
RELIGION AND TOURISM IN SLOVAKIA

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Abstract

The paper deals with the nature, current state and prospects of tourism, associated with gaining religious experiences via visiting places of pilgrimage and sacred sites, or participating in festivals. This phenomenon has its spiritual and material roots in the Western culture, but it is becoming a significant social phenomenon of tourism in Slovakia.

Keywords: religious tourism, pilgrimage, missionary tourism

1. Introduction

This paper deals with the interaction between secular approaches to tourism on the one hand, and religious practice, on the other hand. It defines the nature of religious tourism as a part of tourism in general, which is characterized by a deliberate search for spiritual benefit of active participants, while regarding the current structure of religious population and also the perspective of its development in Slovakia. It presents the results obtained from the field surveys carried out in spiritual tourist sites in Asia and Europe, and compares them with the relevant surveys in Slovakia. It also describes the significance and identity of individual destinations, festivals and pilgrimage sites and outlines their contribution to both travel agencies, development of local governments, as well as to meeting the spiritual needs of active tourists.

2. Religious tourism and pilgrimage

The World Travel Organisation (WTO) defines tourism as “the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited” [1]. Religious or spiritual tourists and pilgrims exactly fit to this definition of the persons travelling away from their home for a specific time and with a specific main objective: a religious motive of the journey. To better understand the difference between the common concepts of religious tourism and pilgrimage tourism, let us present their most frequent definitions.

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According to Vukonic [2], religious tourism involves numerous spiritual sights and related services, which are frequently visited for spiritual and religious reasons. According to this definition, the sights can be divided into two groups: sanctuaries and pilgrimage sites. Sanctuaries include the places where relics or images are venerated. Pilgrimage sites are famous for a miracle that happened there, while the miraculous effect persists. The best-known examples include Lourdes in France. Various festivals with religious implications also represent an element of religious tourism. Sheckley [3] provides the basic classification of religion-based attractions:

- Natural phenomena (lakes, mountains, islands, forests),
- Buildings and sights built for the purpose of religious rites,
- Buildings with religious motives,
- Special events with signs of religious happenings in ‘non-religious’ places,
- Religious secular monuments dedicated to tragedies or politically significant events (prisons of Nelson Mandela on Robben Island).

According to Blackwell [4], religious tourism includes all types of journeys motivated by religion where the destination is a religious place. These places or monuments may not be associated with a specific religion, since several religions have disappeared in the history of humankind, while their monuments (monasteries, shrines, statues, etc.) and cultural heritage still persist. Typical example of the religious monuments attracting general public without particular confession may be, for example, the sights shown in the movie ‘The Da Vinci Code’ and its sequel ‘The Angels and Demons’.

By clarifying the term ‘pilgrimage’ and the related ‘pilgrimage tourism’, we reveal a certain difference. A tourist-pilgrim expects primarily spiritual experience, while the aim of his holiday activities is deeper sensation and more thorough understanding of the relationships and mysteries of this world. When travelling, the tourists meet other people, better recognize their fellow travellers, and learn how to better understand and perceive other individuals. Pilgrimage becomes a great opportunity to meet other people. In his message to the 23rd World Day of Tourism, Pope John Paul II pointed out that leisure time and tourism could compensate the lack of human contact, which people often miss in their everyday life.

A common feature of pilgrimage and religious tourism is destination. A significant difference is in the behaviour and motivation of individual participants. While pilgrims repeatedly appeal to their Lord during their journey and are willing to bear a certain amount of suffering, religious tourists rather incline to visiting sacred sites without deeper consideration. In most cases, there is also an economic contrast: the pilgrims are known for their austerity and modesty, aim of their journey (the pilgrimage) is also a manifestation of a certain sacrifice; while in the case of religious tourists, comfortable accommodation, transport by luxury coach to sites etc. are not an exception.

Another difference is in terms of the product of journey. While visiting sites in religious tourism is associated with buying souvenirs, pilgrimage tourism collects the experiences significantly affecting their spiritual lives. Motivation of

both groups also differs and their expectations are diverse. The key motivation and expectations for pilgrimage tourists is the completion of the journey (pilgrimage), enrichment of their spiritual life or attaining the feeling of self-satisfaction.

Thus, the pilgrimage differs from religious tourism in achieving a spiritual goal, breaking through the barriers towards it and attaining self-satisfaction.

