A new perspective of non-religious motivations of visitors to sacred sites: evidence from Romania

Alexandra M. Drule a,*, Alexandru Chiş b, Mihai F. Băcilă c, Raluca Ciorean d

a,b,c,d Babeș-Bolyai University, 58-60, Teodor Mihali street, Cluj-Napoca 400591, Romania

Abstract

The religious tourism phenomenon arouses the interest of many researchers and practitioners, but few concentrated on the non-religious motivation of religious travelers. Using a questionnaire based on the model, more than 1600 Orthodox people from Romania who visited a monastery in the last two years were asked to evaluate the non-religious purpose of their visits. The analytical results showed that visitors are mainly motivated by a self-actualization need, namely their desire to become better persons. The paper offers a basis for a new and alternative approach of religious travel and a better understanding of the target market of this special form of tourism gradually on the rise.

Keywords: tourist motivation, religious travel, push factors, Romania;

1. Introduction

Tourism or journeys with religious motivation have a particular importance in many parts of the world. On one hand, primarily due to intrinsic reasons that trigger them, these practices have special significance for the people who carry them out. On the other hand, they bring a wide range of benefits to the communities in which are practiced. But as the reasons for travelling have evolved significantly from their initial forms focused on food or shelter searching, so can be observed a shift from journeys with single motivation to those with multiple motivations. Only few people can talk about one single dimension of their journeys, including those who take religious pilgrimages. In addition, more and more representatives of sacred sites have to face the challenges given by the simultaneous management of visitors with highly diversified motivations (religious and otherwise) that visit the holy places.

While many authors analyzed the religious motivations of the people who travelled to sacred sites in order to construct a typology of visitors encountered there, few concentrated on the non-religious motivation of the visitors who declare themselves as having a multiple reason (inclusively a religious one) to travel to holy places. Romania, the only Latin country in East-Central Europe whose main religion is Orthodox Christian, is experiencing continuous and growing flows of religious travelers. After the fall of communism, in Romania has been noted a sustained development of the existing places of pilgrimage and construction of new religious establishments. Both cases refer especially to monasteries. Therefore we considered that this development process of the sacred site

* Alexandra M. Drule Tel.: +4-074-239-0447
E-mail address: alexandra@drule.ro

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should be analyzed from a visitors’ motivation perspective. But giving that the religious motivation is mandatory present in some degree, we wanted a new approach, namely that of the non-religious motivations.

Regarding the Romanian market one can observe a proliferation of national pilgrimage offices or centers. Knowing the motivation of people who travel to monasteries or to other religious establishments, would allow better targeting and more effective communication with tourists interested in such destinations. Unfortunately, as emphasized by Collins-Kreiner and Gatrell (2006), the travel agencies or tourism intermediaries give little importance to the different motivations which drive those who travel to religious destinations, seeing them rather a homogeneous or uniform market. Considering all these aspects and given the little research in the field, the purpose of the present paper is to investigate the non-religious intrinsic motivations of the Romanian Orthodox people who visited a monastery in the last 2 years and to test the differences in intensity according to respondents’ socio-demographic characteristics.

2. Literature Review

People perceive differently the places they visit or intend to visit, due to two main categories of reasons (Ruback, Pandey & Kohli, 2008): on the one hand, there are differences of material, social and symbolic nature between places; on the other hand, distinct perceptions are due to individual's experience, beliefs and attitudes (his background) and the travelling motivations.

Although tourism motivation has been extensively addressed in the literature, from sociological, psychological or anthropological perspective (Cohen, 1972; Crompton, 1979; Gnoth, 1997), data on travel motivations, eg.to sacred sites, are quite rare (Meng et al., 2008). In a first phase, Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1970) has been widely used to study the tourism demand. The first theories and models focused on tourism motivation belong to Stanley Plog (1974, 1987) and Pearce (1988, 1992), the latter based his studies on the theory proposed by Maslow. Tourism motivation can be defined as “the combination of needs and desires that affect the propensity to travel in the general sense” (O’Leary & Deegan, 2005, p.247). Several studies present what motivates travelers from different nationalities to visit foreign countries: reasons for Chinese travelers to visit New Zealand (Ryan & Mo, 2001), motivation of Chinese tourists visiting Singapore (Kau & Lim, 2005), why German and British travelers are visiting Mallorca and Turkey (Kozak, 2002), Japanese travelers' reasons for visiting the U.S. and Canada (Jang et al., 2002), reasons of foreign tourists to visit Jordan (Mohammad & Som, 2010).

A large number of researches in the field of tourism motivation are focused on two main categories: “push” factors and “pull” factors (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1981; Yuan & McDonald, 1990; Uysal & Jurowski, 1993). The first category refers to internal stimuli that push people to travel, to seek experiences that meet their needs and desires like recreation, escape, social interaction, pleasure seeking, fun, etc. The second category includes external factors especially related to attributes and attractiveness of the destination (Mohammad & Som, 2010), “travelers' perceptions and expectations, such as novelty, benefit expectation and marketing image” (Uysal & Jurowski, 1993, p.844) that attract tourists. However, these motivations are interrelated and have a dynamic evolution depending on situational factors (Correia, 2000). A highly relevant aspect is that tourism motivation is a complex concept that significantly influence the decision making process of a tourist (McCabe, 2000).

