

RELIGIOUS TOURISM - BETWEEN CONTENT AND DESIRE IN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

PhD Iordache Maria Carmen

Constantin Brâncoveanu University, Pitești, Faculty of Management Marketing in
Business Affaires Ramnicu Valcea
Email: iordache72@yahoo.com

Abstract: *Tourism and religion are two increasingly interconnected notions in many cultural contexts in the future, given the popularity and flexibility of both activities. Religious tourism is the pioneering form of tourism that began almost with the beginning of mankind. Since ancient times, religious destinations have not only been a part of the cultural landscape, but have also become a vital factor in local marketing and the economy of hosted destinations. The purpose of this article is to give an outline of a meta-analysis, which reflects the key areas of the perspective of the academic impact of the connection of religion and tourism, to generate a conceptual framework that may be useful to decision-makers in the industry, to understand the effects of and dimensions of religious tourism as well as the factors that affect the growth in religious tourism.*

Keywords: *religion, religious tourism, pilgrimage.*

JEL Classification: *L83, Z12, Z30.*

1. Religion - Tourism connection

Religion and tourism have always been inextricably linked. This pioneering form of tourism began in the form of religious pilgrimages, such as those of Christians traveling to Jerusalem or Muslims to Mecca. Pilgrimages have always been one of the dominant factors for motivating people to travel. Turning to religious history, it was found that major religions stimulated tourism globally as a basis for the spread of their own religious beliefs.

The founders of the main religions-the Prophet Muhammad (Islam), Jesus (Christianity), Moses (Judaism), Gautama Buddha (Buddhism), inspired various acts of pelerinaj. Pe next to the religions mentioned above there are several other religions, such as Hinduism, Sikhism and Jainism, which carry their own norms and values. They have their own special religious destinations. For example, the Pashupatinath Temple in Nepal is the most important pilgrimage destination of Hindus.

A sacred place was connected with events associated with the life of Holy faces, such as Jesus Christ and Muhammad. In many cases, a location can serve different religions. Jerusalem, for example, is one with the most famous paradigms of a holy city, which is the cradle of three religions: Christianity, Judaism and Islam. For Christians, Jerusalem is the city where Jesus Christ lived and was crucified. For Jews, Jerusalem is the capital city of their Kingdom, where they find King Solomon's temple, which was destroyed by the Romans (70 A.D.C.), today there is just a Wall, where he performed the pilgrimage to the Jewish, the most important thing (Egresi, 2012; Kurar, Akbaba & Art, 2015). However, Jerusalem is also a holy city for Muslims, because Muhammad lived and came into contact with God in this city (Moir, 2003).

In the Orthodox religion, a visit to the Holy Land is a matter of great importance. This desire was born when St. Helena (5 d.Hr.) revealed part of the Holy Cross and built some churches the places that today represent the center of Christianity.

In the past, Transport did not exist and this type of travel was quite dangerous. People traveled for months without food and water, and sometimes thieves or pirates threatened their lives (Moir, 2009). However, this difficult and dangerous journey was part of the purification process. The lack of necessary things made believers stronger and caused them to continue and save their souls from evil.

There are sources in the literature that indicate that since in the Byzantine era there were hotels in the Holy Land. These data show that religious tourism for monotheistic religions has a fairly early start (Selebou, 2016). On the other hand, for Muslims, travel to Mecca has the form of obligation. In the Islamic faith, this journey is a kind of obligation for believers, it is called in the Qur'an with the name Hajj. Religious Islamic texts show that Muslims, in addition to Mecca, must visit Medina and other sacred places, where Muhammad had lived (Balomenou et al., 2015; Turker, 2016).

Religion and experience are two important topics in tourism, the desire of pilgrims to be in a religious place being comparable to the desire of tourists to visit a tourist attraction. Evidence shows that religion plays a vital role in the lives of everyday people (Hunt, 2013), but also in tourism practices and destination selection (CollinsKreiner & Kliot, 2000). Religious travel is linked to constructive elements such as spiritual fulfillment, self-discovery, broadening the cultural horizon or visiting sacred places (CollinsKreiner, 2010). Although any tourist experience is largely based on the emotions and moods of the individual, in the case of religious tourism it gains greater importance among religious visitors, for spiritual and mental fulfillment or the creation of states of peace and happiness obtained. (Collins-Kreiner, 2018). Pilgrims perceive feelings of union with others, special fulfillment about their religious calling, considering themselves closer to God. The trip is perceived not only as a tourist experience, but also as a religious experience that has offered spiritual healing and piety in a framework focused on three central components, namely: tourist place, faith and action.

