

---

# **RELIGIOUS TOURISM AND ITS SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS**

**Eva Hvizdová\***

*College of International Business ISM Slovakia, Department of Economics, Management and Marketing, Duchnovičovo námestie 1, 080 01 Prešov, Slovakia*

(Received 20 October 2017, revised 30 November 2017)

---

## **Abstract**

The paper seeks to describe the essential common features of religious tourism, regardless of whether tourists belong to a particular religion or denomination. After defining religious tourism as opposed to other species, we focus on pilgrimage as a typical form of religious tourism. We point to specific realities of the realization of religious pilgrimage in various world religions, in relation to economic indicators. We also try to take on other aspects of religious tourism as it goes beyond the activities of religious pilgrimages. We draw attention to the importance of religious tourism for the development of the regions, as documented in the examples of Australia and Mazovia. We also pay attention to religious tourism in Slovakia, while striving to differentiate between denominations represented in Slovakia. We recall many specific sites with religious monuments of Catholic and Evangelical provenience as well as specific events related to religious tourism within Slovakia. In the context of the comparisons of the individual studies we analysed, we have also presented our own research conducted in Slovakia, from which we can state that the lower visitation of sacral buildings by foreign tourists and residents is due to the insufficient promotion of the regions, as well as the insufficient implementation competencies of cultural and ecclesiastical institutions.

*Keywords:* religious tourism, employment, research, regional development

---

## **1. Introduction**

In recent years, tourism has grown into religious destinations around the world, including various religious traditions, and has become a key driver of economic development. However, research in this area is limited. The main factors that drive tourism towards religious aims are: the expansion of certain religious traditions, the diversification of the tourist motives, the development of the media and their interest in religious sites and events, and the dynamic and coordinated activity of religious and secular authorities. Effective strategic plans to promote tourism in religious destinations need to be drafted, leading to the economic development of the regions [1]. In the past, people's travel was mainly conditioned by religious motives. The first travellers were pilgrims who travelled to places for the purpose of spiritual worship. Furthermore, there were

---

\*E-mail: hvizdova@ismpo.sk

existential reasons such as searching for livelihood, searching for fertile areas suitable for growing food, or migration of nomadic tribes. The development of tourism was conditioned by the trade routes through which the purchase and sale of goods were realized. The development of tourism is conditioned by several factors. One of the basic preconditions for tourism development is freedom of travel. Other prerequisites are free time and free funds. For tourism development, peace is needed in the country where tourism is being carried out, as well as a favourable international climate. According to Sedláková, it is important to communicate correctly with a group of tourists as well as to transmit true information from abroad in order to create confidence and avoid mistakes and crises in the event of political unrest or sudden natural disaster in tourist destinations [2].

Why people make trips, i.e. stays outside the usual place of residence, are dependent on motives and unfulfilled needs. Types of tourism are a reflection of human motives, for example, sports tourism, adventure tourism, cultural tourism, religious tourism, spa tourism, health tourism, business tourism, congress tourism, incentive tourism, eco-tourism, volunteering - voluntary tourism and many other types.

## **2. Religious tourism in the spectrum of socio-economic dimensions**

Tourism is a complex system that cannot be explained in terms of one discipline. It is a phenomenon based on the interaction of many assumptions. A number of leading sciences, mainly Economics, Geography, Sociology, Anthropology, and others, are involved in exploring tourism, taking advantage of different approaches to tourism modelling. It may be economic tourism models, territorial tourism patterns or behavioural approaches. Freyer formulated a general model of tourism, which consists of an economic module, a social module, an individual module, a political module, a module of the environment and a leisure module [3]. In order for the modular tourism model to be of a universal nature, transport, Geography, Medicine, Law, or Architecture must also be taken into account. Despite multidisciplinary, the common goal of tourism is to meet customer needs and thus to gain a comprehensive experience [4]. In addition, tourism has a positive impact on the economy of the state because it is a source of value creation and a function of a multiplier effect related to the emergence of accommodation, catering and ancillary services, the creation of a technical base and transport infrastructure, which ultimately reduces unemployment in the state, supports development and has a positive impact on GDP. Taxpayers are also aware of the importance of tourism because, as Mokrišova says, a properly set tax system in the country can stimulate consumption [5]. Cultural heritage attracts cultural tourists and represents the main source of income and employment for the destination economy. The economic impact of the site of cultural heritage on its environment can be assessed through linear models based on regional matrices of social accounting [6].