Regarding the motivations for traveling to sacred places, the literature is rather scarce (Poria et al., 2003). Smith (1992), whose study was one of the first that have tried to identify a typology of the travelers which visit sacred sites. For pilgrims, (Fleischer, 2000) the traveling motivations are rather internal, the “pull” factors being less important. Collins-Kreiner and Kliot (2000) have studied the characteristics and the typology of people who visit sacred sites in Israel, considering the tourism interests, the interest for non-religious activities and the interest to visit non-Christian sites. An interesting approach and less common in the literature was performed by Andriotis (2009) which analyzed visitors’ experience on Mount Athos from a phenomenological perspective. He examined the experiences of visitors, both religious and non-religious, identifying five interconnected factors that characterize the journeys to this place: spiritual, secular, cultural, educational and environmental. Triantafillidou et al. (2010) approached the travel motivations in a qualitative study on pilgrims’ perceptions on the characteristics and the specific marketing elements of a tour package to Holy Land.
3. Research Methodology

This study was carried out during six months in Romania, a country where 85% of the population is Orthodox. The target population was represented by persons aged over 15 years who visited a monastery in the last 2 years - the main religious travel attractions of the country. Our sampling method was a mixed method combining quota sampling - residence, age and gender - with stratified random sampling. The questionnaires were distributed among 1800 respondents from all eight development regions of Romania out of 1648 were completed and validated. The research has been carried out using the survey method, namely self administrated survey, face-to-face interview and email survey. The instrument of data gathering was a questionnaire. In order to evaluate 10 intrinsic non-religious motivations, it has been used a five point scale ranging from 1 “it doesn’t affect me at all” to 5 “it affects me greatly”. The questionnaire was designed based on previous studies (Collins-Kreiner, 2006; Andriotis, 2009). We used one filter question regarding the nature of the motivation (single or multiple motivation).

A brief socio-demographic profile of the respondents has been build up using the following variables: gender, age, residence, education and income.

| Variable       | % (1648) | Variable       | % (1648) |
|----------------|----------|----------------|----------|
| Age            |          | Gender         |          |
| Under 25 years | 30.95    | Male           | 42.66    |
| 25-35 years    | 20.75    | Female         | 57.34    |
| 36-45 years    | 17.66    | Ed.            |          |
| 46-55 years    | 15.23    | Primary school | 15.48    |
| 56-65 years    | 10.74    | High School    | 38.86    |
| Over 65 years  | 4.67     | Post High School| 10.2    |
| Income (personal) |        | Residence      |          |
| Less than 150$ | 24.86    | Urban          | 57.46    |
| 151-240$       | 22.60    | Rural          | 42.54    |
| 241-330$       | 19.04    |                |          |
| 331-450$       | 15.19    |                |          |
| 451-600$       | 11.08    |                |          |
| 601-900$       | 5.33     |                |          |
| More than 901$ | 1.9      |                |          |

Reliability analysis was conducted and demonstrated that the Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient was 0.759, respectively 0.781, which confirmed the relatively high internal consistency of the models used (Cronbach, 1951). There have been calculated the average values for all used items and has been applied the factor analysis, using Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. All five hypotheses regarding the influence of the demographic characteristics on the motivation’s intensity have been tested using, as appropriate, the nonparametric Mann-Whitney test (Z), Spearman's correlation coefficient (Rho) and ANOVA test (F). Data were processed with SPSS software.

4. Research Findings and Discussion

First results indicated that 87% of respondents have multiple traveling motivations (the percent is significantly higher among youth, among people with higher education, people in urban areas and among those with high-income). For 60% of respondents, the religious motivations is the main reason to visits the sacred sites (the percentage is higher in case of females, of rural inhabitants, of persons with lower income and elderly).

Analyzing the intensity of non-religious intrinsic motivations, we can state that “the desire to be better person” is the most influencing factor in the decision to visit the monasteries. It is the single item with a mean importance score greater than 4, significantly higher than other items (t=2.221, p=0.027). In case of this motivation, the relevant position in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs would be at the top of the pyramid, within the needs for accomplishment.

Perhaps this desire is satisfied through the experience of visiting a religious settlement, in terms of beliefs or convictions that visiting a sacred place means to do a good thing relating both to God and to the religious dogma. On
the other hand, respondents may have thought of the further benefits of such experience on personality, behavior, values and attitudes.