2. Research methodology

The research methodology is based on three main stages: identification of the literature, its selection, corroboration and synthesis of data.

The literature is based on a series of research, mostly conceptual, international studies that show a fundamental theoretical orientation about religious tourism. The methods used focus on conceptualizing and describing the notions of religion and religious tourism, and it is necessary to closely examine this concept in view of the opportunities it offers to both religious entities and the tourism industry.

An initial, informal evaluation of the literature, using computer sources, revealed that there is a lack of statistical data on the number of tourists and revenues related to religious tourism. In parallel with the increase in supply and demand, recent years have witnessed a significant increase in the number of researchers exploring different aspects of the Religion-Tourism link according to their various medium disciplines (history, theology, sociology, psychology, anthropology, economics and geography). These researchers publish hundreds of relevant articles every year, making a review paper on the topic almost impossible to compose.

Accordingly, there are a large number of articles, books, case studies and research papers and review has been written on the topic.

The purpose of this article is to give an outline of a meta-analysis, which reflects the key areas of the perspective of the academic impact of the connection of religion and tourism, to generate a conceptual framework that may be useful to decision-makers in the industry, to understand the effects of and dimensions of religious tourism as well as the factors that affect the growth in religious tourism.

3. Analysis of specialized literature

The history of religious tourism is undoubtedly connected with the existence of the human being on Earth, the notion of the sacredness of a place becoming crucial (Moir, 2003).

It is difficult to give a specific definition of religious tourism because cultural and religious trips overlap somewhat, most cultural tourists also visit religious destinations as part of their itinerary and are thus referred to as religious tourists.

As a general definition of religious tourism we can say that it represents those trips with the main reason for experiencing religious activities or products they induce, such as art, culture, traditions and architecture. This definition, however, does not reveal the real meaning and motivations of religious tourism.

First of all, religious tourism is a special form of cultural tourism, the main motivation being given by the deep desire of man to honor God (Skoultos and Vagionis, 2015). However, religious tourism also includes knowledge of religious heritage and Customs. Through a trip motivated by religion, tourists have the opportunity to study architecture and religious art, to strengthen faith in God. The tourist experience of a religious nature becomes more intense, as tourists participate in religious events, get in touch with other people and share their beliefs, and work in a religious environment. Mount Athos is a perfect example because tourists engage in rituals, pray and taste unique monastic cuisine (Tsarouchis, 2016).

Table no.1. Typology of definitions for religious tourism

El-Gohary, 2016: 125	Travel with the main motive of experimenting with religious forms, or the products they induce, such as art, culture, traditions, and architecture
Utomo & colab., 2019	A journey resulting from religious reasons, to a holy place for spiritual purposes and inner tranquility
Nicolaides & Grobler, 2017	Visiting religious attractions such as shrines, tombs, mosques, churches as well as trips to religious rituals and ceremonies.
Collins-Kreiner, 2010	Moving to areas with religious objectives in order to increase social and spiritual cohesion
FICCI, 2012	Travel with the basic motive of experiencing the religious form or the products they induce, such as art, culture, traditions and architecture
Kim, B., Kim, S.S., and King, B., 2016	That segment of cultural tourism associated with spiritual motives, which brings to the fore heritage sites
OMT, 2014	The trip contributes to the inner spiritual fulfillment and satisfaction of the tourist by improving the psychological and physical dimension of the individual
Rinschede, 1992	A specific form of Tourism ,whose participants are " motivated either partially or exclusively by religious reasons"

Source: made by the author on the basis of the studied bibliography

Managing this activity is even more challenging, with religion retaining a socially significant place in the preservation of culture and traditions, in the conditions of a constantly changing global society.

Religious tourism refers to all travel outside the usual environment for religious purposes, excluding travel for professional purposes (eg. priests traveling for work). Participation in wedding parties or funerals are generally classified under the heading visiting friends and relatives. However, in countries where these ceremonies have a strong religious connotation, it would be more appropriate to integrate them under the heading religion and pilgrimages (UNWTO, 1995).

In their reports, Mintel seeks to broaden their definition of " religious tourism " beyond individual motivation to emphasize a number of activities undertaken: visits sites, significant religious trails and festivals, participation in conferences, conventions, camps, etc. (religious significance.). Excludes trips to ancient sites (such as still temples and pyramids), which despite having a religious significance, are usually included in the segment of cultural tourism (Mintel, 2012).

By mixing these definitions and reflecting on the wide range of activities it encompasses, we can create a typology of faith-based tourist trips.

