

Swot Analysis

HARGHITA COUNTY COUNCIL

WP3 -

Training needs and population wider attitude in

Romania



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THE OPERATIVE PHASE

Description of context (overview)

For thousands of years, people have been traveling to places considered sacred to meet or to worship Divinity. Religion-motivated tourism is extremely important in many parts of the world. In Romania, the only Latin country in East-Central Europe and the only Latin country whose main religion is Orthodox Christian, religious ceremonies to celebrate Saints' days as well as all the related places and relics represent places for prayer and meeting with God for millions of people. The evolution of visitors' number certifies the trends and forecasts recorded on international market outlining religious tourism's increase in Romania from one year to another for more than 70% of religious settlements.

Religious pilgrimages have a real history as economic generators for the visited areas as services developed to meet the needs involved by these journeys. This is also valid nowadays in Romania where numerous religious sites are the main tourist attraction.

Many research studies have investigated the distinctions and similarities between tourists and pilgrims. Religious tourism may be identified as a specific type of tourism "whose participants are motivated either in part or exclusively for religious reasons".

Religious trips are frequently multifunctional journeys which involve religious dominant factors along with other tourist motivations. Therefore, many people travel to sacred destinations, urged not only by religious, spiritual motivations or for experiencing the sacred in a traditional manner but also by the fact that these are promoted as cultural attractions. Moreover, tourists visiting sacred places are looking for genuine experiences either regarding the religious representatives or the pilgrims participating in various rites, either experiencing "a sense of the place" or a sacred environment.

The main reasons of pilgrimage in Orthodox tradition refer to:

- To live a visual memorial of the places where God showed his love and work;

- To intensify the prayer and the spiritual life in general;
- Spiritual act of thanksgiving;
- Act of repentance;
- Strong desire to receive God's help.

(Daniel, the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, 2000)

Precisely because “the lack of religious and spiritual side, out of the tourist products existing on the Romanian market”, the Romanian Patriarchy as well as other metropolitan churches have created their own places of pilgrimage organizing both internal and external pilgrimages undertaking simultaneously a missionary activity, the promotion of the genuine sense of pilgrimage, worship activity, educational and social mission as common faces of religious experience, considering the fact that economic profit is the only aim of travel agencies providing such packages and they neglect the real meaning of pilgrimage.

Pilgrimage places are visited by different people coming from different regions. Their reasons and desires are as different as their features or their spiritual sensitivity. But according to pilgrim's spiritual experience, participants influence each other, mostly in the sense of increasing spiritual experiences and the feeling of religiosity.

As a general presentation on the extent of pilgrimages in Romania, pilgrimage places are visited by a number of 100.000 – 200.000 of pilgrims every year. A good example therefore is the Franciscan monastery of Șumuleu Ciuc, a few kilometers far from Miercurea Ciuc, known in Hungarian as Csikomlyo, where a wooden-sculpture figure of the Virgin Mary, known as the Weeping Mary, can be found in the monastery church, which is the destination of a traditional pilgrimage of Roman Catholic seklers, held since 1567, called the "Csíksomlyó Pilgrimage" (Romanian:Pelerinajul de la Sumuleu; Hungarian: Csíksomlyói Búcsú). The event, held on the Saturday before Pentecost, attracts several hundred thousand people every year. This traditional gathering is not only attended by the pilgrims living in the region, but also by a great number of mostly Hungarian Catholics from other parts of Transylvania region, Hungary and all over the

world. Beside its religious importance, the pilgrimage has also become a demonstration of the awareness and solidarity of Hungarian people living in and outside the historical region of Transylvania.

In another context, in Romania the period the most numerous and important pilgrimages aiming at the celebration of some saints ranges between the middle of spring and the first half of autumn.

Places famous for religious holidays:

- Iași – 14 October for St Parascheva
- Bucharest – 27 October for St. Dimitrie the New
- Nicula – 15 August for St. Mary
- Șumuleu Ciuc for Pentecost
- Cacica, Lipova – 15 August for St. Mary

The results of the research conducted by a group of professors and lecturers from the main Romanian universities (in year 2010) identify 4 basic dimensions of experience within religious settlements starting from their mission and the destination of the journeys made by pilgrims: (a) Existential-religious elements; (b) Social-helpful elements; (c) Cultural- formative elements; (d) Emotional elements. Besides the spiritual pull, the other motives than religious are “the beauty of places and of the monastery”, “curiosity”, “relaxation”, “cultural motivation”, “place visit”.

