 2018). Observation may be used as an independent method or in combination with other methods, and is particularly suitable for gaining insight into tourism practices (de Souza Bispo, 2016), because not all human actions can be seen as reflexive and intentional (Garfinkel, 1984).

de Souza Bispo (2016) discusses how observation, when compared with interviews, stands out because of the possibility of witnessing situations and activities that are common to people. What tourists say they do and what they actually do in practice, do not always coincide. Studying what people do instead of what they say (Tjora, 2010) is thus a key aspect of this study. In the encounter with the people, the place or the context to be observed, the observer can take on different roles, depending on the purpose of the observation. Angrosino (2005) describes three main forms of observation: participant observation, reactive observation and unobtrusive (non-reactive) observation. In *participant observation*, the observer actively enters the group to be observed and fully participates in their activities. In *reactive observation*, the researcher is open about conducting the observation and those being observed are thus aware of it, while *non-reactive observation* implies that the people under study are unaware that they are being observed.

In this research, I have practised a non-reactive form of observation. The people being observed were thus unaware that I was observing them. With the gaze as my main method, I have spent 2½ to 3 hours observing for three and four days a week at various times of the day, spread over a period of four weeks, studying visitors’ presence, activity and interaction in the church. In order to gain specific insight into individual practices, thus, not merely to observe practice in general, I have observed 64 individuals during the period of the fieldwork. To ensure that the tourists’ movement

were included, I have followed each individual's movements from the moment they entered the church until they left, whether their stay was brief or long. I have noted down each individual's activity alone or in interaction with other tourists. I have also used a structure involving a division of the church into zones in order to examine the visitors' walking patterns and actions inside the church, noting down the duration of each individual visit. Studies in public places have the advantage that the researcher's presence there is perfectly legitimate, as pointed out by Tjora (2016). There is consequently no need to construct one's own role or to legitimize one's participation in an environment, as the context in this case was a church with visitors coming and going. Aiming to find the most non-disturbing place in the church without hiding, I have been sitting in the same pew at the back every time. Here, I have used my senses to watch, listen to and follow tourists' visits to the church, while also noting down my observations.

Observational data are fundamentally naturalistic (Adler & Adler, 1994), and interpretation of this type of data can thus be more demanding than with other research methods (Cotton et al., 2010). In the further process and analysing of the data, my data have been systematized and categorized in the form of themes, using coding, condensation and interpretation (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). The selection of themes and categories have been inspired by theory (Flick, 2009). To conduct an objective, pure, independent or isolated observation is difficult, if not impossible, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2011). My experiential background and subjective perceptions may thus have influenced what I have seen and noticed. However, I have attempted to conduct the fieldwork as freely as possible of prior assumptions and prejudices.

Findings

Tromsdalen church – the Arctic Cathedral

Tromsdalen church – the Arctic Cathedral is an eye-catcher. One can notice its distinctive architecture long before crossing the Tromsø Bridge that connects Tromsø Island and the city of Tromsø with Tromsdalen on the mainland. With fixed daily opening hours suitable for tourists, the church welcomes around one hundred thousand visitors every year. The Arctic Cathedral was consecrated in 1965. It was designed by the architect Jan Inge Hovig, and is composed of thin concrete panels separated by glass (Blix, 1974). The interior decoration includes three chandeliers, a silver cross and a stained-glass window (Mellem, 1990). The window, which fills the entire east gable, was designed and constructed by Victor Sparre (Blix, 1974), and is, in addition to the architectural design, the most eye-catching part of the church, with shifting colours that change with the light and the seasons (Mellem, 1990). The Arctic Cathedral fulfils a number of functions. It holds religious rituals such as church services, baptisms, confirmations and weddings. It contains meeting rooms, a kitchen and toilets. It opens for events, concerts, maternity groups and leisure activities. The church charges an entrance fee to visitors, and has a small selection of souvenirs at a sales counter near the ticket office. There are no audio guides available, but groups can prebook a guided tour. The church is open to tourists almost every day throughout the year.

Been there, done that

The Arctic Cathedral is located at some distance from the centre of Tromsø, and is one of two popular attractions in Tromsdalen. The other is a cable car that runs up and down the mountainside, starting a short walk from the church. Many tourists combine the two experiences, sometimes starting with the church and sometimes with the cable car. A number of tourists arrive by coach, and there are guided tours of Tromsø that include a visit to the church for cruise passengers and other tourists.

