

## PANEL PROPOSAL

### On Being Spiritual: Pilgrimage as an Information Context

#### Abstract:

Religious and secular pilgrimages have been part of human history since the beginning of time and remain very much alive today, whether it is the Holy Land, the Hajj, Lhasa, Kumbh Mela, Char Dham, or else the Camino de Santiago, Kumano Kodo, Glastonbury Tor, Elvis's Graceland, national parks or war memorials. Pilgrimage has been an object of study across disciplines, in art, architecture, and heritage (Avril et al 2015; Paul Davies 2013), history (Elsner 2005; Janin 2002), literature (Edwards 2005), social anthropology (Badone and Roseman 2004), religious studies and tourism (Ross-Bryant 2017; Norman and Cusack 2015; Coleman and Elsner 2002; Llyod 1998) among others. Yet, pilgrimage as a context for research in Information Studies has been surprisingly overlooked (exceptions include Bati, 2015; Caidi et al., 2018, along with some foundational work on spirituality by Kari (2007) or Gaston et al. (2015)). This panel fills the gap by offering an information perspective to the study of pilgrimage, shedding a light on approaches and concepts from our field that can enrich our understanding of the complexities of the pilgrim's journey through the lens of information and media practices, embodied experiences, memory work, curation practices, community-building, information mediation and sharing, and virtuality and pilgrimage in a global and digital world.

Pilgrimages, in the 20th century, have seen an increase notably due to faster modes of transport (leading to the phenomenon of 'religious travel'), mobility and 'liquid migration' (Engbersen 2012) as well as a renewed sense of spirituality (and/or religiosity). Moreover, our sociocultural landscapes are continuously being transformed by new practices of digital communication, interaction and memory making where members of diverse communities renegotiate the role of their descendant heritage as part of their emergent civic identity. In theorizing religion and diaspora, it has been argued that in moving away from home, migrants experience alienation and yearning, and by undertaking a pilgrimage they recreate their own 'imaginary wholeness' (Liebelt, Shenar and Werber 2010). We argue that the increasing mobility and the emergence of multicultural societies give rise to hugely important new phenomena of identity formation and memory work mediated by online digital media (Caidi et al, 2018; Innocenti 2015, 2016) and taking pilgrimage as core aspirations. The conception of the 'workings' of pilgrimage is changing too. Coleman and Eade's use of 'motion' as a key aspect of sacred pilgrimages (2004, 3) widens our understanding of pilgrimage beyond an experience confined to a holy place, toward it being a ritual dynamic space. It has been recently argued that this viewpoint could be further broadened by discussing 'what pilgrims take from heritage, materially as well as conceptually and emotionally, and how this process affects the pilgrims life at home and their home community' (Flaskerud and Natvig 2018, 2). Such perspective paves the way to begin a conversation on social phenomenology, everyday information practices and related socio-cultural barriers (Savolainen 2016; 2008; 1995), and techno-spiritual practices (Bell, 2006; Odom et al., 2018) in the context of pilgrimage.

The panel brings together an international group of scholars to discuss their diverse theoretical, empirical and methodological work around pilgrimage and information. The short presentations and interactive engagement will coalesce into a formulation for a research agenda on Pilgrimage an Information Studies. Speakers' interventions will revolve around five connected questions:

1. How can religious and secular pilgrimage be theoretically contextualised within Information Science?
2. What research approaches are most suitable for exploring pilgrimage in the digital age?

3. What framework would best account for the everyday rituals related to pilgrimage and assimilated into pilgrimages memories and emotions?
4. How are pilgrimage traditions evolving in an age of migrations and diasporic identities?
5. What is the current and future role of cultural and memory institutions as resources on, and sites for, the commemoration of experiences and rituals in our networked world?

Drawing on existing literature (Caidi et al., 2018; Berger 2018; Post and van der Beek 2016), we seek in this panel to probe and unsettle the geographic, professional, ideological, and other interfaces that information professionals constantly negotiate in their examination of digital intangible cultural heritage. Nadia Caidi will discuss methodological approaches to exploring the spiritual/religious experiences of the Hajj pilgrimage goers. Perla Innocenti will engage in the conceptual framing of pilgrimages within the intangible and digital culture heritage discourses (Stefano, Davis, Corsane 2012; Kalay, Kvan, Affleck 2008; Cameron and Kenderdine 2007; UNESCO 2003). Suzanne van der Beek will examine cyberpilgrimage as phenomenon and object of research (Van der Beek, 2017). David Kirk will discuss designing for pilgrimage and diasporic identities in relation to visiting and memorializing mass graves in Slovenia (Kirk et al 2018). Finally, Jannica Heinström will present preliminary findings from a qualitative analysis of spiritual and emotional information needs as expressed on a discussion forum about the Camino de Santiago.

Through this panel, we seek to set the agenda for pilgrimage research in Information Studies, and address our field and professionals' role in curating our intangible cultural heritage (as it pertains to pilgrimages), and in deepening our understanding of the role played by meaning-making, authenticity, value-making, and performativity.

### **Organizers:**

Organizers and moderator:

Dr. Nadia Caidi (moderator - University of Toronto, Canada)

Dr. Perla Innocenti (Northumbria University, UK)

Other speakers:

Dr. Suzanne Van der Beek (Tilburg University, Netherlands)

Dr. Jannica Heinström (Åbo Akademi University, Finland)

Dr. David Kirk (Northumbria University, UK)

**Length:** The panel will be 90 minutes in length.

**Participants:** Expected/preferred number of participants is around 35.

### **Proposed format:**

For this session, we will start with a brief 10-min talk by each panelist, followed by an interactive engagement (in small break-out groups, depending on attendance). The ultimate purpose of the speakers' interventions is to help the audience frame this research area, and setting the stage for the audience to collaboratively define an agenda of research at the intersection of information and pilgrimage. The organizers will also set up a living document to sustain the conversations beyond the conference.

(5 min.) – Introduction

(10 min.) – each presenters speaks for 10 mins in sequence (x 5)

(10 min.) – Q/A with the audience

(20 min.) – Agenda building exercise in small break-out groups; Reporting

(5 min.) – Concluding remarks & Wrap-Up; Living document notification.

### **Purpose, goals, expected outcomes and contribution to conference theme**

This panel offers a novel, contemporary approach on a topic that is at the heart of the lives of individuals and communities the world over. It will initiate a conversation that will bring together scholars in information behaviour and practices; data curation; identity and community-building; spiritual and religious communities; and memory work in the context of secular and religious pilgrimages. In this sense, the topic addresses several of the conference's themes:

- Theoretical conceptualizations of the cultural, social, cognitive, affective, and situational aspects of information needs, seeking, searching, use, and sharing.
- Specific contexts: e.g., in everyday life, in social networks, including social media, gaming, or virtual worlds.

### **Special requests/equipment needs:**

A desktop computer (PC or Mac) or appropriate wiring for a laptop, a projector, and—if possible—an Internet connection will be required for this panel. We also ask for a room that enables participants to break out in small groups. The organizers will provide other needed materials.

### **Participants**

As this panel has a rich, timely theme that touches upon several areas of interest to the ISIC community—including information behaviour and practices, information literacy, everyday life, and cognitive authority and expertise—we expect it to draw an audience of approximately 30-40 participants. At least 15 audience participants would make for the best interaction.

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