
RELIGIOUSNESS AND RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN SLOVAKIA CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Religious tourism represents an important segment of cultural tourism going through a renaissance in the recent period. Pilgrim tourism is currently being determined by new trends, such as increasing variety of religious events, pilgrimage places and sacred sites enjoying more popularity also from the part of the tourists for whom the spiritual dimension is of lesser or no importance, the aim of today's pilgrims being no longer only a visit of a religious landmark or event but also other 'secular' attractions and sites, pilgrimage journeys becoming more popular, etc. Such trends are also finding their way to Slovakia – a country perceived as strongly Christian from abroad as well as by its own population. A comprehensive view on the status of using Slovakia's great potential for religious tourism is absent; a systematic research of religious tourism on the national level is unsatisfactory. The aim of this case study is to make up a typology of religious landmarks and attractions related to the specifics and historical development of the Slovak territory.

Keywords: religiousness, religious tourism, Slovakia, pilgrim's journey, localizations factors

1. Introduction

Religious tourism is one of the most ancient and most wide-spread forms of travelling [1, 2] and currently remains one of the most important forms of tourism, not only in terms of its volume but also of its extent [3]. Religious tourism has been the subject of scientific study mainly recently (approximately last 15 years), chiefly in terms of its standing in the overall structure of tourism, protection of cultural heritage, of its historical aspect as well as in terms of its contribution to the regional development. For the development of regional policies and strategies, several empirical studies have been conducted recently. These resources are mostly based on research of the history of religiosity, geography of religions related to regional tourism, etc. Pilgrimage, sites of

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religious tourism over the world and their current use in the form of modern tourism have their roots also in regional differences of the development of denominational differences [4, 5].

Several differences can be found between a tourist and a pilgrim consisting mainly in the motives of their travel. A tourist comes to historical sites, places with extraordinary scenery or beneficent to physical health (spa) etc., in order to get culturally enriched, see the sights, experience the beneficial effects of the water on human organism, etc. A pilgrim on the other hand, in addition to admiring the beauty of nature and sights, endeavours on his or her tour to live into places where saints lived or to visit 'places of grace'. These places mean encouragement and succour for the life of pilgrims. That means a pilgrim deliberately seeks also a spiritual dimension of the tour. A pilgrimage is thus a reflection of a specific search for a 'deity' that people travel to when setting out for a journey to a place deserving reverence [6]. Religious travel is closely linked to other forms of travel – e.g. visiting nearby summer or winter destinations (e.g. Međugorje vs. Adriatic summer resorts, Lourdes vs. the Pyrenees and the like) and various services such as catering and boarding [7]. These products and services are thus complementary creating together one inseparable package of services. A destination of religious tourism is always very closely linked to the existence of relevant infrastructure in the area [8], by which we mean: e.g. important sacred buildings, objects or landmarks linked to important religious events or events in religious history, existence of religious traditions and the like. In terms of marketing [9], religious tourism as a free-standing product is rather exceptional, and even in Slovakia more attention is being paid to it within marketing strategies of the development of tourism in regions.

2. Religiosity of the Slovak population in the course of time

Religiosity of the population has direct impacts on forming the potential for religious tourism. By a religious denomination we mean participation of inhabitants in relationship to the religious life of one of Churches (religious group). Historically, affiliation to religion formed individual elements of material, spiritual and social culture as well - as of folklore expression and popular piety. Christendom has had a long tradition in Slovakia, beginning its spread as soon as in the first centuries of our era [10], with the dominance of the Catholic Church both in the past and present. Rather important time for mass development of religious tourism in Slovakia was the period after the recatholisation (ca. 17th and 18th centuries) when more important religious sites were visited in greater numbers during religious festivals and various pilgrimages with the cult of saints became more wide-spread.

Present status of population's religiosity in Slovakia is considerably influenced, chiefly by the events after the Second World War when Catholic schools were taken over by the state after 1945 [11]; and later in 1948, by the oppression of the Church in the form of property confiscation, elimination of

Christian press, priest seminars and monasteries, etc. Gradually, the Church was completely under the control of the state [12]. As a result, most popular activities related to public pilgrimages or pilgrim tourism as such were subdued. After the fall of communism in 1989, the relationship between the Church and state began to be gradually formed to the present shape.

