



Heritage as an Alternative Driver for Sustainable Development and Economic Recovery in South East Europe

The Role of media in Promoting Religious Tourism in Romania

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Abstract

Nowadays it is recognized that the media has an important role in building and maintaining the image of tourist destinations. It is also undisputed that the dynamic on-line environment is an active factor in promoting tourism at global level. However, due to poor media coverage, Romanian tourism offer is little known domestically and internationally. Therefore, understanding how the media works is actually imperative regarding the desire to use this knowledge to promote tourism destinations in Romanian tourist area. This paper aims to analyze the religious tourism market in Northern Moldova and its presence in the Romanian online and at the same time to investigate media discourse and how it support the marketing approach.

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1. Introduction

Religion is one of the factors that motivate people to set out on a journey. Millions of people travel towards the great pilgrimage centers located throughout the world. From statistic point of view, approximately 240 million people pertaining to great religious cults start off their pilgrimage annually. The popularity of pilgrimages determined, within the last decades, the religious tourism to occupy an important segment of world tourism's economic dynamics. Thus, it was determined that in relation to other touristic products, the religious phenomenon is a very limited field of research. The specialists consider that both religious tourism market and marketing communication in the field are less studied. It is just recently that researchers, travel agencies and governments noticed the great number of travelers starting off, from religious reasons, towards sacred locations. Thus, the sacred places are not only seen as cultural locations voided of their religious component, as simple touristic attractions addressed to those interested in culture and passionate about history. The specialists started to notice that the field

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has a special development potential; as a matter of fact, an entire touristic literature emerged, promoting scared places, cathedrals, churches, mosques, pilgrimage itineraries. As a direct result from promotion of such locations, the number of those that start off has increased.

1.2 Mass-media role in promoting religious tourism

In the greater content of mass-media, the religious journalism was always considered a small Cinderella that could be dismissed at any time if the economic reasons imposed it. This is the reason why during economic growth times, media trusts afford themselves to financially support the journalists specialized in religion, while in crisis periods; the trusts prefer to simply reproduce the religious information presented in the news flow. As a consequence of such deficient practice, the religious news reaches to the public in a distorted manner, which does not remain unsanctioned by the great public, dissatisfied by the quality of information provided.

In an opinion survey carried by Stewart M. Hoover in 1980, it was identified that the public considers that religious information is more important than sports information, and the number of readers and listeners is approximately even, but their satisfaction level is totally different. Sports news is always on the first page of newspapers, while religious news is constantly ignored, except for scandals of which the protagonists are represented by religious personalities or information about violent attacks of extremist terrorist groups².

The religious influence of mass-media over the population indicates the improbability that people give up their own faith in the name of another one. The researches carried identified that there is a tendency among individuals to embrace new religious elements belonging to other cultures and to insert them in their own faith and their own system of values. At the same time, we can also discuss about the quality of religious journalistic material that could only be analyzed in a religious context. It is impossible to make a comparison between the quality of a religious material from different religious confessions and it is strange to have a conversation in such terms. We may rather talk in terms of clarity and capacity to convey the religious message. As a matter of fact, it was noticed that people tend to choose a media channel that best supports their ideas and beliefs and that does not collide with their own convictions. In consequence, it is less probable that media succeeds in converting someone, and the only visible effect is mass-media capacity to establish connections between the members of the community and to manage a coherent mobilization of the related groups³.

The way in which the contemporaneous person considers religion differs from the traditional way in which religion existed in churches. Nowadays, in order to draw the attention of the believer, churches struggle by means of mass-media and discussions are carried out in cold terms of audience and number of visualizations. This seems strange and inconceivable for the dynamics of religious market at the beginning of 20th century, but the new means of communication have changed the society and forced the world's religions to keep up with the latest technologies. The church is part of each society and it cannot be strictly blanked out and placed above, in the intangible and sacred space, without taking into account its material part. The church is built physically – by people and things, even though some people like it or not⁴.

The contemporaneous society is related to religion in ways that were inconceivable in the past. The marketing communication became an intrinsic necessity in the superior valorization of the religious touristic product. A classic example of a successful promotion of the religious product is represented by the pilgrimage to Compostela, Spain. The success of this pilgrimage is owed to the concerted effort of competent authorities (religious, central and local administration), directly interested in developing the touristic flows and local economy. The pilgrimage to Compostela started when the relics of Saint Jacob were discovered. The considerable donations of Spanish kings and nobles made it possible to build a new cathedral. In the 12th century, the pilgrimage reached the highest peak, when the chronics of those times record over one million pilgrims. The pilgrims that made the itinerary to Compostela were distinguished from ordinary travelers by the sign of the shell, symbol of the fact that Santiago was a fisherman

² Carson, Thomas, Cerrito, Joann (coord.), 2003, *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Thomson Gale, Detroit, p. 391;

³ Jones, Lindsay. (2005), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, New York, Ed. Thomson Gale, p. 394;

⁴ Sade, John, Sallnow, Michael J., 1991, *Contesting the sacred. The antropology of Christian pilgrimage*, Routledge, London, p.35;

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