Religious tourism also referred to as pilgrimage or religious tourism; is part of cultural and sightseeing tourism and is associated with the traditions of world religions. Nyaupane studied the role of social distance in the relations between the people of different religions visiting the sacred sites of other religions (Lumbini, Buddha's birthplace in Nepal) [7]. The findings of this study suggest that Hindus and Christians visited Lumbini because they considered Buddhists to be more closely aligned with their own faith than other groups. Furthermore, the author investigated how people see themselves as tourists, pilgrims, tourists and pilgrims, or any of these names. Separately identified type of visitor differs in terms of motivation. In line with existing religious tourism literature, the study shows that those who refer to as pilgrims have higher religious motivations and those who identify themselves as tourists have higher recreational or cultural motivations. In this study, the social distance identified relationship structures, similarities and differences among travellers of different religions who consume the same tourist area [7].

In connection with religious tourism, we come across concepts such as pilgrimage, wandering, pilgrim. The pilgrimage is the wandering of believers to sacred places at home or abroad. The path of pilgrimage is a traditional way leading to the sacred places of different religions, in order to fulfil the needs of a spiritual character. A pilgrim is a person who is a participant, a person who travels to holy places with various motives, mostly a deep faith in healing, reversing, pardoning grace, fulfilling religious demands, and so on. Pilgrimage activities call for the need to build up an adequate infrastructure at the destination. Organizers should prepare special attention from the point of view of visitors - pilgrims and religious activities. They should respect the religious and cultural character of the event. Cultural tourism differs from the religious one by its motives, and religious pilgrims reject the designation of themselves as tourists. Religious tourism in the broader sense is understood as participation in tourism, which is motivated by visits and sightseeing of religious monuments, such as churches, cathedrals, cemeteries, chapels, cross-roads and so on. When visiting these monuments, it is essential to respect not only their piety but also the moral right of the believers in order to preserve a dignified environment and a sacred atmosphere. The existence and development of religious tourism is conditioned by their material and technical basis, which are sacral structures, sacral art and the places of the believers. Religious tourism is one of the most widespread types of tourism. People around the world travel and participate in the pilgrimage to fulfil their spiritual needs.

Some authors examined the socio-economic impact of the Common African Apostolic Church on the rural tourism industry and surrounding rural communities in Vhembe District of South Africa [8]. Data on pilgrims, businesses, and inhabitants were collected during and immediately after a religious event. The results of the study confirm that religious events have a positive socio-economic impact on rural communities, while at the same time revealing a consensus among the population, the pilgrimage assembly promotes morality, improves socialization, and feelings of good and being proud on their

community. The basic motive of man's decision-making about participation in tourism is a drive that is built on the structure of their needs. It represents the most important incentive of people's behaviour and is part of the biological and psychological factors that are connected with the need and the motive of participation in tourism.

Other authors tested the relationship between tourism motivation and the satisfaction of tourists, as 'religion' relaxes the relationship [9]. The variable 'Religion' was expressed by the availability of Islamic standards and practices related to tourism in the destination. The results of the smallest square show that the motivation for tourism is significant and positively linked to the satisfaction of tourists. The results also showed that religion greatly reduces the relationship between push motivation and the satisfaction of tourists, but the mitigating effect of religion on the relationship between push motivation and the satisfaction of tourists was not confirmed.