3. Motivation for pilgrimage, religious tourism, events and festivals

Religious tourism has a long history. The first ever cases of tourism date back to the Egyptian empire, where religious ceremonies were attended by people from far and wide. When coming to the venues, those people were offered accommodation and food by local merchants. This laid the basis of modern tourism.

In subsequent years, religious tourism was widespread mainly in Greece. Spa and religious monuments became popular tourist destinations and the Greek religious festivals also gained considerable importance. The Olympic Games in 776 BC in the ancient Greece represented the best example of the first large-scale religion-related event [5].

The first travel writer was Herodotus who visited various places of pilgrimage from Athens to Egypt while making records of his travels. Around the year 1000 BC, Solomon had built the Temple in Jerusalem, which thus became the first shrine of the Jewish community. During the Roman Empire, people travelled for various reasons - religious, business, education and military.

Jesus himself often travelled between Jerusalem and Galilee on a pilgrimage and to celebrate the holidays. After his death, his apostles and followers travelled all over the Roman Empire spreading the gospel. Around 300 AD, the Holy Land became the top destination for travellers [6]. Three most important pilgrims of that time were Helena - the mother of the Constantine the Great; Egeria – a woman from the Western Roman Empire and an unknown traveller called the Pilgrim of Bordeaux [7].

In the 4th century, Helena travelled to Jerusalem, where she discovered the cross Jesus Christ died on. Egeria travelled to Egypt, Israel and Syria, writing her pilgrimage diary. An unknown pilgrim of Bordeaux set out his pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 333 AD, and wrote there the first pilgrimage guide. His chronicle contained travel information, descriptions of temples, monuments, distances and even the tips on where to dine.

In the 5th century AD, after the collapse of the Roman Empire, the journeys became dangerous, which made people spend their free time at home instead of travelling. At that time, Christian holidays became the days free from work with the only compulsory activity of visiting the temple.

In the Middle Ages, long trips became as popular as in the earlier centuries, and pilgrimage turned into the main reason for travel. Jerusalem, Rome or later Canterbury, the prominent pilgrimage centre in the UK, became the most visited places [8].

“Onset the new millennium was marked by the character of the jubilee of the year 2000 AD (The Holy Year). Many Christian monuments were visited by many people; just the number of visitors to Rome, Israel and Egypt grew from 10 to 20 million.” [7] The recent years witnessed the attractiveness of short-term missions, lasting 1-3 days, associated mainly with visiting sacred sites and pilgrimage places, popular mainly with young people, individual travellers or churches. It was interesting the impact of September 11, 2001, which brought about the decrease of the global tourism market. However, soon after, religious pilgrimage and tourism were the first to revive; temples, religious monuments and places of pilgrimage were visited by tourists as an expression of solidarity. Modern age and comfortable travel connections have prepared favourable conditions for a group of travellers willing to move a few thousand miles to a pilgrim action. In the Catholic Church, Pope John Paul II was a frequent traveller followed by thousands of people. Currently, there are numerous tourist agencies all over the world, focusing on the specific destinations of pilgrimage or religious tourism.

4. Travelling possibilities

Kevin Wright [9] established five categories for various types of Christian tourists: pilgrimage and tourism, missionary tourism, fellowship vacations, Christian events and retreats, and Christian attractions.

4.1. Pilgrimage and tourism

Pilgrimage is an important component of the Christian spiritual life. Many Christians view their lives as a pilgrim's path, which is the path towards God. In the world of travelling, Christian pilgrimage is a route to the Holy knowledge with spiritual intent or purpose. Reasons for travelling are different; for some people, it is finding the roots of Christianity, for others, visiting destinations where they can touch the places where Jesus spent his life. The individuals identify themselves with amusement, which offers them various kinds of consuming, exciting show of disparate pictures, rhythms, exotic fads etc. They act under the media pressure of two antagonistic tendencies. On one hand, they live in the frame of mass culture which offers uniformity, standardization, homogenization, hyperconsumption. On the other hand, their pop-culture resistance leads to extreme individualism, to an effort to differentiate from the others [10]. For some of them, religion is a way to avoid the stereotype.

4.2. Missionary tourism

If pilgrimage is the heart of Christian tourism, missions are its blood. Missionary tourism is an indispensable part of the Christian faith, theology and tradition. In 1990, the Methodist Church had 20,000 employees; today there are 100 000 of them. They visit the missions all around the world; their trips are

mostly short and medium term. The key objective of missionary tourism is the Gospel, construction of churches and temples in both Christian and non-Christian communities, as well as the aid in humanitarian actions [11].

