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RESEARCH ARTICLE



Non-extractive mobility and tourism-like encounters: the case of the walk for peace

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how tourism-like encounters can emerge from forms of mobility that are neither organised as tourism nor structured through commodification. Focusing on the 112-day Walk for Peace undertaken by Theravada Buddhist monks across the United States, the research investigates how a religious and ascetic journey generates patterns of congregation, travel-to-witness practices, and digitally mediated visibility typically associated with tourism. Drawing on qualitative netnography of publicly accessible social media posts, livestreams, images, and participant reflections, the study analyses how mobility produces relational and affective value in the absence of pricing, branding, and formal tourism infrastructures. The findings show that although the monks' mobility is religious rather than touristic, it generates secondary mobilities in which observers travel, gather, and participate through witnessing and voluntary hospitality. These encounters generate dense forms of social and emotional value without being organised through exchange value. At the same time, increasing digital visibility produces tensions related to symbolic capture without translating into economic commodification. The paper introduces the concept of non-extractive mobility to explain how tourism-like spatial formations can emerge from non-touristic practices. In doing so, it contributes to tourism and mobility research by reframing tourism as an emergent relational effect of movement rather than a pre-defined economic activity.

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Introduction

Tourism is commonly understood as a system organised around commodification, in which access is regulated by pricing, experiences are packaged for consumption, and places are branded for circulation in global markets. Even alternative or ethical forms of tourism are frequently embedded within exchange-based systems. Critical tourism geographies have long demonstrated that tourism operates as a political-economic process, reorganising space, culture, and labour for capital accumulation (Bianchi, 2018;

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Britton, 1991; Fletcher et al., 2019). Within this framework, mobility generates value by transforming experiences into commodities.

This paper examines the Walk for Peace, a 112-day silent journey undertaken by Theravada Buddhist monks across the United States, from Texas to Washington, D.C. The journey is grounded in religious and ascetic practice, emphasising disciplined movement, silence, and alms-based sustenance. There are no tickets, merchandise, sponsorships, or formal branding, and participation is neither marketed nor monetised. Along the route, local residents and observers offer voluntary hospitality, including food and shelter, while others follow the journey through digital platforms or travel to witness the monks' passage.

Importantly, this study does not position the Walk for Peace itself as tourism. The monks' journey is not motivated by leisure, consumption, or touristic intent, but by religious practice. Instead, the analytical focus is on how this form of non-touristic mobility gives rise to tourism-like spatial formations, including patterns of congregation, travel-to-witness practices, and digitally mediated following. These phenomena are typically associated with tourism but emerge here without being organised through tourism infrastructures. In this sense, the study shifts attention from tourism as a predefined category to tourism as an emergent effect of mobility and social interaction.

Analytically, the study distinguishes between two interconnected forms of mobility. The first is the monks' primary mobility, which is religious, ascetic, and non-touristic in orientation. The second consists of secondary mobilities generated around the walk, including spectatorship, travel-to-witness practices, digitally mediated following, and temporary spatial congregation. The study does not conceptualise the monks as tourists; rather, it examines how tourism-like spatial and relational formations emerge around non-touristic movement.

The Walk for Peace thus presents an important empirical puzzle for tourism geographies. It generates forms of gathering, encounter, and spatial coordination that resemble tourism, while systematically minimising the commercial mechanisms, such as pricing, branding, and productisation, that usually structure such processes. The mobility is highly visible and widely followed, yet operates outside conventional circuits of commodification. This raises a central question: how can tourism-like encounters emerge from mobility that is neither organised as tourism nor structured through economic exchange?

Existing scholarship provides important but partial answers. Political economy approaches have extensively analysed how tourism commodifies landscapes and social relations, linking mobility to capital accumulation (Bianchi, 2018; Britton, 1991; Harvey, 2002). Degrowth tourism critiques the sector's reliance on expansion and consumption (Fletcher et al., 2019; Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019). Mobilities research has further highlighted how movement itself produces social relations, encounters, and spatial formations beyond destination-based consumption (Edensor, 2007). However, much of this literature either assumes the presence of commodification or focuses on its reform, rather than examining empirical cases in which commodification is systematically minimised.

The Walk for Peace offers a distinctive opportunity to address this gap. The organisation of the journey emphasises silent walking, voluntary hospitality, and digitally mediated witnessing, foregrounding relational and affective forms of value rather than

exchange value. Participants engage not through purchasing access but through presence, attention, and care. At the same time, the walk unfolds within digital environments where visibility circulates across platforms, raising questions about the potential for symbolic or algorithmic forms of value capture.

To conceptualise these dynamics, this paper introduces the notion of non-extractive mobility, defined as forms of movement that generate relational, affective, and communal value while minimising the infrastructural mechanisms of commodification. Building on political economy analyses of tourism and degrowth critiques of consumption-driven mobility, the concept distinguishes between value creation and value capture, highlighting the possibility that spatial and social value can be produced without being systematically extracted through market mechanisms.

The study addresses three interrelated questions: (1) How does the Walk for Peace enact non-extractive mobility through the refusal or absence of commodification mechanisms? (2) What forms of relational and affective value circulate in the absence of monetary exchange? (3) What tensions emerge between decommodification and digital visibility?