According to the results of last population and housing census in 2011, the most numerous registered Churches in Slovakia on the national level were: a) Roman Catholic Church (62%), b) Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (5.9%), c) Greek Catholic Church (3.8%) and d) Reformed Christian Church in Slovakia (1.8%). Compared to the data from the census in 2001, the number of inhabitants adhering to the above mentioned Churches in Slovakia has decreased. On the other hand, the number of 'unchurched' inhabitants increased, compared to 2001. Regions with most inhabitants of the Roman Catholic denomination are: in Western Slovakia, mainly Trnava and the surrounding area, Záhorie, Nitra and surrounding area, Upper Nitra; in Central Slovakia Tekov; in the North of the country Kysuce, Upper Orava, Lower Liptov; and in the East of the country chiefly the region around Spiš. At the same time the members of the Roman Catholic Church are significantly more numerous than the members of other denominations in all Slovak districts.

3. The sites of religious tourism in Slovakia

As hinted above, also due to relatively diversified and historically conditioned denominational structure of the population in Slovakia, conditions for the formation of tourist destinations with great deal of religious tourism have been created. These sites of religious tourism are characterised by strong religious awareness manifested in the architecture of sacred shrines or folklore expression of the local inhabitants. Sites of religious tourism are relatively numerous in Slovakia with local, regional, national but also supranational importance. The character of these places of pilgrimage is often marked by their historical development; they are also differentiated by the motives of the visitors or tourists. In our literature, we haven't encountered a unified categorization of religious tourism places comprehensively describing them. Available literature on this topic is oriented on the spiritual dimension of pilgrimages in Christianity [6, 13-15], further on the analysis of religious tourism in terms of its localizing conditions [16, 17] or on the geography of religions [18-21]. In the following text we present an outline of comprehensive categorization of the sites in terms of most frequent motives of the participants in the religious tourism in Slovakia.

3.1. Sacred buildings

They often transcend their religious character having also a cultural dimension which can have supranational significance, chiefly in terms of architecture, national history and culture. Very often in the historical cores of towns, they form a part of the identity and culture of individual localities. The

building of churches in the area of today's Slovakia can be very likely dated back to the 9th century – i.e. during the rise of the Great Moravian Empire. In Slovakia, one can find unique buildings from the Romanesque period up to the present modern sacred architecture. Moreover, in the churches are often placed miraculous statues and images as central objects of veneration by pilgrims since ca. 11th century. The beginnings of veneration of these miraculous statues and images in the Western rite are often random or customary, bound to a specific artefact. On the other hand, the objects venerated by the pilgrims of the Eastern rite include both the original icon as well as any other one marked in an adequate way [22]. In our conditions, veneration of miraculous statues and images is very wide-spread, most often bound to the Marian cult. Individual sacred buildings may be further specified according to their status, as follows.

3.1.1. Basilicas

Basilicas have an extraordinary significance for pilgrims among all the sacred buildings. The title basilica minor is used: a) for churches built in basilical architectonic style or b) in our conditions more frequently, for the churches endowed with name as an honorary papal title due to their ancient origin, extraordinary importance, intensity or extent of pastoral activity. Faithful visiting such places and meeting certain other conditions are endowed with spiritual benefits (plenary indulgences). In Slovakia there are 12 churches with the title of Basilica minor.

3.1.2. Cathedrals and concathedrals

Cathedral is a name for the main church in a diocese or in an eparchy, or one containing a seat of a bishop or seniorate. If a bishop has two churches containing his seat, the other one is called concathedral.

3.1.3. Churches

These sacred buildings or complexes serve for liturgy or other religious purposes, representing also a very important part of religious tourism in our country. In each town or village in Slovakia there is at least one Catholic, Evangelical or Orthodox Church. In addition to regular services (in recreation areas attended also by the visitors or tourists) feast days are celebrated nearly everywhere in our country (at that time family and friends are often visited) with cultural events such as concerts, various lectures, etc. Some of them are important mainly due to their history and architecture, e.g.: the wooden churches in Eastern Slovakia, Saint James church in Levoča, the monasterial complex in Hronský Beňadik, the monasterial complex Jasov, Saint Adalbert church in Gaboltov and many others. These are listed in detail e.g. in [V. Judák, *Kalvárie a krížové cesty na Slovensku*, 2013, http://paulus.frcth.uniba.sk/atlas/documents/kalvarie_krizove_cesty.pdf, accessed on September 16, 2013], or on

the web pages of individual Slovak dioceses. Churches often form a part of a larger complex of sacred buildings complemented by monasteries and monastery gardens. For tourists these are also very often objects of interest, usually providing boarding and catering services, housing galleries, museums and the like.