4.3. Fellowship vacations

A new rapidly growing segment of Christian tourism is travelling with a community of people, called fraternal holidays. Its aim does not necessarily have to be a religious site or a place of pilgrimage; it may be just going on a summer vacation or a cruise, however, with the community of people with similar religious orientation.

4.4. Christian events and retreats

Christians have gathered on the occasion of various events, meetings and gatherings since the beginning of the current era. Some come for prayer or ceremony, others because of some crucial gatherings. Visit of Pope may attract a million of visitors, similarly to other religious communities e.g. in India. Such events comprise various festivals, concerts, educational workshops, youth conferences, etc.

4.5. Christian attractions

What is Disneyland to children or Louvre in Paris to art fans is the Holy Land Experience in Orlando, Florida for Christians in the United States. It is a biblical park built in 2001, annually visited by more than 200,000 visitors. It also provides the facilities such as theatre, museum and a welcome centre [13].

5. Pilgrimage and religious tourism in Slovakia

Slovak Republic undoubtedly belongs to the Christian countries of Europe in terms of statistical significance pursuing religious structure in the post-revolutionary censuses (1991: 60.43% Roman Catholics, 3.39% Greek Catholics; 2001: 68.9% Roman Catholics, 4.1% Greek Catholics). Political and social changes of the year 1989 allowed the population in Slovakia to freely practice pilgrimage activities as a part of the religious activities.

Currently, there are over 55 places of pilgrimage in Slovakia, of which about eight are Greek Catholic (Figure 1). Expansion of the Marian pilgrimage sites occurred mainly in the 17th to 19th centuries. The pilgrimage places in this area were only occasionally established due to the apparitions of the Virgin Mary, but mainly as a result of many spiritual healing, prayers heard, good life decisions taken at these locations, and some based on physical healing. Pilgrimages are held usually on the occasion of the Marian feasts, especially in July, August and September.

Most often, pilgrimages are organised on the feast of the Ascension of the Virgin Mary (15 August), the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (8 September) and the memory of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (16 July). In Slovakia, there is a great tradition of pilgrimage on the occasion of the feast of the Virgin Mary, patroness of Slovakia on 15 September, which is a bank holiday in the Slovak Republic. Believers gather at the pilgrimage sites in Slovakia also on the anniversary of the consecration of St. Mary's Basilica in Rome - Our Lady of the Snows (August); in October, pilgrimage binds to the Protection of the Virgin Mary Day (1 October) and the memory of Our Lady of the Rosary (7 October).

In addition to the renowned pilgrimage sites such as Marianka near Bratislava, Šaštín-Stráže, Rajecká Lesná, Staré Hory and Mariánska hora in Levoča, Catholic believers come to many less-known sites in order to express respect for the Mother of God and gain strength and hope. For example, believers gather at the gracious statue of the Virgin Mary feeding the baby Jesus in the village of Višňové near Žilina. The statue was made by an unknown early Baroque master in the 17th century and placed in the church donated in 1514 by mayor Wišňovský. In the mid-18th century, the pilgrimage temple was visited by John Zaffiro, a Kremnica citizen, and his sick daughter. When the girl healed, he moved to Višňové and initiated the building of a spacious pilgrimage temple. Paintings in the interior are the work of Joseph Hanula, a Slovak painter of the years 1901-1902.

There are also shrines in other places, e.g. in a small village of Bôrka near Rožňava in the south-east of Slovakia, where the present church dating back to 1732 is dedicated to Our Lady of Mount Carmel, in the village of Bobrov near Námestovo, in Nová Ves over Žitava, in Báč near Dunajská Streda, in the village of Dunajská Lužná near Bratislava and many other.

The major Greek Catholic pilgrimage sites include the village of Klokočka (district of Michalovce) with a Greek Catholic temple dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, the village of Šášov and many more. Greek Catholic believers come to Rafajovce (district of Vranov), to the local temple dedicated to the Nativity of Mary, to Malá Vieska near Košice and other places.

The latest Greek Catholic Marian pilgrimage site is Litmanová, officially acknowledged on 7 September 2008, where the believers have gathered in large numbers for already 18 years.