Empirically, the study adopts a qualitative netnographic approach, analysing publicly accessible social media posts, livestreams, images, and participant reflections generated throughout the 112-day journey. The analysis examines the presence or absence of commodification devices, practices of refusal, forms of non-monetary exchange such as hospitality and witnessing, and instances of symbolic or digital capture. This approach enables an examination of how mobility organises space relationally rather than economically.

The findings show that the Walk for Peace enacts a form of decommodified mobility through the systematic absence of ticketing, merchandising, and branding. Rather than being organised through exchange value, the journey generates alternative forms of value centred on presence, attention, reciprocity, and community care. Patterns of spatial gathering emerge from shared ethical and affective orientations rather than from market coordination. At the same time, digital mediation introduces important tensions, as increasing visibility within platform environments raises the possibility that non-extractive mobility may be subject to forms of symbolic or algorithmic capture.

This study enhances the field of tourism geographies by introducing non-extractive mobility as a framework for analysing how tourism-like encounters and spatial formations can develop independently of commodification. In doing so, it contributes to political economy discussions by differentiating between value creation and value capture, while also advancing the scholarship on degrowth tourism through an empirical examination of mobility practices that intentionally minimise monetisation mechanisms. The findings further suggest how space may be organised as a relational commons, shaped by practices of presence, care, and witnessing, rather than through commodified infrastructures.

Rather than treating tourism as inherently tied to consumption, this paper reframes it as a set of spatial and relational effects that may arise around mobility under particular conditions. The Walk for Peace does not constitute tourism in itself; instead, it generates tourism-like encounters through processes of gathering, witnessing, and mediated attention. In doing so, it opens up new possibilities for understanding how

mobility can produce collective experience beyond the dominant paradigms of commodification, accumulation, and growth.

Literature review

Tourism, commodification, and the political economy of value capture

Tourism has long been conceptualised as a political-economic process through which places, cultures, and mobilities are reorganised for capital accumulation (Britton, 1991; Mosedale, 2011). Critical tourism geographies highlight how tourism development is shaped by uneven power relations among states, corporations, and local communities, often resulting in the extraction of value from cultural and spatial resources (Bianchi, 2018). Within this framework, commodification functions as a central organising logic, transforming social relations, cultural practices, and landscapes into exchangeable goods.

Early scholarship on cultural commodification emphasised how tourism converts practices and performances into marketable products, raising concerns about authenticity, staging, and the commercial viability of culture (Cole, 2007; Shepherd, 2002). More recent work has extended this analysis to contemporary tourism practices such as festivalisation, heritage branding, and destination marketing, all of which rely on mechanisms of pricing, packaging, and symbolic differentiation (Hayes & MacLeod, 2007; Wynn & Yetis-Bayraktar, 2016). Across these perspectives, tourism is understood as a system in which value is stabilised and captured through market-based infrastructures. As such, commodification is not merely a feature of tourism, but is often treated as its underlying condition of possibility.

However, despite its analytical depth, this body of literature largely assumes that tourism is inherently tied to exchange. As a result, scholarly attention has focused on how commodification operates, rather than on the conditions under which it may be minimised or refused altogether. This assumption limits the analytical capacity of tourism studies to account for mobility formations that generate social and spatial value without activating mechanisms of market capture.

Decommodification and degrowth: limits of existing approaches

In response to critiques of commodification, tourism scholarship has increasingly engaged with decommodification as both an ethical orientation and an analytical framework. Early calls for a 'decommodified research paradigm' (Wearing et al., 2005) emphasised the role of civil society, non-market practices, and alternative tourism models. Subsequent research on community-based tourism, volunteer tourism, and social enterprise has explored how tourism might generate social value beyond profit (Mtapuri et al., 2022; Okazaki, 2008).

At the same time, critical evaluations have demonstrated that many of these initiatives remain embedded within commodified systems. For example, volunteer tourism often involves packaged experiences that monetise participation, raising questions about whether such practices genuinely challenge or reproduce commodification (Godfrey, 2018). Similarly, approaches grounded in diverse economies have highlighted

non-market practices, such as gifting, care, and reciprocity, within tourism systems, yet these are frequently intertwined with market-based access (Casado-Díaz et al., 2020; Spade, 2020; Zhu et al., 2024). Consequently, decommodification is often partial, operating within rather than outside dominant market logics.

Degrowth tourism further advances this critique by questioning tourism's structural dependence on expansion, consumption, and accumulation (Fletcher et al., 2019). It promotes alternative value systems centred on sufficiency, well-being, and ecological limits, and has become an important framework for rethinking tourism futures. However, much of this work operates at the macro level, focusing on policy, governance, and systemic transformation (Milano et al., 2019). Less attention has been given to how such principles are enacted through everyday mobility practices.

These perspectives reveal an important gap. While tourism scholarship has critically examined commodification and proposed alternatives, it has paid less attention to mobility formations in which commodification is not reconfigured but systematically minimised or absent as an organising principle.

