

A Religious and Ethnic Tourism Profile of Europe

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Abstract

The distinction between ethnic tourism and cultural tourism, though blurry at first sight, can be clarified with the help of two key-elements: ethnic tourism tends to focus on a certain group of people for whom exoticism is, obviously, the main tourism attraction; ethnic tourism turns the natives rather into performers on a special “stage” for tourists than background performers facilitating “exotic experiences”. Instead of looking for historical monuments, for nature wonders, or for a local “cultural environment”, the ethnic tourist needs to see people whose way of life differs considerably from their own way of living. Thus, ethnic tourism depends, mainly, on the relationship between tourists and the natives, an encounter that is mediated by a third party that represents the tourism industry.

Keywords: ethnic tourism, religious tourism, Europe, tourism profile

1. Introduction

Religious tourism or **faith tourism** is defined as a form of tourism in which believers travel individually or in groups as pilgrims, missionaries, or for leisure.

Specialists also speak of **Christian tourism**, a subcategory of **religious tourism**. Given the large number of believers of other religions than the Christian one, and because we would not like to limit in any way the possibility of developing Jewish or Muslim tourism products, we use, in everything that follows, the term **religious tourism** [1,2,3].

The structure of religious tourism from the point of view of:

- travel agencies;
- institutional associations and organisms (the national *tour-operator*, tourism associations);
- governmental associations (national tourism associations, national tourism organisations);
- tour-operators (offer),

show that **religious tourism** – or **ecumenical tourism**, as it is called in the official documents of the Romanian Ministry of Tourism – is, in Europe, a rather **pilgrim tourism** established for hundreds of years focused almost exclusively on such pilgrimage sites as Santiago de Compostella (Spain), Rome (Italy) or the Mont Saint Michel (France), for instance. **Pilgrimage tourism** or **faith tourism** is, in its turn, of three types:

- **traditional pilgrimage**;
- **missionary** or **humanitarian travel**;
- **confessional travel**.

In the present paper, we deal only with the first of these three types of **religious tourism**.

Ethnic tourism can be defined as a form of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourist involves the desire of interacting with ethnic (exotic) peoples. In this context, *exotic* means “set in a very remote region and that impresses through unusual, weird aspects; coming from such a region, belonging to these regions” [3].

If this definition represents the point of view of a tourist, a wider meaning of the concept “ethnic tourism” includes, besides tourists, local suppliers of “exotic” experiences and “cultural brokers” that

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facilitate the interaction between tourists and local suppliers of tourism products and services.

The term **cultural broker** designates a person that mediates or **intermediates the culture of destination and the culture of the tourist**. He/she assumes the role of explaining or selling indigenous culture to those who visit a destination. A guide, for instance, is a cultural broker since he/she accompanies the tourists to different villages and places along the route, interpreting or explaining what they see. In other words, a cultural broker describes a culture for the benefit of the members of another culture [4]. Here are other examples of cultural brokers:

- travel agencies: when they are large, they need to count, within the Tourism office, in the *Production compartment*, three divisions – *General programming*, *General operations*, and **Congress and pilgrimage operations** [5];
- anthropologists, who write about the culture of peoples from other continents for the audience of their own countries of origin;
- artists;
- authors of travel books;
- photographers;
- local intellectuals who write books or articles on the traditional culture for the visitors;
- local businessmen who organise seminars or consultancy for foreign firms concerning the way business is done in a foreign cultural place;
- national tourism offices that select the sites to be visited and the tour routes;
- journalists.

2. Materials and methods

In the context of European cultural tourism, establishing the religious and ethnic profile of Europe (an almost exclusively Christian continent and, at the same time, the main source of Christian religious tourists to Romania) aims at the following: defining the profile of the most important religious and ethnic tourism markets in Europe; analysing the tourist flow from Europe.

Defining the profile of the most important religious and ethnic tourism markets in Europe is done depending on the following: the dominant religion of the tourism market; the socio-economic environment of the tourists: (interest in religious and ethnic tourism; health state; income).

3. Results and discussion

Richards (2005) made up the list of the types of sites and attractions that attract mainly cultural tourists (in everything that follows, we have marked the ones that are related to religious tourism and to ethnic tourism):

- archaeological sites and museums;
- architecture (ruins, famous buildings, entire cities);
- arts, sculpture, **crafts**, art galleries, festivals, artistic events;
- music and dance (classical, **folk**, contemporary);
- drama (theatre, film);
- linguistic and literary study, tours, and events;
- **religious festivals, pilgrimages**;
- **entire cultures (folk or primitive) and subcultures**.

Here is the list of reasons why tourist visited such cathedrals as those in Burgos (Spain), Nottingham Castle (United Kingdom) or Paleis Het Loo (Holland) (Table 1, Figure 1).