A study developed new identities such as secular pilgrimage or dark tourism [10]. The product lifecycle model survey provides an appropriate framework for interpreting the process that many tourism concepts are currently experiencing, for example eco-tourism and raising important questions about the use of new concepts. A theoretical framework for the systematization of the understanding of how tourism concepts are emerging and over time are changing, was made through the example of a structured description of the evolving 'pilgrimage tourism' phenomenon. The current debates and theorizations of (post) secularism do not recognize the final position on the role of pilgrimage, spiritual paths, and sacred places [11]. Nilsson, in his theoretically informative empirical study, analysed contemporary pilgrimage as an arena in which post-secular practice and discourse are integrated [12]. He identified several ways in which 'pilgrimage tourism' is carried out 'post-secularly', that is, identity construction. Travel can become a powerful instance, for example, in creating mobile places. Current pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela is polyvalent. Pilgrim paths cannot be understood as uniquely religious, secular or post-secular. Tourism pilgrimage sites are open by constantly reworking the identity and importance of the place. In Spain, religious tourism has its justification. The Holy Week is one of the most important traditional celebrations in many parts of the world. It has deeply rooted cultural and social traditions, but at the same time it also includes a tourist dimension that ultimately has an impact on the economy of its venues. Some authors examined the influence of the Holy Week on the city of Palencia [13]. This study of economic impact was based on the description and evaluation of three types of effects, direct, indirect and induced. The results showed that this event generated a total of euros 2.258 million, of which 82% remained in the city's own economy, with the hotels and restaurants sector benefiting the most. This traditional celebration contributes to income and employment creation, to preservation of traditional industries, to protection of cultural heritage, and to improvement of the image and projection of the area.

Other authors argue that religion has a general influence on tourism that goes beyond the direct influence of religious desires [14]. For this purpose, the gravitational model for international tourist arrivals is most used. This allows us to assess how the five major religions bring or limit the flows of international tourism. The results point to the fact that religion as well as the origin and destination of the country have significant strength in global tourist flows.

Australian scientists have explored the relationship between cultural similarity and demand for tourism, with particular emphasis on tourism in Australia examining visitors coming from 42 countries using a gravitational model to derive an econometric model. Because language and religion are the main exposure and bearers of culture, they have created an index of a continuous, normalized, and time-based version that captures the similarity in language and religious profile between the source country and Australia. Incorporating these indices into the empirical model brings the results of OLS method and quantifications that support the belief that there is a similarity between culture and demand for tourism [15].

Other authors have focused their research on issues of sustainability of religious tourism, whether the development and management of religious tourism in rural areas will be sustainable from economic, environmental and socio-cultural points of view [16]. Other issues include sustainable religious tourism, access to sanctuaries, the protection of cultural and historical values of the local community, benefits for local residents and meaningful experiences for visitors. The authors were particularly interested in some less popular holy sites in the Mazovian region (Poland), addressing two concerns: preparedness to respond to the needs of people with different disabilities, and local community opinion on tourists. The results show that, despite numerous improvements, the most popular rural sanctuaries in the Mazovia area are only partially accessible for people with disabilities. As many pilgrims have a significant impact on the quality of life and everyday life of the population (that contributes to both positive and negative effects), those who accept that tourists are important for economic development benefit from the way they create an 'intelligent host space'. These rural communities, which do not have any knowledge of the positive impacts, can see only negative consequences.

Malodia and Singla [17] measured the satisfaction of religious tourists travelling to different sacred destinations in the Himalayas to identify gaps in expectations and experiences and understand the shift in travel motives. The satisfaction of religious tourists was explored by the HOLSAT model of vacation satisfaction developed by Tribe and Snaith [18]. The study found that the motives of religious tourists moved from purely religious to secular tourist motifs. The results of the study reinforce the value of the HOLSAT model as a potential tool for measuring and enhancing the satisfaction of religious tourists, with attributes that can positively contribute to the satisfaction of tourists. Measuring expectations and experiences for the same group of respondents is a unique asset for conducting such research.

### **3. The development of religious tourism in Slovakia and its perspectives**

Religious tourism in Slovakia has tremendous potential due to the rich history of the countryside and a large number of valuable historical monuments, beautiful sceneries and, last but not least, the deep spiritual life of the Slovak people, which, however, remains inactive from the economic point of view. One of the ways to satisfy the visitors' spiritual needs in Slovak regions is to visit sacred buildings - wooden churches, located on the middle, but mostly in eastern Slovakia. These are especially cultural treasures that are the national monuments and the great wealth of the whole of Slovakia. The great importance of this religious and cultural heritage is also confirmed by the fact that some of them have been included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. Slovakia has a long-standing tradition of wandering especially to places connected with the worship of Our Lady. The history of the oldest pilgrimage places in Slovakia dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Among the oldest pilgrimage places in Slovakia are Marianka, Skalka near Trenčín, and Levoča in Eastern Slovakia. At present there are more than 55 pilgrimage places in Slovakia. Pilgrim places and trips are not yet marked separately. They are particularly visited by local pilgrims. At present, such traditional places are an inspiration for activities combining wandering for spiritual experiences with history in the beautiful nature where these sacral buildings are situated.