Mobilities and tourism-like encounters beyond consumption

In this study, the term 'tourism-like encounters' refers analytically to spatial and relational practices commonly associated with tourism, including temporary congregation, travel-to-experience, witnessing, mediated co-presence, and anticipatory following, without implying formal participation in tourism systems. Mobilities research has expanded the scope of tourism studies by emphasising movement, relationality, and the production of space through travel practices (Edensor, 2007; Tomassini & Lamond, 2023). From this perspective, tourism is not limited to destination-based consumption but involves dynamic processes of encounter, coordination, and co-presence.

Research on pilgrimage and spiritual mobilities further demonstrates that travel can be motivated by meaning, devotion, and ethical commitment rather than leisure or consumption (Olsen, 2019; Scriven, 2014). However, such mobilities are often entangled with tourism economies through commodified infrastructures, including tour operators, heritage industries, and destination marketing. As a result, the distinction between religious mobility and tourism remains analytically blurred.

A key insight from mobilities-oriented scholarship is that phenomena commonly associated with tourism, such as gathering, witnessing, and place-based encounters, can emerge through movement itself, rather than through consumption. Yet empirical research has often marginalised such practices, treating them as peripheral to tourism or categorising them as 'non-tourism.' This creates a conceptual blind spot in which tourism-like effects are recognised but not systematically theorised. Consequently, there is limited understanding of how these formations arise in contexts where commodification is not the primary organising force.

Non-market value, visibility, and the risk of symbolic capture

Scholarship on diverse economies and gift exchange highlights how value can circulate through non-market practices such as hospitality, reciprocity, and care (Zhu et al., 2024; Scarth & Novelli, 2024). In these contexts, value is not derived from price but from relational engagement and mutual recognition. Such perspectives are essential

for understanding mobility practices in which participation is not mediated by monetary exchange. They point to the possibility that value can be generated through presence and interaction rather than through transactional logics.

At the same time, recent research on digital platforms introduces a critical tension. Even in the absence of direct monetisation, visibility within platform environments can generate forms of value capture through data extraction, attention economies, and algorithmic amplification (Frenzel et al., 2022; Srnicek, 2017). Tourism-related research has shown how digital traces shape spatial imaginaries and influence movement patterns (Cheng, 2025), suggesting that visibility itself can function as a mechanism for value production and potential capture.

This raises an important question for decommodified mobility: can forms of movement that resist pricing and productisation remain non-extractive in contexts where visibility is mediated through platform infrastructures? Addressing this tension is critical for understanding the limits and possibilities of non-extractive mobility in digitally mediated environments.

Synthesis: toward non-extractive mobility

Across these strands of literature, three key insights emerge. First, tourism is deeply embedded in systems of commodification and value capture. Second, existing alternatives, such as decommodification and degrowth, have primarily focused on reforming or reconfiguring these systems, rather than examining cases in which commodification is minimised in practice. Third, mobilities research suggests that tourism-like encounters can emerge through movement and relational coordination, yet provides limited empirical analysis of such formations outside market structures.

This paper addresses this gap by conceptualising non-extractive mobility as an empirical and analytical problem. It examines how mobility can generate tourism-like spatial and relational effects, such as gathering, witnessing, and coordinated movement, while minimising the infrastructural mechanisms of commodification. In doing so, it shifts the analytical focus from tourism as an economic sector to tourism-like formations as emergent outcomes of mobility. This perspective enables a more nuanced understanding of how value is created, circulated, and potentially captured in contemporary mobility systems.

Methodology

Research design

This study adopts a qualitative research design combining netnography and spatial discourse analysis to examine how tourism-like spatial formations emerge around non-touristic mobility. Netnography is particularly suited to analysing digitally mediated cultural practices and the interplay between online and offline mobilities (Kozinets, 2015). Given that the Walk for Peace was organised, circulated, and experienced through digital platforms, these materials provide a critical entry point for understanding how mobility generates patterns of gathering, witnessing, and coordinated movement.

Rather than treating digital content as a secondary representation of offline events, this study conceptualises platforms as active infrastructures through which mobility is organised, observed, and interpreted. This approach enables analysis of how secondary mobilities, including travel-to-witness practices and distributed forms of participation, emerge through the interaction between embodied movement and digital circulation. The study relies exclusively on publicly accessible data and does not involve direct participation, focusing instead on the mediated construction of mobility and value.

Context of the study

The Walk for Peace is a 112-day silent pilgrimage undertaken by Theravada Buddhist monks across the United States, beginning in Texas and concluding in Washington, D.C. The journey is grounded in ascetic and religious practice, relying on alms-based support rather than formal economic exchange. No tickets, sponsorships, or tourism marketing mechanisms are used to organise participation.

Within Theravada Buddhist traditions, the practice of alms-giving (*dāna*) constitutes a central moral and spiritual obligation through which lay participants offer food and material support to monks. These acts are not understood as economic transactions but as forms of merit-making and ethical engagement, embedded in a broader religious framework of reciprocity and compassion (Gombrich, 2006; Tambiah, 1970). As such, the voluntary hospitality observed along the route reflects a non-market form of value exchange, in which participation is motivated by spiritual and moral considerations rather than financial incentives. This context is critical for understanding why observers engage with the walk and how practices of care and witnessing are sustained in the absence of monetisation.