Monitoring **European cultural tourism** showed that religious sites are among the favourites of European tourists (Table 2, Figure 2)

This study shows that **rural religious sites** rank after museums and historical sites and monuments, but before art galleries, heritage values, theatres, traditions, film, classical music, dance, music in general, or pop concerts.

Table 1. Reasons why tourists visit European cathedrals

Reasons for visiting	Burgos	Nottingham Castle	Paleis Het Loo
Self-education	14	14	14
Children's education	-	3	1
Novelty	10	11	8
To imagine past life	4	8	6
To see things in reality	5	5	4
Relaxation and pleasure	4	3	5
Exploring and assessing the self	3	3	5
Compensate lack of culture back home	5	2	4
Artistic experience	2	1	8
Interest in architecture/arts	5	1	3
Escape from routine	1	6	-
Reinforce relative relationships	-	3	2
Facilitate social interaction	-	4	+
Exchange information with other people	1	1	2
Social obligation of visiting cultural sites	1	1	1
Interest in royalty buildings	-	-	3
As part of one's work or study	1	-	1
Religious reasons	1	-	-

Source: After Richards (2005).

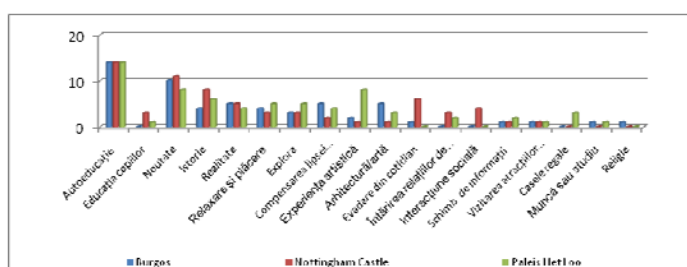


Figure 1. Reasons why tourists visit European cathedrals

Table 2. Types of locations monitored within the ATLAS Cultural Tourism Project 2007

Type of site	Number	Percentage
City	1,668	6.0
Historical site	805	7.5
Museum	737	26.7
Rural archaeological site	602	20.6
Rural religious site	400	4.3
Festival	280	25.9
Gallery-exhibition	91	4.7
Centre of tourism heritage	83	4.4

Source: After Richards (2005).

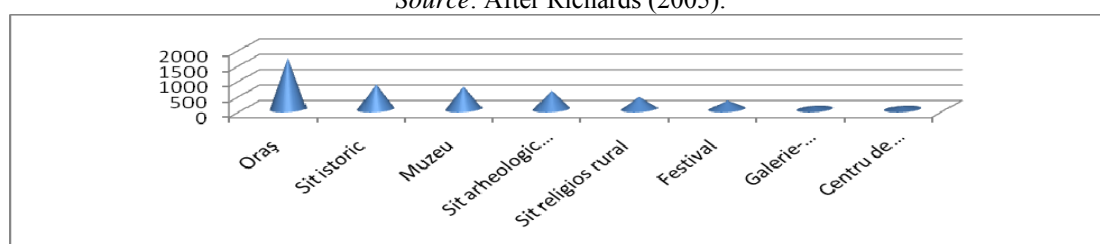


Figure 2. Types of locations monitored within

4. Conclusions

Cultural and/or religious values (pilgrimage centres, religious sites, etc.) of the preferred destination (with emphasis on the capacity of infrastructure of facing tourism traffic) in Europe are as mentioned above: Santiago de Compostella (Spain), Rome (Italy) or the Mount Saint Michel (France).

The safety and security factors of **religious tourism** are the safety and security factors of any type of cultural tourism practiced in Europe, a safe continent from the point of view of terrorism, if we leave aside the attack in the Atocha Station in Madrid (Spain) or the attack in the London underground (England), to mention only two of them. Travel formalities (visa, immigration, custom, travel warnings, other political issues) are among the simplest ones, in the context in which most European countries with religious tourism potential are members of the European Union.

Ethnic tourism is not only a form of interaction between “guests” and “hosts”, but a complex of ethnic relationships with significant implications for the ethnic identity of the natives.

It is important to emphasise that ethnic groups themselves cooperate actively to ethnic tourism experience – purely and simply because it is imperiously necessary that an ethnic tourism experience be a successful one. The natives do that encouraged by the state and hoping it will increase their incomes. **Ethnic tourism is often promoted by the state as a catalyst of economic integration and of the “modernisation” of the populations that live on subsistence activities but that contribute, as such, very little to the increase of state’s incomes.** Besides economic benefits (that are rather low) obtained from ethnic tourism, ethnic groups also experience changes that facilitate tourism experience but that also affect behaviour, clothing, production means, and traditional practices.

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