3.2. Other pilgrimage places

In addition to sacred buildings, religious tourism is also frequent on other pilgrimage places such as calvaries (ways of the Cross), places spontaneously connected with celestial apparitions, graves of saints, places related to the lives of saints, ruins of churches, hermitages and monasteries and the like.

3.2.1. Calvaries

Are open-air places or moderate slopes where the faithful take part in prayers or Stations of the Cross. Most frequently they are a set of shrines – chapels depicting a group of characters portraying the crucifixion of Jesus Christ or the entire Way of the Cross. Slovakia is one of the countries with the highest number of such structures in Europe – as many as 109 calvaries are recorded [23]. History of most Slovak calvaries goes back to the 17th century, the oldest calvary in our country being in Banská Štiavnica – dating back to the late 15th century. The most important calvaries are in Bratislava, Košice and Prešov. Most of them can be found in Western Slovakia, mainly in Trnava region).

3.3. Pilgrimages to the places spontaneously associated with ‘celestial apparitions’

These are places of apparition of saints (most often Virgin Mary), ecclesiastically acknowledged, in the process of approval, or the process has not yet started (from the ecclesiastical viewpoint, Church authorities permit pilgrimages for the ‘spiritual wellbeing of the faithful people’). History of the oldest pilgrimage place of this kind in our country goes back to the 1850’s, but sacred buildings are still under construction in various places. The most important pilgrimage places of this kind in our country are Litmanová, Turzovka and Dechtice.

3.3.1. Graves of saints

Important instances of religious tourism are also pilgrimages to the graves of saints, mainly during the anniversaries of their deaths, i.e. to ones already beatified or canonised, or to the graves of the people who died with the fame of sanctity. Important instances include: Podunajské Biskupice, Bratislava – Vajnory, Pavlovce nad Uhom – various pilgrimages take place here during the year: Pilgrimage of Joy for youth (a 3-day convention, the 59th pilgrimage took

place in 2013, attendance over 250 people), Pilgrimage of Maturity (a 3-day convention, the 13th pilgrimage took place in 2013, attendance over 257 people), Pilgrimage of Families (the 17th pilgrimage took place in 2013), etc.

Pilgrimages to the relics of saints can also be included here. Relics of saints are also preserved in cathedrals and basilicas (e.g. Saint John Baptist cathedral in Trnava, Saint Martin cathedral in Bratislava, Saint John Baptist cathedral in Prešov, etc.).

3.4. *New forms of religious tourism*

In distinction to the previous categories, new forms of religious tourism have had a relatively short history – coming to our country after 1989. In this case individual activities are not primarily related to the so-called localising conditions of tourism, such as churches, statues, paintings, relics, etc. The primary objective of tourists – very often young people – is to take part in a social convention, such as a festival of religious or gospel music, other cultural or educational programs designed for spiritual recreation. They are characterised by great number of attendants from the outside of the local community or from abroad, they may be regular (annual or more frequent) or thematically oriented (e.g. occasioned by the Year of faith, anniversary of the coming of Saints Cyril and Methodius to our country and the like). These events take place most often in public places from towns or villages, in amphitheatres or in sports areas conditioned to take in greater audiences. Localising conditions often play a secondary role, however (most often churches – where accompanying events such as adorations, meditation in silence, lectures, and the like, take place.) The most important festival of this kind in our country is the gospel festival Lumen in Trnava. A 3-day event, it is one of the most important regular events in Slovakia in terms of attendance (in 2013 ca. 10,000 visitors from Slovakia and abroad) and at the same time the greatest gospel festival in Central Europe. Another regular event of this kind is also a 2-day festival KampFest in Kráľova Lehota with attendance of over 6,000, or the gospel festival ‘Verím Pane’ in Námestovo. This group also includes lectures of important personalities in spiritual life (rather irregular with the place usually differing), charismatic conferences (several-day events) and the like.

