

Cross-interpretation of Cultural Landscapes: The case of the Jesus and gospel trails

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Abstract

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Using the case of the "Gospel Trail" and the "Jesus Trail" in Northern Israel (the Lower Galilee Region) (http://www.goisrael.com/Tourism_Eng/Tourist%20Information/Christian%20Themes/Pages/The%20Gospel%20Trail.aspx and <http://jesustrail.com/>), the paper will show how lack of planning and cooperation between public and private sectors led to confusing cross-interpretation of religious cultural landscapes. This case study also reveals that lack of coherent regional tourism plans open the gate to multiple cultural interpretation of a given cultural space and, hence, often causes unneeded tourism infrastructures, which become unsustainable, obsolete and wasted taxpayers' money. Furthermore, the paper explores how cross-interpretation of cultural landscapes in "cultural routes" is largely an outcome of its initiators' interests (i.e., socio-political, and economic) and is not based on straightforward tangible and intangible cultural assets. Thus, what could have been a positive use of cultural landscapes for the benefit of tourists, their hosts and public/private tourism development agencies, may turn into a colossal tourism development failure. The paper provides a structured analysis of what started as a religiously and culturally exciting trail in the footsteps of Jesus and ended as two overlapping cultural routes using the same cultural landscape and provoking a major conflict between their public and private initiators. Lessons of this case are translated to prescribed solutions and guidelines on how to avoid abuse of cultural landscapes that stem from lack of planning, cooperation and proper strategy on public and private roles in transforming cultural landscapes into sustainable tourist spaces.