With its location in the middle of the tourist trail, the Arctic Cathedral seems to be a building that many people visit without actually seeing it as a church. When observing visitors, I noticed some who were scarcely inside the doors. They just walked a few steps before turning round and

walking out again. Some walk no further than the back pew, where they stand and view the interior. Some seem visibly restless with their mobile phones in their hands, such as three men I saw who came together one day.

The three of them stop just a few metres from the entrance and one takes a few steps forward in the aisle, while the other two stay fiddling with their mobile phones. The man in the aisle takes one photo towards the altar and then quickly returns to the others. One of the three uses the occasion to sanitize his hands, before they all leave after less than four minutes in the church.

Another time I see a young man arrive. He walks a few metres down the aisle, then turns round and walks straight out again.

This repeats itself on several occasions; visitors pay the entrance fee and come in, but only stay for about three or four minutes before they leave. Sometimes I also see this when busloads of tourists arrive; some of them take a short walk towards the altar and come back along the wall, while others just turn around almost as soon as they enter. Already on their way again, with one or two photos in their luggage.

Those who leave and those who stay

In the Arctic Cathedral we find three main groups of visitors. The first group is those I have just mentioned: the ones who are out again almost as soon as they are in. Those who pay to enter but only walk a few steps at the back, close to the pew where I am sitting. These visitors really do very little. Some may take a single photo of the altar or the stained-glass window. Others do not even do that; they just look, and then disappear as quickly as they came. Or their visit may consist of using the toilet, as if this facility was the only reason to enter.

Another group of visitors comprises those who take a little more time, and like to take several photos and move back and forth inside the church. These tourists seem to show greater interest in the interior and the architecture and some sit down, perhaps once or twice in different places, before going out again after spending 8–10 minutes in the church.

Two ladies enter at the same time as me. One stands at the back by the sales counter and flips through a book, while the other walks up to the altar and takes pictures, first of the stained-glass window in front and then one of the back with the organ. They walk around and look at things separately, and then meet up and sit to my left. They whisper to each other, but then they immediately stand up again and continue to walk around the church. Each of them takes several photos with their mobile phones. Then they end up at the sales counter again, where they look at the selection of souvenirs, before leaving again after eight minutes.

The third group of visitors is those who spend the longest time in the church, and often sit down soon after entering. They sit for a while, often at the very back or the very front of the church.

A man enters, walks right up to the altar, and makes the sign of the cross. He then sits down in the second row of pews where he stays for a long time. Visitors come and go while the man remains seated. He seems to be looking straight forward without really realizing what is going on around him. He finally leaves after 40 minutes, and then just walks to the exit without doing anything else.

One morning there are seven visitors, and it is completely quiet. I see a young woman enter and walk forward to the second row of pews, where she sits down. She sits still with her head partially bowed. Meanwhile, some of the other visitors leave, and soon there is just one couple besides her. I can hear the traffic and the wind outside. It is difficult to keep my mind from wandering off. I note that the couple are talking quietly, while the woman at the front still sits there motionless. More than fifteen minutes pass before several other visitors enter, one after the other, and I see the woman get up and walk peacefully along the wall before passing me on her way to the exit.

Another day I am sitting there alone when a couple comes in. ‘Quiet,’ says the woman, seemingly reacting to the empty church. They walk towards the altar, but then the woman comes back and sits down a few pews in front of me. The man stands at the altar for a while and the woman sits and just watches. Quite soon the man comes back and sits next to her. They sit there whispering to each other for a short while before silence descends. Then a few silent minutes pass before more visitors arrive, and the couple soon get up and leave.

A house of worship or an attraction?

A visit to the church may involve great contrasts. At one moment, there might just be a handful of people sitting there quietly. In the next, small or large groups of tourists may arrive with their own group dynamics: noisy, chatty and full of life in whatever they say and do.