Familiarity with pilgrimage sites and sacral sites is now supported by several regional, cross-border and international projects; for example, the Gothic Route, Spišský Jerusalem, or the Pilgrimage of Saint Elisabeth (Košice - Sárospatak), the Sacred Way of the Gothic and Baroque of Liptov and Central Moravia or the 'Sacra Velo' project.

#### ***3.1. National pilgrimages***

The national pilgrimages are: Šaštín - The National Sanctuary of the Sedembolestná Panna Mária - Basilica minor (the Sculpture of the Sedembolestná Panna Maria (Seven sorrows Virgin Mary), Patron of Slovakia from 1564). The main pilgrimage is on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September, Fatima's Saturday. Levoča Church of Virgin Mary at Mariánská hora - Basilica Minor. The Gothic statue of Our Lady with open arms has the main pilgrimage on 2<sup>nd</sup> July and on every first Saturday of each month is celebrated Fatima's Saturday. Marianka Church of Our Lady, Gothic church - Basilica minor - where is the merciful statue of Virgin Mary with Jesus in her arms; the oldest pilgrimage place in Slovakia (since 1380). The main pilgrimage is on 8<sup>th</sup> September. Monthly pilgrimage is held every 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of the month. Staré Hory - Church of Our Lady - Basilica minor has a Gothic statue of Our Lady with Jesus. The Chapel on Studnička with main pilgrimage on 15<sup>th</sup> August, also on the Pentecost and the first Saturday of each month is Fatima's Saturday. Nitra Church of Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary on the Calvary with the Gothic statue of the Seven

sorrows Virgin Mary; the main pilgrimage is on 15<sup>th</sup> August and the second pilgrimage - the Cyril and Methodius pilgrimage is on 5<sup>th</sup> July.

### ***3.2. Pilgrimages with regional significance***

Báč Church and Franciscan monastery from the 17<sup>th</sup> century has the merciful image of Our Lady, which belongs to the group of 'weeping' paintings, the main celebrations are on 8<sup>th</sup> September. Banská Bystrica - Baroque Calvary with stops of the seven sorrows of Our Lady; the main pilgrimage is on 14<sup>th</sup> September. In Bratislava there is the Church of Our Lady of Snow on Calvary. Inside there is the painting of Our Lady, in front of which is celebrated the Immaculate Conception by Bratislava and its inhabitants; the main celebration is on 8<sup>th</sup> September. In Dubnica Church of Saint James is the statue of Queen Virgin Mary with Jesus in her arms; the main celebration is on 8<sup>th</sup> September. In Gaboltov Saint Adalbert's Church is the altar painting of Our Lady of Carmelite from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the main pilgrimage is on 16<sup>th</sup> July. Košice has the Calvary Church with the Baroque Statue of the Seven sorrows Virgin Mary; the main pilgrimage is on 14<sup>th</sup> September. In Modrý Kameň the painting of the Seven sorrows Virgin Mary in the Church of Saint Antony of Padua comes from the castle chapel. The pilgrimage on Calvary is on 14<sup>th</sup> September. In Radvaň - Banská Bystrica we have the Church of Our Lady with the picture of the Birth of Virgin Mary and the main celebration on 8<sup>th</sup> September. Rajecká Lesná - Neo-Gothic Church of Our Lady - Minor Basilica with the Gothic statue of Our Lady with Jesus; the major pilgrimage on 8<sup>th</sup> September. In Trnava - Saint Nicholas Cathedral has the 'Weeping' picture of the Trnava's Virgin Mary from 1570. A nine-days devotion is taking place before it - Novena - 13<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> September. In Trstená - the Chapel of Our Lady of Carmel at the Parish Church with the main celebration is on 16<sup>th</sup> July.