Table 2. The results of principal components analysis of non-religious motivations and importance mean scores

| Groups                               | Mean          | Factor loading | KMO | \( \chi^2/p \)   | Eigenvalue | Variance explained |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|-----|------------------|------------|-------------------|
| Curiosity                            | 3.35 (S.E.=0.029) | 0.764          | 0.709 | 1888.05           | 2.328      | 58.20%            |
| Desire for knowledge                 | 3.76 (S.E.=0.026) | 0.764          | p=0.000 | 2.328             | 58.20%     |
| Escape from daily routine            | 3.59 (S.E.=0.030) | 0.789          |       |                  |            |
| Leisure/recreation                   | 3.61 (S.E.=0.029) | 0.733          |       |                  |            |
| Desire to discover cultural beauties | 3.95 (S.E.=0.026) | 0.735          | 0.715 | 2680.00           | 3.968      | 66.13%            |
| Finding natural beauty               | 3.88 (S.E.=0.027) | 0.724          |       | p=0.000           |            |
| Contact with traditions and values   | 3.66 (S.E.=0.027) | 0.707          |       |                  |            |
| A new life experience                | 3.25 (S.E.=0.030) | 0.701          |       |                  |            |
| Desire to interact with people       | 2.82 (S.E.=0.030) | 0.608          |       |                  |            |
| Desire to be a better person         | 4.01 (S.E.=0.028) | 0.563          |       |                  |            |

Note: S.E= standard error of mean; Extraction method – principal component analysis; Rotation method – Varimax with Kaiser normalization; KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy; Bartlett’s test of sphericity; \( p= \) significance level.

Some may have taken into consideration the appreciation, the respect or the admiration they will receive when returning home. On the following positions there are motivations regarding the aesthetic of the religious place and of the environment in which are located (“pursuing cultural beauty”, “finding natural beauty”). We could talk once again of a motivation situated on a higher level, which can be satisfied by the attractiveness attributes or factors of the visited destination. The manifestation of this need can be easily identified in the religious tourism market in Romania, where the most visited monasteries are famous for architecture, design often with unique characteristics (the Barsana and Voronet monasteries - included in the World Heritage List) and remarkable natural landscapes (Sambata de Sus, Cozia, Putna, Ramet, Prislop, Curtea de Arges, etc.). The least mentioned motivations concern the desire for social interaction (only average below 3) and search for new life experiences.

After testing the hypothesis regarding the existence of differences in intensity of non-religious motivations that lead to visits to monasteries, was revealed that comparing to male travelers the females are more motivated by the desire “to be better [person]” \((Z=-3.608, \ c=0.107, \ p=0.000<0.05)\), youth are more animated by curiosity \((F=3.523, \ \text{Rho}=0.101, \ p=0.000<0.05)\), older people experience a greater need for social interaction at pilgrimage places \((F=6.694, \ \text{Rho}=0.135, \ p=0.000 <0.05)\), the same is also true for those with lower educational level \((F = 7.184, \ \text{Rho}=0.135, \ p=0.000<0.05)\). People with higher incomes are more interested in cultural motivations, namely the desire for knowledge \((F=2.652, \ \text{Rho}=0.112, \ p=0.000<0.05)\) and the contact with authentic traditions and values \((F=2.652, \ \text{Rho}=0.102, \ p=0.000<0.05)\).

In order to apply the factor analysis, the items were grouped into two categories depending on the degree of correlation between them. The KMO test revealed two relatively good models. We aimed to extract from each model one or more motivational factors that explain in at least 50% the models’ alternative. In the first category was extracted the “relaxation/recreation” factor and in the second set were extracted two items “pursuing cultural beauty” and “desire to interact with people” in the journey to the religious destination.

5. Conclusions

During the past years, the phenomenon of travelling to religious places has spread significantly both in Romanian market and global. Knowing the motivations that lead millions of peoples to travel to sacred places is an essential condition for the management and the marketing of destinations and attractions of this kind, or for organizing activities and promotion of tour packages on this topic. Also, from an academic perspective it is important to discover the reasons behind a tourist’s action or lack of action (Yuan & McDonald, 1990). But these motivations are evolving, diversifying, and becoming more complex. This empirical study presents a new perspective on intrinsic non-religious motivations for visiting the monasteries in Romania, highlighting a new dimension of these journeys: the desire to become a better person throughout the experiences in these places, a need
related to self-worth increasing and self-realization. These elements could be incorporated into overall promotion strategies for this form of tourism, namely the communication activities could be centred on this message. For different segments of travellers should be considered other motivations for which the intensity varies significantly depending on the socio-demographic characteristics of the tourists: the desire for knowledge, cultural motivation or desire for social interaction. Besides the motivation related to “a better self” (this desire influenced “much” and “very much “over 70% of respondents), “recreation”, “desire to discover the cultural beauties” and “desire to interact with others” could be used mostly as predictors for the behaviour of visitors to sacred sites.

The limits of the study are given by the lack of research for the “pull” motivations related to the non-religious attributes of the visited destination, although the results regarding the need for “beauty” offer some insights and a starting point for future studies. Comparative studies for this type of journeys taken by tourists of other religions would allow a deeper understanding of the non-religious motivations and an extensive validation of the results.

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