One day three women are sitting in the church. They are far forward, with a suitable distance between them, and it is so quiet that we can hear the sounds outside. I notice that the church seems brighter than usual and imagine that it might be because of the fresh snow out there compared with the grey, wet weather yesterday. I see one of the women take off her coat and another one follows suit. Then they sit silently again, and nothing happens for a while. But then a change is in the air. A group of tourists is approaching. We hear their arrival as the ticket seller tells them in a loud voice, 'Yes, you have to pay', and switches from one language to another, and more people enter the church. Some talk loudly without any regard for the atmosphere there. They talk about all kinds of things, things that have nothing to do with the church. I hear the words 'Yes, have you been there too?', which may be about sights in Tromsø or somewhere else. Some of them are laughing, and some are talking even louder. In view of the transformed atmosphere, two of the women at the front have stood up, and I soon notice that the last of the three also starts to walk back. Then all three of them are out of the church.

In encounters between tourists, one can notice different reactions. Sometimes one feels that groups of tourists are in opposition to one another. There are moments when one can almost see inside the tourists.

We notice it at the same time, me and the couple sitting a little further forward: the crowd of tourists that has arrived out there. We hear somebody discussing the price with the ticket seller, while only a few tourists from the group enter the church. I do not notice it immediately, until the couple in front of me turns and looks back, and I do the same. We see a group of tourists standing outside huddled together with their noses pressed against the window as if to see what is inside. Several put cameras and mobile phones against the window and take pictures. I look at the couple in front of me making faces and shaking their heads at the behaviour of the others, and they look towards me as if to get confirmation that I agree with them. Then we share our reaction with a look and grin pointedly at the behaviour of the others.

The groups and the others

Sometimes I could see it in people's facial expressions – people who had the church to themselves and suddenly have to share it with a coachload of tourists. They are rudely awakened from their prayers or contemplation and the complete silence is already broken when the voice of the ticket seller is heard all the way to the first row of pews, telling the visitors the ticket prices and speaking in different languages about the church or the facilities and answering other questions the tourists may have.

There seems to be something special about flocks of tourists arriving somewhere. Perhaps they have come straight from another attraction. Perhaps they are standing outside chatting, waiting for someone to pay the entrance fee. They may have their own tour guide with them to lead the way. Encounters between individual visitors and those who come in groups can lead to a form of discord, where the experience of an almost devotional atmosphere in the church, often shared with other individual visitors, is shattered by a large group of people with a guide.

We have been sitting there for a while. Eight others and I scattered across the pews. Several candles are burning at the altar, and two young women stand up in turn to light their candles. People are speaking quietly, and newly arrived visitors speak in equally low voices. This quiet atmosphere lasts for about half an hour, with tourists coming and going. There is a calm, almost divine, atmosphere. Then we hear a foreign guide speaking in a loud voice on his way into the church and notice a flock wandering behind him who are partly listening and partly talking about other things. Then even more arrive after this first group – tourists with mobile phones being used for texting, Internet searches, photography, sorting photos, sharing activities, and even conversations. Many are only briefly inside before they go out again. A few sit down, but only for a short time. There is no order. No system for what one can or cannot do. Someone ventures up behind the altar. Some people walk between the rows of pews. Voices are buzzing, and the guide is talking the loudest of everyone. But the groups seem to be in a hurry, because after nine or ten minutes they have all left, including the tour guide and his group.

And then only four of us are left. Myself and three of the original eight. Back in the calm, undisturbed church.

Those who come to look and those who come to pray

The church appears to be two distinct places. On some occasions, there are only a few people who may be strolling around inside, talk in low voices and are unobtrusive.

One day when I enter the church, I see about ten people walking around and looking. Someone clears their throat, and I can hear low voices. I try to sit down without making a sound and immediately notice the calm inside. After a while, an old woman and a young one each light a candle at the front and then sit down in the first pew. Then an elderly couple enters. The woman finds somewhere to sit almost at the back after making the sign of the cross. It is so quiet that I can hear her mumbling, perhaps praying. Then the man comes and sits down after walking around. Almost immediately he stands up and takes a photo. He seems to want to move on, as he remains standing and waiting. But the woman seems reluctant to move, so he sits down too. Finally she stands up, and the couple leaves after about fifteen minutes.

Sometimes it feels as if respect for the church is an integral part of the tourists' actions. You have to walk slowly. And whisper or speak quietly. You should sit down, perhaps after making the sign of the cross; then you sit and contemplate or pray. Sitting in the pews, some people bend their head slightly forward. Others rest their gaze on something in front of them or study the interior and ornamentation. Some people may close their eyes, as I noticed once, but that is difficult to judge when people are looking down towards the floor.