Travel, leisure time and holidays can be spent in a variety of ways. Many people are keen on walking or hiking, there are more and more fans of the ski and water tourism, moto-tourism, as well as spa and agro-tourism. Spiritual experiences, deeper and more thorough understanding of the world can be also gained by the pilgrimage to places of cultural heritage [13].

This is the aim of religious tourism - visiting sacred sites and sacred sights associated with a particular cult, mysterious spirituality, and special revelations. Pilgrimages to shrines have always been a part of the cultural history of Europe, where Christianity was the dominant force determining the evolution of society and history. The current development of religious tourism within Europe is of a

multi-confessional character, thus contributing to the awareness of the European multiculturalism and enhancing the feeling of common identity of the nations within the European Union.

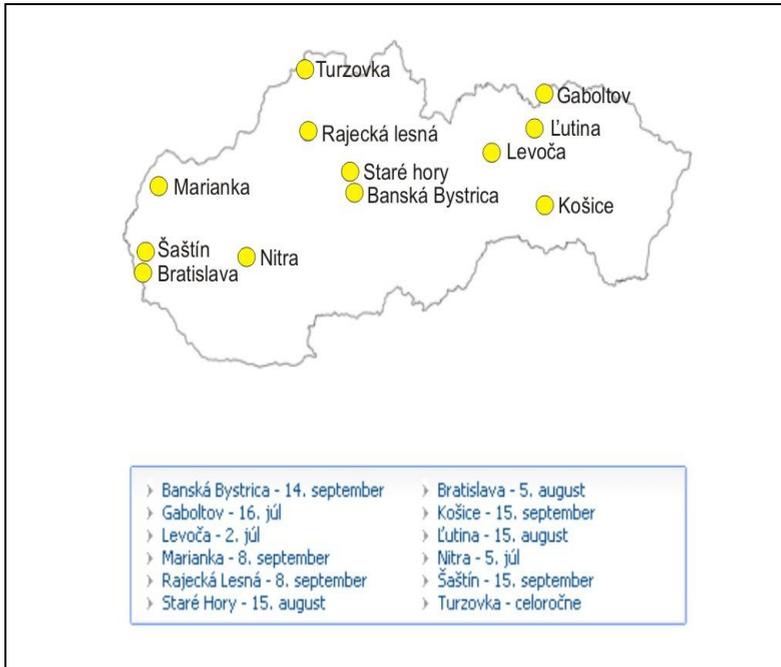


Figure 1. Pilgrimage and religious tourism in Slovakia.

Travel Agencies in Slovakia have flexibly responded to the client requests of religious tourism by offering the tours and pilgrimage to sacred monuments such as churches, chapels, and Calvary Crosses. The map of tourist trails comprises for example, I-23 route connecting the pilgrimage sites of three countries: Czestochowa in Poland, Levoča in Slovakia and Mariazell in Austria. The international Marian trail in Slovakia passes through the oldest and most important pilgrimage places such as Levoča, Staré Hory, Rajecká Lesná, Šaštín and Marianka.

We believe that the offer of pilgrimage tours leading to the French Lourdes, Catalan Montserrat, Portuguese Fatima and Medjugorje in Bosnia and Herzegovina will soon include Slovakia. The area of Slovakia, small in size, yet with plenty of sacral monuments, has a lot to offer.

The essential element of Catholic spirituality is undoubtedly Marian devotion, and it therefore cannot be omitted in the life of the believers. The Marian cult has always been associated with pilgrimage to the Marian shrines. Pilgrimages are a long-term element of the European as well as Slovak history. The important Marian pilgrimage site in Slovakia is Staré Hory, the most visited pilgrimage site in central Slovakia. Its importance was emphasized in 1990 by awarding the Church of the Visitation in Staré Hory the title of Basilica Minor.

The picture about the actual facts, the manner in which we interpret and perceive everyday reality, this form of social consciousness has been called social representation [14].

6. Conclusions

Since 1989, religious and pilgrimage tourism in Slovakia represents a relatively new phenomenon. Regarding the development of tourism, it is necessary to increase the demands for the quality of environment, transportation, material-technical base, caterers, etc., which is the challenge that the tourist industry has to deal with seriously. The pilgrimage sites in Eastern Slovakia are specific for being common for two or in some cases even three religions, gaining thereby an ecumenical character and acquiring a higher social dimension.

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