The walk is coordinated through decentralised and digitally mediated processes, primarily *via* social media platforms that provide route updates, livestreams, and narrative documentation. This mode of organisation enables both local and distant forms of participation. While many observers encounter the walk within their immediate surroundings, others engage in travel-to-witness practices, travelling across regions to experience the monks' passage. These dynamics generate forms of spatial coordination, such as anticipation, congregation, and mediated following, that are typically associated with tourism mobilities, despite the absence of commodified infrastructures.

Data sources, collection, and scope

Data were collected from publicly accessible digital sources documenting the Walk for Peace during its 112-day journey. The primary materials were sourced from the official Walk for Peace Facebook page, which provided daily route updates, livestreams, photos, and public statements regarding the walk's goals. Additional materials came from affiliated organisations' Facebook pages, capturing route documentation and communications. The dataset also included user-generated posts, reposts, and comments to reflect audience engagement and varied witnessing practices. All materials

Table 1. Overview of dataset across 112-day trajectory.

Data Type	Number	Temporal Coverage	Analytical Function
Social media posts	642	Day 1–112	Narrative framing and route documentation
Livestream recordings	78	Key segments	Embodied mobility and spatial congregation
Comment entries	1,204	Throughout	Affective response and witnessing
Images	312	Throughout	Visual analysis of commodification absence/presence

Source: Author's own work.

were publicly accessible, in accordance with ethical guidelines, and no personal identifiers beyond displayed usernames were recorded.

Data collection followed a chronological and event-based strategy, enabling analysis of how participation, visibility, and spatial coordination evolved over time. The final dataset comprised 642 social media posts, 78 livestreams, 1,204 comments, and 312 images, totalling approximately 210,000 words of textual content. Materials were archived systematically, with daily folders organised by platform and content type, and each item was assigned a unique identifier for analysis.

Particular attention was given to key moments such as state crossings, urban congregation points, and the final arrival in Washington, D.C., where engagement intensified. In addition to documenting the progression of the walk, the dataset was analysed to identify patterns of spectator participation, including both localised encounters and instances of travel-to-witness practices, where individuals reported travelling across regions to observe the monks' passage.

The role of digital platforms was central in this process. Social media functioned as a coordination mechanism, disseminating route information, enabling anticipation, and mobilising participants across distance. This digitally mediated organisation enabled dispersed audiences to follow, converge, and engage with the walk in ways resembling tourism-like mobilities, despite the absence of formal infrastructure or commercial promotion. A master spreadsheet documented metadata such as date, day number, location, and content type. [Table 1](#) offers an overview of the dataset.

Coding and analytical framework

The analysis employed a structured thematic coding framework aligned with the study's conceptualisation of non-extractive mobility. Coding was conducted manually using a spreadsheet-based analytical matrix, enabling systematic categorisation, filtering, and cross-referencing across temporal and spatial dimensions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saldaña, 2021).

Each data item was analysed across four dimensions aligned with the study's conceptual framework of non-extractive mobility. The first dimension focused on commodification devices, including pricing, ticketing, merchandise sales, sponsorship visibility, promotional branding, and itinerary packaging. Each item was systematically reviewed to determine whether these devices were present.

The second dimension emphasised practices of refusal and the structural minimisation of monetisation mechanisms. This included explicit rejections of commercialisation as well as a consistent lack of commercial infrastructure across materials.

The third dimension explored the circulation of non-monetary value. Items were analysed for indicators of voluntary hospitality, communal coordination, affective

Table 2. Analytical coding framework.

Analytical dimension	Indicators	Theoretical basis
Commodification devices	Pricing, ticketing, merchandise, sponsorships, and branding	Political economy of tourism
Practices of refusal	Explicit rejection or structural absence of monetisation	Decommodification scholarship
Non-monetary value circulation	Hospitality, affect, witnessing, travel-to-follow	Degrowth and diverse economies
Symbolic/digital capture	Hashtag repetition, narrative consolidation, engagement spikes	Platform capitalism

Source: Author's own work.

expressions such as gratitude and compassion, and instances of individuals travelling to experience the walk.

The fourth dimension examined the potential for symbolic or digital capture. Coding evaluated whether repeated imagery, hashtag consolidation, narrative framing, or increased engagement metrics might act as informal branding processes, despite the absence of formal commercialisation. Table 2 summarises the analytical framework.

This framework enables a systematic examination of how value is generated relationally rather than through exchange, and identifies how tourism-like encounters emerge through secondary mobilities.

Analytical procedure, rigour, and limitations

Thematic analysis followed an iterative process of familiarisation, coding, pattern identification, and theoretical interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding was initially deductive, informed by political economy and degrowth tourism scholarship, and subsequently refined inductively as patterns emerged from the data. Analytical memos were maintained throughout to document coding decisions and ensure transparency.

Analysis proceeded in three stages: verification of the structural absence of commodification devices; examination of the circulation of relational and affective values across time and space; and assessment of potential symbolic capture through digital amplification. Spreadsheet filtering functions enabled systematic comparison across days, locations, and platforms.