Table no. 2. Size of religious tourism products

Traditional pilgrimage	The word "pilgrimage" suggests that the participant undertakes a journey to a sacred place as an act of religious devotion.
Religious tourism	Visiting religious "tourist attractions" because they are sacred;
Church tourism	Visiting houses / places of prayer and shrines for cultural, historical and architectural reasons-not for any religious motivation
Religious events	This category includes crusades," conventions, " rallies, faith-based camps, meetings, and other events involving religiously motivated activities such as Holy Week processions.. Although some are annual events, many "events" are not site / location specific and are hosted at different locations on a regular basis.
Missionary and volunteering	This type of travel involves volunteer work, usually for a church or charity.
Withdrawal	They comprise a form of introspective activity of meditation or prayer, usually to (re)connect with God. Retreat facilities range from spartan to luxurious.
Student/youth activity	Short-term outings to residential "camps", often involving fun and adventure in addition to spiritual training and personal development.
Faith-based cruises	Leisure cruise tourism can be combined with visits to various cultural, historical, religious, natural areas and other tourist facilities.
Religious trails	From routes with the purpose of forgiving wrong deeds, asking for favors (health, success) or other religious reasons, to routes that find expression in cultural ones
Spiritual pilgrimage	This segment involves visiting a place in the usual environment, with the intention of spiritual growth - this could be religious, but also include non-religious, sacred or experiential intentions

Source: made by the author on the basis of the studied bibliography

To simplify things, in tourist practice the term "religious tourism" is used, but it is fully recognized that this designation is limited and subtly masks the terms used for custom activities.

Motivation for religious tourism is a combination of cultural, traditional and spiritual values that interact and lead to a travel decision. Religious tourists are generally motivated by their desire to know more and generate spiritual memories (Griffin, 2007).

It is very difficult to identify the characteristics of a religious tourist, since literature lacks this information. Rinshede (1992) argues that different reasons lie at the base of each trip, some being clear and others hidden. Religious tourism connects and interacts, to a large extent, with cultural tourism, because religious tourists every time they go to a sacred place behave like ordinary tourists, who eat in restaurants, buy souvenirs, stay in hotels and visit monuments.

The spiritual experience can also be satisfying for those tourists whose main motivation was not related to worship, but who felt that they had deepened their religious knowledge after visiting the Holy Land, the significance and atmosphere of the sites related to the life of Jesus strengthening their faith (Collins-Kreiner and Klot, 2000).

In some religious places, socio-demographic differences have led to increased demand for tourist products. Historically, the cult of saints and the Virgin Mary involved the search for cures for diseases, protection against diseases or the evocation of help to solve infertility. For example, the vast majority of visitors to holy places with the Virgin Mary in Europe are women who seek the beneficial interaction of the Virgin in matters related to fertility, health, the good of the family and those close to them (Gemzöe, 2005). In contrast, Mount Athos is an exclusively male sacred shrine (Andriotis, 2009), somewhat similar to Mecca, where travel is limited by gender, with most pilgrims being male. Various theoretical studies exploring the interpretation of the causal effects of religion on health, argue that religious involvement has positive health outcomes (e.g. lower depressive symptomatology, better health practices) especially in relation to the health-related well-being of older people. (Thoresen, 2002).

In addition, religious tourism has a political character and social expressions. There is no doubt that some nations are connected with an activity of a saint or own a monument

that has led tourists to consider it blessed. The Virgin of Guadalupe is an example that characterizes the Mexican nation, with Catholic tourists considering this top destination linked to their religion (Moira, 2009).

These situations illustrate that it is very difficult to clarify the characteristics of religious tourists. However, some studies create a religious tourist profile and indicate that religious tourists are about 40 years old, have higher education and a high level of culture (Tsarouchis, 2016).

4. The size of religious tourism

The links between religion and tourism are extremely varied and have numerous implications for sites, visitors and locals (Butler & Suntik, 2018). Religious tourism is one of the fastest growing types of tourism in the world, with the World Tourism Organization (2017) estimating that about 900 million national and international trips of a religious nature. Of those internationally, 50% are made in Asia and the Pacific and 40% in Europe. Every year about 30 million Hindu pilgrims go to the Ganges river in northern India, 50% of those who visit Saudi Arabia are religious tourists (Mecca and Medina alone attract about 80% of pilgrims) (Euromonitor, 2011).