3.5. *Pilgrim journeys*

These are one of the oldest forms of religious tourism. The aim of this kind of tourism is to visit a biblical place or a person, relics or grave of a saint, most often on foot (recently also by bicycle). Origins of the history of pilgrim journeys go back to the 4th century of our era (Palestine – Jerusalem). The most celebrated pilgrim journey in Europe is the so-called Way of Saint James, with more than 150 000 pilgrims going to Santiago de Compostela each year. In Slovakia various walking or cycling pilgrimages are known, most often occasioned by important church festivals – pilgrimage to Levoča, Šaštín

and Marianka organised from the entire Slovakia, the greatest ones often having international attendance. Most frequently they are organised by individual parishes or covered by religious communities. The territory of Slovakia is crossed by the Central European Marian Way connected to pilgrimage routes of Central European countries and linking more than 150 Marian pilgrimage places. Several pilgrimage routes are gradually formed also in Slovakia, providing not only route description but also complex network of services to the pilgrims such as boarding and catering services: Slovak Marian Way, Cyril and Methodius Pilgrim's Way.

3.6. Other (non-Catholic) pilgrimage places and festivals

The most important non-Catholic pilgrimages or conventions in Slovakia include e.g.:

- Traditional convention of the Western District of the Evangelical Church in Slovakia occasioned by the feast of Saints Cyril and Methodius on Branč castle – a solemn liturgy is held in this place on the feast of Cyril and Methodius and meetings are dedicated to the memory of the apostles Constantine and Methodius who were imprisoned in Branč as well as to the memory of Master John Hus.
- Memorial of Chatam Sofer in Bratislava – an underground Jewish burying area where notable Pressburg Rabi and Jewish scholars are buried. Second only to the Wailing Wall, the mausoleum in Bratislava is the most important Jewish pilgrimage place.
- Cyril and Methodius days in Terchová – a regular even (the 24th season took place in 2013) dedicated to the memory of the apostles of Slavs Saints Cyril and Methodius with both religious and cultural dimension. Held annually, it spans several days on various places in Terchová village (Saints Cyril and Methodius church, J. Hlinka square, Oravcové). The events are rich in their liturgical and cultural content.
- National pilgrimage to Devín – a festival in the ruins of the Devín castle and in the municipality of Devín, spanning several days dedicated to the memory of the Thessaloniki brothers with national, cultural, religious and ecumenical character.

4. Conclusions

Cultural tourism, and more specifically religious tourism, has been recently on the rise in Europe. Similarly to all the segments of the tourist sector, the requirements of tourists in the religious tourism on higher quality of services, accessibility of additional (accompanying) services, usage of information and communication technologies, etc. are rising. Religious tourism in Slovakia has an immense potential due to country's rich history and great number of valuable historical landmarks, to the beautiful sceneries and last but not least to the deep spiritual life of Slovak people which remains, however, quite idle from the

economical standpoint. The present case study aimed at charting out the potential of localising factors for religious tourism in Slovakia classifying them under five heads: i) sacred buildings, ii) other pilgrimage places, iii) new forms of pilgrim tourism, iv) pilgrim journeys and v) other (non-Catholic) pilgrimage places and festivals.

A low level of interconnectedness between Church subjects (who are most often the administrators of religious landmarks) with the public and private sector results in the absence of strategic and long-term planning and definition of aims. Mutual information of key subjects is also unsatisfactory as well as financial resources for the improvement of the necessary infrastructure.

Religious travelling in our country is usually organized by individual parishes with the time spent on pilgrimages reduced to minimum and spent nearly exclusively on the visit of the religious landmark. Tourist agents in the domestic religious tourism are nearly absent and their offers are mainly oriented on the destinations abroad. This is a result of underdeveloped religious destinations, mainly in their technical infrastructure. Relax zones, catering and boarding facilities adequate to the requirements and needs of a religious tourist are often absent as well as accompanying events able to keep the pilgrims on the place for longer.

Last decade has seen a positive trend in the religious tourism in Slovakia, mainly in organizing new forms of pilgrimages such as gospel music festivals and in opening up sacred objects for the general public with accompanying cultural program (e.g. the regular event called Night of Churches) attracting mainly younger generations of pilgrims.

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