Religious pilgrimages have a real history as economic generators for the visited areas and the elements of supply involved. Romanian monasteries are experiencing some continuous and constant flows of pilgrims, but, at the same time, they also turned into attractions for mass tourism.

As a result of marketing programs and of the high interest in cultural tourism, religious sites are more and more visited by rather curiosity-driven visitors as compared to genuine pilgrims and this is the reason why they are promoted, adapted and comprised in products meant for tourism market (Timothy and Boyd, 2003). Moreover, many tour

operators think that for an individual or a tourist is not mandatory to be very religious to make a journey or to enjoy visiting some attractions endowed with religious significance (Stoykova, 2009). At the same time, the structure of the services supplied within religious attractions have changed, as it was aimed at their adaptation and diversification according to the needs shown by various types of visitors or categories of the general public.

A number of economic realities determined the religious settlements to obtain funds by means of trade, collection of entrance fees and provision of some restoration services, guide or accommodation.

As for religious tourism, in certain areas, the demand for services from the part of tourists and pilgrims changed the environment, the structure of local economy, while urbanization followed the track of pilgrimage centres. Souvenir shops adjacent to many religious objectives have a more significant economic importance. In many cases, these are owned by the religious organization in charge with that respective destination, but often, these belong to local communities. The souvenirs which are most looked for and sold are those representing religious symbolism, especially if they can be associated with the place or the events that occurred at the place of purchase.

Like any other tourist, pilgrims must spend the night somewhere. Accommodation means to which they resort vary from tents, little guest houses, houses for pilgrims up to luxury hotels. A special situation is encountered among religious settlements providing accommodation services within their own premises as is the case of the Romanian monastic complexes. People may be provided a meal within the premises of Romanian pilgrimage sites, even within the premises of monastic settlements, while some settlements have a capacity to provide meals of more than 300 seats. But many of them do not have fees for these services. It is the choice of every person to pay a certain amount of money for these services.

A market research conducted by a group of professors and lecturers from Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca and Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies shows the

following results:

- More than 60% of monasteries provide with accommodation services within the monastic complex, and 13% outside the complex in own villas, chalets, etc.

- Accommodation service within the monastery is free of charge for almost 80% of the monasteries subject to our study. Nevertheless we have to specify that tourists pay most of the times for these services on their own initiative in the form of donations, amounts to pay for church service, etc., while in the case of the units run by monasteries where these units are located outside the complex, accommodation fees amount to 30 lei (8 €) per night on an average.

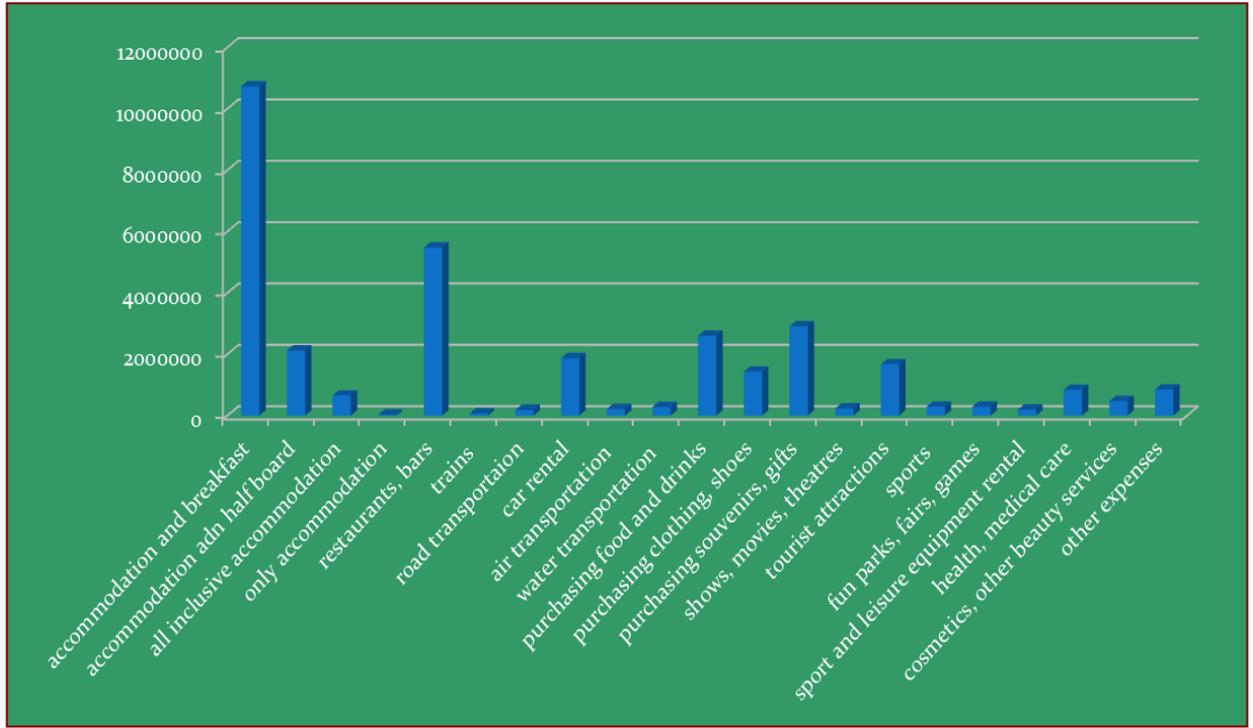
- It is possible to be provided with a free meal at about 75% of the monasteries comprised in our study, sometimes only if the visitor is also accommodated within the monastery; more than half of the monasteries have a fixed schedule for meals and 20% of them provide only meal without meat.