Methodological rigour was upheld through transparent data archiving, structured coding that aligns with theoretical frameworks, chronological and spatial cross-referencing, and iterative memoing. The spreadsheet-based matrix offers an auditable trail comparable to qualitative software while ensuring replicability.

The reliance on publicly shared digital materials confines the analysis to mediated representations rather than direct embodied co-presence. However, since digital circulation plays a vital role in the spatial organisation of the walk, a netnographic analysis is well-suited to address the research questions. This study emphasises mobility practices and economic infrastructures over theological interpretations.

By integrating systematic digital archiving, theoretically grounded coding, and iterative thematic analysis across a substantial dataset, the methodology ensures that claims about non-extractive mobility are empirically substantiated and analytically robust.

Findings

Structural absence and explicit refusal of commodification

The initial dimension of analysis examined the presence of commodification or productisation, including pricing mechanisms, sponsorships, merchandise, branding strategies, and packaged itineraries. Across the entire dataset, no evidence of ticketed access, paid registrations, merchandise sales, corporate sponsorships, donation drives, or tourism packaging was identified.

The absence of monetisation was not only structural but also discursively recognised by observers, who explicitly contrasted the walk with commercialised events. For example, one participant noted:

What strikes me most is that there's nothing to buy here. No tickets, no merchandise, no fundraising banners, just monks walking in silence across highways and towns. In a world where every gathering turns into a market opportunity, this feels almost radical.

(Comment thread, Day 54)

Such reflections indicate that decommodification was not merely an analytical interpretation but a central feature of how the event was perceived and experienced. The absence of market mechanisms became a defining element of the walk's moral and spatial distinctiveness.

Livestream recordings further emphasised this structural absence. Extended broadcasts, some lasting over thirty minutes, captured uninterrupted walking without any promotional overlays, branded graphics, or sponsorship acknowledgements. In response to one such recording, a viewer remarked:

I watched the entire walk today. There were no speeches, no politics, and no requests for money. Just steady steps and silence. It feels honest because nothing is being asked from us except to witness. (Livestream comment, Day 63)

These observations suggest that the walk was not organised as a consumable event but as an open, non-instrumental form of mobility, in which participation was not mediated by exchange. Spatially, gatherings formed along roadsides and public spaces without formal coordination, ticketing, or designated viewing areas. Rather than being staged, encounters emerged through decentralised, situational forms of organisation, supported by digital circulation rather than by market infrastructures.

Secondary mobilities, spectatorship and relational value circulation

The second analytical dimension examined the emergence of secondary mobilities and the circulation of relational value around the walk. Particular attention was given to hospitality, affective engagement, spectatorship, and travel-to-witness practices. While economic transactions were absent, the walk generated dense forms of relational and affective value, structured through voluntary participation and non-market exchange.

Images and livestreams frequently depicted local residents offering food and water to the monks. These acts were not organised through pricing or donation systems

but emerged through religious and ethically grounded practices of giving. One participant reflected:

We stood quietly by the road this morning with fruit and bottles of water. No one told us to come. No one asked for anything. When they passed, we bowed and placed the food in their bowls. It wasn't a transaction. It was simply an offering. I felt part of something peaceful just by being there. (Participant reflection, Day 71)

Such encounters demonstrate how value circulates through care, reciprocity, and presence, rather than through exchange. Hospitality functioned not as a service but as a relational practice, reinforcing connections between participants and the moving procession.

Beyond local encounters, the data also reveals the active role of spectators as mobile participants. Engagement was not limited to passive observation; rather, spectators contributed to the spatial dynamics of the walk through both co-presence and mobility. Emotional responses in comment threads illustrate how witnessing itself became a form of participation:

Every time I see them walking, it brings tears to my eyes. There is no shouting, no slogans, no signs, just silence and persistence. Watching them cross state lines without anger reminds me that peace can be powerful without being loud. (Comment thread, Day 88)

In this context, the walk's public visibility did not function as a commodified attraction but rather as a catalyst for attention, affective engagement, and participation. Visibility functioned not as tourism itself, but as a condition that encouraged witnessing, co-presence, and relational involvement among observers. This dynamic becomes particularly evident in travel-to-witness practices, in which individuals undertake journeys to encounter the walk. For instance:

We drove almost four hours just to stand by the roadside for a few minutes as they passed. There was no stage, no programme, no big event, just a brief moment of eye contact and silence. That was enough. (Comment thread, Day 95)

These statements demonstrate that spectators were not confined to local audiences but included individuals who actively travelled across regions to participate. Such practices resemble tourism-like mobilities because they involve intentional movement toward an event-based encounter, even though they were not organised through ticketing systems, destination marketing, tour operators, or commercial itineraries. While some participants may have been motivated by religious commitment, many engaged through witnessing, curiosity, solidarity, or a desire to experience the event firsthand. In this sense, the tourism-like qualities identified in the study are located primarily in the secondary mobilities generated around the walk rather than in the monks' movement itself.

These secondary mobilities should not be understood as conventional tourism activities. Although some spectators travelled considerable distances and may have utilised ordinary transport or accommodation infrastructures, these movements were not organised through tourism products, ticketing systems, destination marketing, or commercial itineraries associated with the walk itself.