On other occasions, the church can suddenly change character from a sacred place to a setting for chit-chat and mobile phone use, and even selfies.

One day we have been sitting there for a while, myself and a handful of others, with a good distance between us, spread across the rows of pews. Then two middle-aged couples come in, obviously travelling together, and sit down in a pew beyond mine. One has a lot to say and tells it in a lively way. 'Well, can you believe it?' she exclaims loudly, and the others laugh. It does not seem to matter to them that they are inside a church, until one of the four suddenly gets out his mobile and takes pictures in several directions from his pew without standing up. Then three other visitors arrive, who talk just as loudly as the first four, two of whom are now leaving. There is a lively conversation between the new visitors, and one of the men is now sharing his experiences from other destinations.

People who visit the Arctic Cathedral have different expectations of what the church should be or what it should contain. And unlike some Catholic churches where Mass takes place while tourists are present in the church, it can be more difficult to distinguish between religious visits and other types of visits. For some tourists, the church is undoubtedly an attraction on a par with other attractions, but for others it has its distinct function as a place of worship and a house of God.

One day when I am sitting there in my usual pew, I hear a discussion between the ticket seller and a visitor. 'Yes, but churches are open in the rest of the world', argues the visitor, not wanting to pay the entrance fee. 'But you have to pay so we can keep the church open,' says the lady in the ticket office. 'In Latvia, churches are open for everyone,' says the visitor in a loud voice, and I hear someone else butting in to agree with the visitor. 'It's not normal to pay,' he says, 'And do you have to pay to come here and pray?' But the ticket seller sticks to her argument. And I notice that they do not enter; they decide to leave as they are getting nowhere with their argument.

After a while, some other people enter the church. And I notice that the sound level increases in line with the number of tourists inside.

Discussion and conclusion

A church can be both an attraction and a place of worship, but basically it is first and foremost a church. For tourists, however, it can be difficult to distinguish between these two functions, and as Iliev (2020) points out, religious tourism is not only a matter of spirituality, but also a huge economic driver. Shackley (2002) finds a significant difference between religious sites that charge an entrance fee and those where it costs nothing to enter. 'By the introduction of charging, a dissonance arises,' says Shackley (2002, p. 350), pointing out that having to pay can change tourists' view of a place, although tourists may not be quite aware of this. In the Arctic Cathedral all visitors have to pay, whether they come to look or to pray, and most people pay the entrance fee without

complaining about the price, although sometimes situations arise where tourists react and decide not to go inside. Hjelseth (2019) points out how the cultural and emotional value of attractions can decrease from 'the moment they are given commercial value' (Hjelseth, 2019, p. 169). This seems also evident in my data, where paying an entrance fee for visits to the church seems to encourage the view that it is an attraction on an equal footing with other tourist attractions.

In this study, the findings show that two visiting practices predominate, depending on whether the visitor perceives the Arctic Cathedral as a place of worship or as an attraction. In encounters with the church as a *place of worship*, there seems to be a kind of basic understanding that this is a place to be quiet or speak softly. Visitors understand the social order (Goffman, 1983) in the church by moving slowly and with an appropriate distance to others. Gutic et al. (2010) mention how visitors recognize the sacred aspect of religious sites such as a church, even if they are not religious and do not share the cultural values the church represents. This is partly due to the strong cultural and historical influence of Christianity (Bond et al., 2015). In encounters with the Arctic Cathedral as an *attraction*, on the other hand, religion does not seem to have the same impact on people's behaviour. Larsen and Urry (2011) describe the tight schedule of mass tourism governed by 'repetitive performances, guides and tour managers, collective gazing, the drama by photographing and moving en masse' (see also Edensor, 1998). With the behaviour of certain groups of tourists in the Arctic Cathedral, including using mobile phones, a form of noise spreads. This in turn makes it seem acceptable to be active and speak loudly, and the role of the tourist as a 'mass tourist' (McCabe, 2005) thus permeates the visiting practice.