- In more than 70% of the Romanian monasteries we can find souvenir shops; almost 40% of them have arranged parking lots, 20% have conference rooms, while 10% have access to the internet.

- Painting and embroidery are the main activities carried out within Romanian monasteries. Within such religious attraction settlements, people conduct a number of activities, whether cultural or related to objects made by hand contributing to the raise of funds. These activities represent also an attraction for visitors.

Some of these facilities vary according to monastery type, size and Metropolis Church to which they belong.

Travel expenses of non-resident tourists, 2011



In Romanian religious destinations, issues related to religious tourism economy and commercial activities can also be found but on a smaller-size scale and not so much focused on the material side.

Swot analysis

Strengths

- mutual tolerance and openness, traditional hospitality of Romanian people
- cultural and spiritual tradition is maintained
- favourable geographical position, beautiful landscapes
- favourable climate and temperatures

Weaknesses

- deplorable physical status of some religious settlements
- shortcomings of infrastructure
- lack of additional tourism activities in the pilgrimage area
- low quality of adjacent services provided
- lack of education and qualification of the human force;
- lack of financial resources for marketing campaigns
- undeveloped public-private partnerships

Opportunities

- cultural linkage with various partners in country and abroad
- increase in the number of tour operators offering specialized tourism services and products
- complementary religious programs in schools
- reviving local traditions, habits, draftsmanship by the local youth
- European funding programs for the development of spiritual and cultural issues
- transfer of best practices and innovative technologies from the EU
- development of theme routs

Threats

- the lack or a very low level of financial support of the government
- lack of legislation to protect the spiritual values
- social changes in the matter of cultural values and relaxation habits
- disappearing of the traditional crafts and abilities
- Romanian tourism destinations' image as "cheap" and "of poor quality"
 - the possibility of recessions and crisis

Final Report

- *Synthetic summary of the Strengths and Opportunities*

The touristic services and the facilities provided in Romania are at an incipient stage in the case of some religious settlements, generally smaller or less known, but in the case of other monasteries there is a developed tourism and religious supply ranging from spiritual services to banking facilities or communication and information technology-related facilities.

The opportunities are related to the improvement of the business environment, development of adequate legal framework, development of specialized types of tourism, improvement of the surrounding infrastructure, introduction of modern technologies etc.

- *Approaches to be taken to overcome shortcomings and constraints and possible disadvantages*

The potential to develop religious tourism attractions in Romania is extremely high, although the crystallization of this market has hardly begun at domestic level. We can talk about an ever increasing development and adaptation of the facilities provided by main places of pilgrimage as a response to a more and more diversified demand, as a significant integrant part of religious tourism phenomenon.

Spiritual and cultural objectives:

- To promote Virgin Mary authentic experience and history of belief
- To preserve the diversity of Europe's cultures
- To encourage intercultural dialogue
- To promote the European identity in its unity and diversity

Economic objectives:

- To develop infrastructure for tourism demand
- To provide new jobs in less touristic destinations
- To provide new tourism products

Organisational objectives:

- Capacity building both for preserving the cultural heritage and for an authentic spiritual offer
- Capacity building for modern religious tourism development

SOURCES:

1. National Institute for Statistics, 2012 data
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3. MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING THE TOURISM, FACILITIES WITHIN THE ROMANIAN PILGRIMAGES PLACES - Țîrca Alexandra-Maria - Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Stanciulescu Gabriela Cecilia - Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, Faculty of Commerce, Chis Alexandru Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, 2011