Across posts, livestreams, and reflections, spectators played a central role in shaping the spatial organisation of the walk. Through presence, movement, and digital

engagement, they contributed to the emergence of distributed and decentralised forms of gathering, reinforcing the relational character of the mobility.

Visibility, digital coordination and the tension of symbolic capture

The final analytical dimension examined the role of digital visibility and the potential for symbolic or algorithmic capture. While no monetisation mechanisms were identified, digital platforms played a crucial role in coordinating participation and amplifying visibility.

Social media functioned as an infrastructure through which route information, timing, and narrative framing were disseminated. This enabled dispersed participants to anticipate, follow, and converge with the walk across different locations. As the journey progressed, engagement intensified, particularly as the walk approached Washington, D.C.

112 days. Thousands of miles. One silent journey for peace across America. From Texas highways to the nation's capital, every step carried a message without words. (Official page post, Day 109)

The repetition of temporal and spatial markers contributed to a more cohesive narrative identity, while livestream comments further reinforced the symbolic significance of the event:

This moment feels historic. From the very first step in Texas to standing here at the capital, they walked with nothing but faith and discipline. Watching this live makes me feel part of something bigger than politics. (Livestream comment, Day 112)

These patterns suggest that digital visibility facilitated forms of collective recognition and narrative consolidation, even in the absence of formal branding. At the same time, this visibility introduces a potential tension. While the walk resists commodification, increasing attention may generate forms of symbolic capital, particularly through platform metrics, repetition, and amplification.

However, there is no evidence that such visibility translated into economic capture. The culmination of the walk did not involve ticketed events, merchandise, or sponsorships. Instead, visibility remained decoupled from monetisation, highlighting a key feature of non-extractive mobility: the capacity to generate attention without converting it into exchange value.

Integrative pattern across data types

Across all data sources, consistent patterns emerge. Commodification mechanisms were structurally absent and discursively recognised. Non-monetary exchanges generated significant relational and affective value, while spectators actively contributed to spatial organisation through both local presence and travel-to-witness practices. Digital platforms facilitated coordination and visibility, enabling distributed participation without formal infrastructure.

These findings demonstrate that tourism-like encounters, such as gathering, witnessing, and mobility, can emerge from non-touristic practices without reliance on

commodification. The Walk for Peace generates a mobility formation characterised by non-extractive organisational dynamics, in which value is created relationally while mechanisms of economic capture remain largely inactive. In doing so, it reconfigures public space as a relational commons organised through presence, care, and attention rather than through market logics.

Discussion

Tourism, commodification, and the emergence of tourism-like encounters

Tourism scholarship has long positioned commodification as a defining feature of tourism systems, through which landscapes, cultures, and mobilities are transformed into exchangeable products embedded in circuits of capital accumulation (Bianchi, 2018; Britton, 1991; Harvey, 2002). Experiences are structured through pricing, branding, and promotional infrastructures, while even pilgrimage and spiritual mobilities are frequently incorporated into tourism economies through intermediaries and commodified services (Eade & Sallnow, 2000; Olsen, 2014).

The Walk for Peace complicates this prevailing assumption. Across 112 days of movement, the journey generated secondary mobilities among observers and followers, including gathering, anticipation, travel-to-witness practices, digitally mediated following, and symbolic culmination, that resemble forms of tourism mobility. Importantly, these mobilities emerged without reliance on ticketing, sponsorships, merchandise, destination marketing, or other formal tourism infrastructures. Rather than constituting tourism in itself, the case demonstrates how tourism-like encounters can emerge around non-touristic religious mobility through processes of witnessing, co-presence, and relational engagement. In this sense, the tourism-like qualities identified in the study are located not in the monks' movement itself, but in the secondary mobilities and spatial formations generated around it.

What might appear as heightened public visibility in this context does not operate as a commodified attraction. Instead, visibility functions as a catalyst for attention, affective engagement, and participation, encouraging spectators to gather, witness, and, in some cases, travel to encounter the walk. This distinction is analytically significant because visibility here does not generate consumption; rather, it facilitates the emergence of secondary mobilities that resemble tourism-like practices without being organised through commodification.

These findings suggest that commodification should be understood not as an ontological condition of tourism, but as an infrastructural arrangement that organises particular forms of mobility. By demonstrating that tourism-like spatial formations can arise in the absence of tourism, the study expands tourism geographies beyond the assumption that consumption is a necessary organising principle.

Non-extractive mobility and the limits of growth logics

Degrowth tourism scholarship has critically examined the structural dependence of tourism on expansion, increased arrivals, and economic scaling (Fletcher et al., 2019; Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019). However, much of this work remains situated at the

level of policy and critique, with fewer empirical accounts of how such principles are enacted in practice.

The Walk for Peace provides a micro-geographical instantiation of these dynamics. Mobility unfolded across multiple states without scaling strategies, franchising, or eventisation. While spectators engaged in travel-to-witness practices, these movements were neither packaged nor monetised. Participation emerged through decentralised coordination, largely facilitated by digital platforms, rather than through formal tourism infrastructures.