According to estimates made by the US, religious tourism is a global industry on the American continent of 18 billion dollars, stating that in North America alone it is estimated at 10 billion dollars. In addition, one in four North American tourists are currently interested in holidays of a religious nature. The group ARC (Alliance of Religions and Conservation) claims that "it is impossible to obtain fully accurate figures for the number of pilgrims", because in many places, their number is not recorded. However, ARC estimates that more than 200 million people make pilgrimages each year - with the duration of the journey ranging from hours to days and sometimes months. But this figure is quite conservative, since it includes only tourists who visit the largest places of pilgrimage in the world.

The development of religious tourism can have a strong economic impact on the local community, as well as socio-cultural, political and environmental implications (Collins-Kreiner, 2010b; 2010c). Especially when dealing with small communities, the impact of religious tourism on the economy should not be underestimated. For example, Lourdes, a small town in the south of France with a population of 15,000, had in 1987 more than 300 shops, 370 hotels, 28 campsites, 45 restaurants, eight banks and 18 large garages for services (Vukonic, 1998). The city has three times as many rooms as the number of its population and has the largest number of hotels in France after Paris (Carroll, 2010). Practically we could say that the whole city is engaged in the service of pilgrims. Let us not forget that the sanctuary of Our Lady Of Lourdes is one of the most visited places in all of Christendom, with an estimated 300 million pilgrims visiting the site from 1860 to the present.

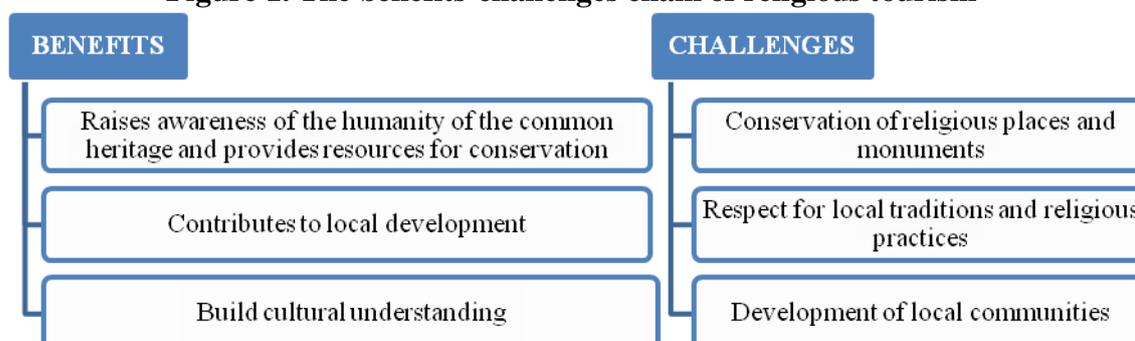
The excessive growth of religious tourism could put a huge strain on the existing infrastructure especially in smaller cities and less developed areas, but sometimes even in countries with great economic potential. For example, local authorities have restricted the increase in the number of pilgrims to Mecca by placing a quota on each country based on population (Reader, 2007; Henderson, 2011). Excessive development of this sector could be a threat to the sustainability of the religious site. Wall and Mathieson (2006: 9) warned that as more and more tourists begin to visit the holy places, their religious significance, which made them famous, will be diminished. The presence of a large number of tourists could inevitably lead to the marketing or exposure of the pilgrimage site too much and could make it difficult to observe religious conduct. The situation is even worse when visitors and locals are of another religion, especially when residents are Muslims and

visitors of another religion (Henderson 2003). That is why good site planning and management are necessary.

In general, due to the perceived economic and social benefits, the local population supports the development of religious tourism. Still, unlike other types of tourists, religious ones do not cause problems related to alcoholism and crime (Terzidou et al 2008). They mainly complained about the tourist traffic that caused overcrowding.

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) argues that "religious tourism can be one of the most effective tools for promotion and development on sustainable principles.

Figure 1. The benefits-challenges chain of religious tourism



Source: made by the author

The World Tourism Organization argues that religious tourism can be one of the most effective tools for promotion and development on sustainable principles. Religious tourism must generate benefits for the local community at the same time as effectively managing the challenges to which the local community is exposed due to it.