All these tangible and intangible cultural monuments create the prerequisites for the development of religious tourism through which small and medium-sized businesses could show more favourable economic results, which would adequately be reflected in the social sphere. Religious tourism in Slovakia is not yet sufficiently explored. In 2016, we conducted a marketing survey focused on the attendance of UNESCO-listed wooden churches. 50% of respondents said they enjoy visiting religious buildings within tourism, but this is not their main objective to visit the region. 94% of respondents responded that they knew such structures, but up to 48% of them did not answer the question of where the churches are located. 25% of respondents said they would like to visit one of the churches in the event of organizing a thematic performance. Concert would be the theme of the visit for 11% of respondents and 11% of the respondents would welcome the meeting of young people. Other reasons to visit sacral buildings is curiosity (5%), gaining new knowledge (4%) and organizing marriage for 3% of respondents. The highest attendance in 2016 was in the Evangelical Church in Kezmarok.

Research has highlighted the fact that lower attendance is due to insufficient promotion of the regions in which sacral buildings are located. Rare sacral buildings are also located in the Gemer and Malohont regions, and these regions are rich in the possibilities of various tourist opportunities. We believe that the current real exploitation is far from the potential offered by the region. The region is populated primarily by Lutheran believers. Historical monuments found in it are in many cases sacred monuments belonging to the Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Empire. They provide many opportunities for religious tourism for Lutheran believers who can visit numerous monuments that are connected with the history of the Lutheran Church. About criticism of Church in Kierkegaard's theological terms see [19-22].

From the architectural point of view, remarkable churches are located in different municipalities of the Gemer micro-region [23]. Černá addressed a case study that focused on portraying the potential of localizing factors for religious tourism in Slovakia, classifying them under five headings: sacred buildings, other pilgrimage sites, new forms of pilgrimage tourism, pilgrimage tours and other (non-Catholic) pilgrimages [24]. The author concluded that religious travel in Slovakia is usually organized by an individual of a parish with a time spent on the minimum and spent almost exclusively from a religious point of view. Travel agencies offer domestic religious travel to a minimum and their offers are mainly oriented towards foreign religious tourism, which results in insufficiently developed religious destinations, especially in their technical infrastructure. Then she has pointed out that relaxation zones, adequate accommodation and catering facilities often lack the requirements and needs of religious tourists, as well as accompanying events able to keep pilgrims in the locality for a longer period. There has been recorded positive trend in religious tourism during last decade in Slovakia, especially in organizing new forms of pilgrimages such as festivals of gospel music and in the opening of sacred objects to the general public, with an accompanying cultural programme (Night of Churches), especially for younger generation of pilgrims. Čábyiová conducted a survey whose main objective was to identify and recognize the current state of cultural and religious tourism in the Trnava region [25]. The survey results confirmed the low level of interest in religious tourism expressed by its inhabitants, especially in the category of young people. The Faculty of Mass Media Communication carried out a project entitled Route of Saints Cyril and Methodius, whose main objective was to create a tour of activities at the stops, attracting mainly a target group of young people to pilgrimage places in the Trnava region. The proposed route of Saints Cyril and Methodius will allow tourists to visit the microregions of Trnava, Zlín and South Moravia, where there are many cultural and sacral sites connected with Slavonic religious and cultural sites and traditions.

#### **4. Conclusions**

At present, religious tourism is widespread in the world and represents a significant part of cultural tourism. Retail is also recording this developmental



trend in the advance of its specific development [26]. Despite all the cultural and historical monuments that Slovakia has, we must state that its potential is underused. According to the analysis of researches performed by domestic and foreign authors who have addressed the issue of religious tourism from different perspectives (from the satisfaction of their spiritual and cultural needs in the destination, the influence of religious tourism on the socio-economic characteristics of the region, the visitation of sacral buildings, etc.) in the spectrum of different kinds of religious beliefs (religions), they agree that the development of religious tourism is important not only from the economic aspect but is also important from the point of view of the convergence of cultures and the mutual understanding of different religions [27]. Such an approach can help regions to grow, residents to raise living standards and social ties in communities.