This distinction is crucial. Unlike alternative or volunteer tourism models that often reconfigure rather than eliminate commodification (Godfrey, 2018), the walk sustained a structural minimisation of economic capture throughout its trajectory. It did not replace one revenue stream with another or seek to convert participation into economic value. Instead, it maintained a consistent absence of pricing, branding, and sponsorship mechanisms. While participants remained embedded within broader capitalist infrastructures, including transport networks and digital platforms, these systems did not function as mechanisms for commodifying participation in the walk.

The case extends degrowth debates beyond critique toward embodied practice, demonstrating that tourism-like intensities of movement and congregation can occur without being configured as engines of growth. This shifts attention from reducing the impacts of tourism to rethinking how mobility itself can be organised outside the logics of accumulation.

Visibility, digital coordination, and the limits of symbolic capture

Contemporary mobilities are increasingly shaped by digital platforms that structure visibility, participation, and spatial coordination (Frenzel et al., 2022; Srnicek, 2017). In many tourism contexts, visibility is closely tied to value extraction, as attention is converted into economic gain through branding, data capture, and platform intermediation.

The Walk for Peace unfolded within these infrastructures, with social media playing a central role in coordinating movement and mobilising spectators across distance. Route updates, livestreams, and narrative circulation enabled dispersed audiences to anticipate, follow, and converge with the walk, facilitating forms of participation that resemble tourism-like mobilities.

As visibility intensified, particularly toward the journey's culmination in Washington, D.C., narrative coherence increased, and symbolic significance was amplified through repetition and collective framing. However, this accumulation of attention did not translate into monetisation. There were no ticketed events, merchandise, or sponsorship integrations, and no attempt to convert visibility into economic value.

This decoupling complicates deterministic interpretations of platform capitalism. While digital visibility creates conditions for value capture, it does not inevitably produce it. The case demonstrates that high visibility and low economic extraction can coexist, provided that commodification mechanisms remain structurally suspended. At the same time, the persistence of symbolic capital suggests that non-extractive mobility should be understood as a contingent and ongoing practice, rather than a stable or guaranteed condition.

Relational value, spectatorship, and secondary mobilities

The findings also extend scholarship on diverse economies and relational value (Zhu et al., 2024) by demonstrating how value can circulate through practices of hospitality, witnessing, and care in the absence of market exchange. Throughout the walk, local participants engaged in acts of alms-giving and support, while spectators contributed through both physical presence and digital engagement.

Crucially, spectators were not passive observers but active participants in the production of mobility. Through travel-to-witness practices, individuals undertook journeys to encounter the walk, thereby contributing to the emergence of distributed spatial formations. These forms of secondary mobility resemble tourism-like practices, not because they are commodified, but because they involve intentional movement toward an event-based encounter. While some participants may have been motivated by religious commitment, many engaged through witnessing, curiosity, solidarity, or a desire to experience the event firsthand.

This distinction reinforces the analytical separation between value creation and value capture. Relational intensity, expressed through affect, co-presence, and ethical engagement, does not necessarily require monetisation. The Walk for Peace demonstrates that rich experiential and social value can be generated without activating economic extraction mechanisms, thereby extending existing discussions of value co-creation beyond commercial service contexts.

Conceptualising non-extractive mobility

Building on these insights, non-extractive mobility can be defined as a form of movement that generates relational, affective, and communal value while minimising the infrastructural mechanisms of commodification. Non-extractive mobility does not imply complete separation from capitalist infrastructures. Participants may still rely on transport systems, digital platforms, accommodation services, and urban spatial networks. Rather, the concept refers to mobility formations in which commodification is not the primary organising principle for participation, coordination, and value circulation. Three characteristics are particularly significant.

First, it involves the sustained minimisation of economic capture, even under conditions of high visibility and spatial expansion. Second, it foregrounds relational value creation, structured through practices of hospitality, witnessing, and voluntary mobility rather than through consumption. Third, it operates within digitally mediated environments while resisting the automatic conversion of attention into exchange value, maintaining a degree of separation between visibility and monetisation.

This concept differs from alternative or ethical tourism models that remain embedded within market logics, as well as from macro-level degrowth frameworks. Instead, it highlights how non-extractive dynamics can be enacted through everyday mobility practices, offering a more grounded understanding of how value circulates outside commodified systems.