Table 3. Factors influencing growth in religious tourism

Factor	Influence
The quest for authenticity	Consumers ' drive for an authentic experience, such as getting to know the spiritual and cultural traditions associated with certain religions and places of pilgrimage
Diversification of the product offer	The emergence of tourism products based on religious motivation through which tourism providers seek to extend the traditional season of Tourism
Increase in the number of travel agencies	The emergence of more travel agencies that offer religious tourism, pilgrimages and church tours and that by default attract more tourists
Cheap flights	More and cheaper intra-European flights and longer flights at competitive prices, making travel easier (especially for Europeans)
Forced popularity of domestic travel	Many tourists choose to travel to their own country because of the perceived threat of terrorism
The search for the original	A global culture where people are looking for more unique vacations or more diversity in one trip
Personal faith	Religious travel seen as a way to check personal beliefs and spirituality
Cultural preservation	Recognizing that religion and spirituality can help preserve cultures and traditions
Increasing the number of shorter holidays	Changing work and leisure patterns with increasing short and frequent free periods
Average	High media profile offered to many of the world's great pilgrimage sites and religious shrines
Search for revenue streams	It must generate revenue for the preservation of religious and architectural heritage
Sustainable development	Global trend in the development of sustainable tourism products
Market expansion	A general expansion in the world tourism market
Internet	Widespread use of the Internet, online booking and smart use of technology and social media

Source: made by the author on the basis of the studied bibliography

The increase in the number of tourists has a fairly strong economic and social impact on Business and the local community. First of all, several accommodation spaces are built, giving most tourists the opportunity to stay in the province for several days, which leads to the multiplication of catering businesses, souvenirs, marketing of local products or other services (transport, recreation, entertainment, etc.) thus encouraging the opening of new businesses, the creation of new jobs that lead to the satisfaction of both tourists and locals.

Much of the commercial activity is represented by the sale of religious objects and other souvenirs, with many religious entities using this practice because such sales reach hundreds of millions of dollars annually (Fleischer, 2000). In addition to these religious objects, almost any place of pilgrimage has artisanal, handmade products or various preparations made by locals. Therefore, the economic impact associated with religious tourism is higher than in other market segments, because pilgrims and other religious travelers are avid buyers of religious souvenirs, in addition to adding other purchases. Because the economy of religious tourism is so lucrative, many religious groups are also willing to accept groups of ignorant tourists who visit and disrupt their religious centers.

We must point out that excessive commercialization, specific in some cases to tourism, can have a negative socio-cultural impact on sacred places. Consequently, a balance must be established so that the commercial and economic side of a religious place does not overshadow its spiritual mission and affect the environment and community in which the meeting of religious tourist demand and supply takes place.

5. Conclusions

Religious tourism and pilgrimage are substantial reasons for the global movement of people. Today, religious tourism is progressively becoming part of mass tourism, the main reasons underlying this phenomenon are highlighted in the following.

► First, religious institutions and organizations have more and more expenses related to priests, religious objects and activities, and the number of religious philanthropists who support them through donations is lower. Because of this, religious institutions and organizations need an increase in the number of tourists, even if they are not primarily motivated by religious reasons.

► Secondly, many governments try to regulate religious tourism legally, due to the benefits generated, such as the taxation of religious entities that practice tourism (taxes arising from the organization of pilgrimages, the sale of religious objects, donations collected) or those of a social nature (additional employment, increasing the quality of life of local people in the areas visited, etc.).

► Thirdly, various types of tourist enterprises are emerging that are trying to develop religious tourism due to the effects of tourism, which are economically beneficial. Today, tour operators are a crucial factor in the development of religious tourism in the international tourist market.

► Fourthly, today's visitors (tourists and hikers) have become more demanding and demand additional offers and services in destinations, including those of a religious nature.

► Fifth, the marketing of religious products and services has begun to take on impressive dimensions. Religious people see religious products and services as a means of transmitting their faith, while sellers see them as a means of spreading the faith. These two entities - religion and marketing, depend on the transmission of a message and the willingness of people to have faith. By different means - rituals, practices and myths, religions create and impose their role, while marketing does the same through advertising and shopping. Similarly, religion assumes acceptance of a belief system, and marketing

accepts belief about a product. Religions have faith communities, while marketing has brand communities. Religion and marketing have a symbiotic relationship, for example, religion is considered as a product, and products as religions.

The decision makers in the field of tourism are different actors from the public and private sectors, non-governmental organizations working in this sector. These decision -makers undertake various tourism policy measures and activities to improve and develop tourism in destinations, the area of operation expanding from local, regional, national to international level (Koufodontis and Gaki, 2019). They are the professionals who need to develop activities specific to all forms of selective tourism, including religious tourism, and governments to create a stimulating business environment in order to improve the efficiency of the overall tourism sector in order to increase the competitiveness of the destination (Kim et al., 2015).

Tour operators and religious entities are the main partners of Tourism decision makers in the process of formulating a set of measures and activities specific to tourism policy to stimulate the development of religious tourism. The level and quality of communications between tourism, policy makers and tour operators will directly influence the conditions for the development of religious tourism.

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