## References

- [1] G.M. Millán Vázquez de la Torre, L.M. Pérez and R.M. Martínez Cárdenas, *Rev. Cienc. Soc.*, **22(1)** (2016) 85-97.
- [2] I. Sedláková, *Risk connected with communication in a critical situation*, in *Risk of processes and their management*, ČVUT v Praze. Fakulta dopravní, Praha, 2017, 153-166.
- [3] W. Freyer, *Tourismus: Einführung in die Fremdenverkehrsökonomie*, 11<sup>th</sup> edn., Verlag, De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2015, 730.
- [4] M. Gučík, *Manažment cestovného ruchu*, UMB, Banská Bystrica, 2010, 198.
- [5] V. Mokrišová. *The Impact of Tax Evasion to the Economic Environment*, in *Global perspective in labour market*, Amelia Aneta Siewiorek, Rzeszow, 2017, 60-68.
- [6] P. Campoy-Munoz, M. Alejandro Cardenete and M. Carmen Delgado, *Tourism Econ.*, **23(4)** (2017) 874-881.
- [7] G.P. Nyaupane, D.J. Timothy and S. Poudel, *Tourism Manage.*, **48(1)** (2015) 343-353.
- [8] G. Dafuleya, A.B. Gyekye, E.K. Oseifuah, T. Nethengwe and F. Sumban, *Tourism Econ.*, **23(4)** (2017) 911-918.
- [9] M. Battour, M.N. Ismail, M. Battor and M. Awais, *Curr. Issues Tour.*, **20(1/2)** (2017) 50-67.
- [10] N. Collins-Kreiner, *Tourism Geogr.*, **18(3)** (2016) 322-334.
- [11] M. Ambrozy, R. Králik and J.G. Martin, *Xlinguae*, **10(4)** (2017) 48-57.
- [12] M. Nilsson, *Ann. Tourism Res.*, **57** (2016) 18-30.
- [13] V.L Sánchez, M.D Fernández, J.Á.S Lara, *Tourism Econ.*, **23(6)** (2017) 1255-1274.
- [14] J. Fourie, J. Rosselló and M. Santana-Gallego, *Tourism Econ.*, **22(1)** (2016) 163-169.
- [15] Y. H. Cheung and S. Saha, *Tourism Analysis*, **20(2)** (2015) 229-241.
- [16] A. Pawlikowska-Piechotka, K. Gołębieska, N. Łukasik, A. Ostrowska-Tryzno and K. Sawicka, *European Countryside*, **8(3)** (2016) 304-321.
- [17] S. Malodia and H. Singla, *International Journal of Culture, Tourism, and Hospitality Research*, **11(2)** (2017) 255-270.
- [18] J. Tribe and T. Snaith, *Tourism Manage.*, **19(1)** (1998) 25-34.
- [19] R. Kralik, *Eur. J. Sci. Theol.*, **13(1)** (2017) 25-34.

- [20] M. Valco and K. Valcova, Communications - Scientific Letters of the University of Zilina, **16(3)** (2014) 25-28.
- [21] M. Valco and A. J. Boehme, Eur. J. Sci. Theol., **13(3)** (2017) 89-97.
- [22] R. Kralik, XLinguae, **10(3)** (2017) 37-44.
- [23] G. Balaša, Obzor Gemera, **8(2)** (1977) 103–104.
- [24] J. Černá, Eur. J. Sci. Theol., **10(Suppl.1)** (2014) 29-37.
- [25] J.L. Čábyiová, Eur. J. Sci. Theol., **12(1)** (2016) 231-244.
- [26] E. Hvizdová, *Vývojové trendy v maloobchode – novodobý prístup*, Zborník vedeckých príspevkov z medzinárodnej vedeckej konferencie ‘Sociálne, ekonomické a etické aspekty súčasnej spoločnosti’, VŠMP ISM, Prešov, 2017, 30–36.
- [27] M. Valco, R. Kralik and L. Barrett, Communications - Scientific Letters of the University of Zilina, **17(2)** (2015) 103-108.