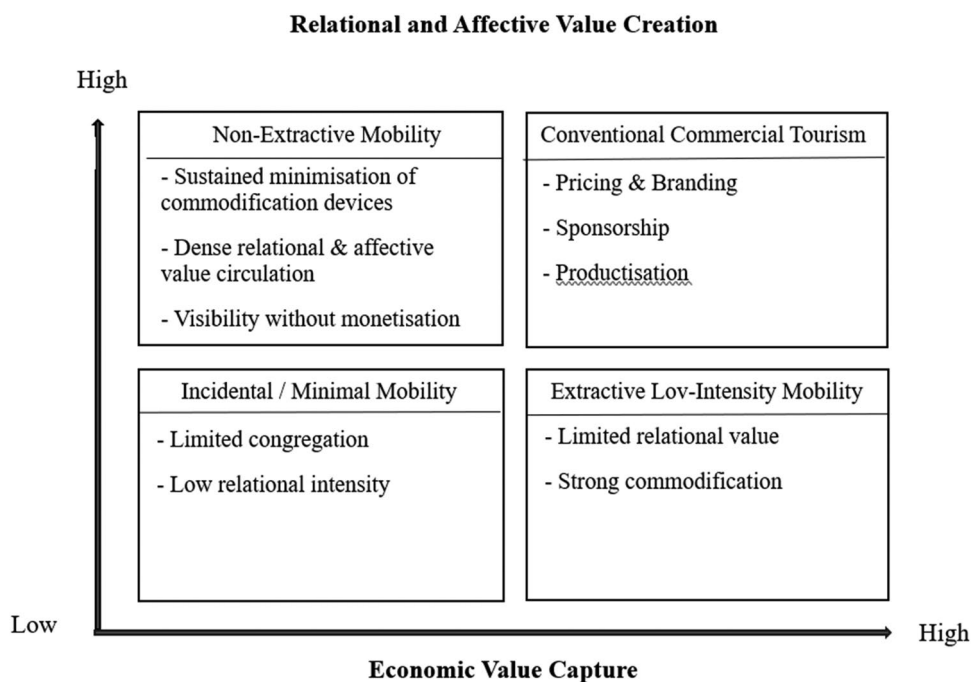


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of non-extractive mobility: Distinguishing value creation and value capture in tourism formations. Source: Author’s own work.

Reconfiguring tourism space: a conceptual framework

These findings invite a rethinking of tourism space. Rather than being defined by destinations, infrastructures, and consumption, tourism-like formations can be understood as relational configurations produced through movement, attention, and co-presence.

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) distinguishes between relational value creation and economic value capture. Non-extractive mobility occupies a position characterised by high relational value and low economic extraction, demonstrating that these dimensions can be analytically and empirically separated.

In this context, spaces such as roadsides, intersections, and national routes are reconfigured as relational commons, organised through witnessing and participation rather than consumption. Mobility itself becomes the primary organising principle, enabling tourism-like encounters to emerge without reliance on commodified infrastructures.

Conclusion

This study examined the Walk for Peace as a case of tourism-like mobility organised outside conventional devices of commodification. Over 112 days of movement from Texas to Washington, D.C., the journey generated congregation, travel-to-witness practices, digitally mediated following, and symbolic culmination, while systematically minimising mechanisms of pricing, branding, sponsorship, and productisation. Drawing on publicly accessible posts, livestream recordings, images, and participant reflections,

the analysis demonstrates that relational and affective value can circulate intensively across space without being converted into exchange value.

The primary theoretical contribution lies in distinguishing value creation from value capture within tourism-like mobilities. While political economy scholarship has extensively documented how tourism extracts value through commodified infrastructures, this study identifies a mobility formation in which high relational value creation coexists with low economic capture. The concept of non-extractive mobility thus provides a new analytical lens for tourism geographies, highlighting how mobility can generate meaningful social and spatial effects without activating mechanisms of economic extraction.

Second, the study advances the degrowth tourism debate by shifting attention from macro-level critique to embodied spatial practice. Rather than focusing solely on reducing the scale or impacts of tourism, the findings demonstrate how mobility can unfold without being structured by growth imperatives. In this context, tourism-like spatial relations, such as congregation, anticipation, and symbolic culmination, emerge through movement and participation, rather than through accumulation logics.

Third, the study contributes to platform tourism scholarship by showing that digital visibility does not inevitably translate into monetisation. The Walk for Peace achieved widespread visibility and narrative coherence without converting symbolic attention into economic value. This finding complicates deterministic interpretations of platform capitalism, suggesting that while digital infrastructures enable value capture, such outcomes remain contingent on how mobility is organised and mediated.

The conceptual framework presented in [Figure 1](#) further supports this contribution by distinguishing between relational value creation and economic value capture. By positioning mobility formations along these two dimensions, the framework moves beyond binary distinctions between tourism and non-tourism, enabling a more nuanced understanding of how tourism-like encounters emerge across different contexts.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study relies on publicly accessible digital materials and does not include interviews with organisers, participants, or local communities. While digital traces were integral to the walk's formation and visibility, ethnographic engagement could provide deeper insight into organisational intentions and lived experiences. Additionally, the focus on a single case within the United States limits the broader generalisability of the findings.

Future research could examine whether similar forms of non-extractive mobility emerge in other contexts, such as spiritual movements, activist mobilities, or community-based practices, and whether such dynamics can be sustained under conditions of institutionalisation or increased media attention. Comparative studies may further explore how visibility, symbolic capital, and monetisation interact across different mobility formations, as well as how non-extractive practices intersect with environmental sustainability and social justice concerns.

Overall, this study reframes tourism-like encounters not as predefined economic activities, but as spatial and relational effects that may emerge around mobility under particular conditions. The Walk for Peace demonstrates how non-touristic religious mobility can generate tourism-like spatial and relational formations through secondary mobilities of witnessing, gathering, and digitally coordinated participation while

maintaining a sustained resistance to commodification. It opens up new directions for understanding how mobility and the value it produces can be organised beyond the dominant logics of extraction, accumulation, and growth.

Author contributions

CRediT: **Vi Thi Tuong Tran:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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