In allowing tourists into churches, as churchgoers and visitors, the church accommodates both 'dispersed practices' and 'integrative practices' (Schatzki, 1996). 'Tourism as practices paves the way to understanding that tourism practices are not isolated from 'non-tourism' practices', according to de Souza Bispo (2016, p. 177), and similarly, one could say that tourists' practices in the Arctic Cathedral do not necessarily differ significantly from their practices in other settings, even though the church is a religious site. The lack of skills in suitable behaviour of some tourists can lead to situations where tourist-to-tourist interaction is challenging. Such interaction can in some cases diminish the tourist experience (Adam, 2021; Han et al., 2021), which is also the impression from my observations in the church. However, while previous research has explored the influence of tourist-to-tourist interaction on tourists' value creation (Adam, 2021; Han et al., 2021), my findings show how tourist-to-tourist interaction can also result in a visit being cut short by someone who has been using the church for peace and contemplation, when groups of noisy tourists enter. Larsen and Urry (2011) describe how tourists observe each other's activities, and almost imitate each other's behaviour. This is also revealed in this study, where I observed several tourists conforming to others through their movements, form of conversation and sound level, which represented a form of contagious practice in the interaction. The key question here, however, is in which ways tourists adapt to each other, and which skills they use in the process, such as Tjora (2016) discusses how inexperienced festival attendees may like to watch and learn from those who appear to have more experience, but in fact are not entirely successful because the person being imitated is not experienced, but just pretending to be. Thus, one may find a paradox in adaptation to others in a church in that those who practise a form of loud, self-confident nonchalance could create acceptance for such behaviour among other visitors, including taking selfies in the aisle or stepping up to the pulpit.

While previous research on behaviour in churches has demonstrated a form of interaction between visitors where respect seems to be a key concept (Andriotis, 2009; Griffiths, 2011; Smørvik, 2021, 2022), the present study provides a more varied picture. Respect appears to come and go, depending on which tourists are in the church at the same time and for what reasons. It is not so that one practice is more correct than the other. The challenge, however, is when the simultaneous use of different practices creates an imbalance, as demonstrated by the findings from this study. 'Tourism is an exemplary process through which different forms of tourist practice and performance are confronted, so that the conventional habits through which tourism is performed can be confounded by those who perform tourism differently', according to Edensor (2007, p. 213). In line with research on non-purist and purist pilgrims

(Casais & Sousa, 2020), where ‘different values attached to the experience’ (2020, p. 8) seem to form the basis of conflicts in pilgrim-to-pilgrim interaction, visits to the Arctic Cathedral include some of the same issues. In the Arctic Cathedral, both experienced churchgoers and visitors with far less experience visit, and one can say that a clash takes place when those who have skills in visiting churches, either through repeated visits as tourists or as regular churchgoers, meet more consumer-oriented tourist groups or those that are typical of mass tourism (Edensor, 1998; Hjelseth, 2019; Larsen & Urry, 2011).

In this study, I have examined tourists’ practices and skills in the Arctic Cathedral, and my research has revealed insight into two distinct practices, based on the encounter with the church as a place of worship or as an attraction. A key contribution of this study is thus to provide deeper insight into tourists’ behaviour and actions in a church and the divergent practices demonstrated by tourists in this setting. Tourist-to-tourist interaction may give rise to positive or negative experiences (Nicholls, 2020), but as the data from this study show, lack of skills in how to relate to a religious site does not only affect experiences in the church, but it can also in the worst case force some visitors to leave early. Besides the contribution that lack of skills can lead to disparities between tourists, the findings have relevant implications for the theory of tourist-to-tourist interaction at religious sites. Further, the findings can provide knowledge to help managers of churches, offering e.g. visitor information, volunteer guides or other arrangements.

This study has some limitations. The first is that data collection took place at a single religious site in northern Norway. The second is the potential for bias that might arise in observational studies, based on the researcher’s background and experiences, which I have attempted to counteract by being as free from preunderstanding as possible. Since little attention has been paid to how commonplace skills affect tourist-to-tourist interaction at religious sites, there is a need for more knowledge on this topic. There is also a need for research that examines more closely the links between tourists’ commonplace skills and routines on the one hand, and their practices at religious sites on the other. The in-the-moment nature of church visits demonstrates the complexity of visitors’ practices. It is therefore important to conduct further studies that explore in greater depth tourist practices at various religious sites and destinations. Finally, there is a need for more research on tourist-to-tourist interaction in churches.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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