
PILGRIMAGE TOURISM IN SLOVAKIA

THE POTENTIAL FOR DEVELOPMENT

Ludmila Čábyová*

*University of ss. Cyril and Methodius, Faculty of Mass Media Communication, Nám. J. Herdu 2,
917 01 Trnava, Slovak Republic*

(Received 4 November 2015)

Abstract

We often come across the opinion that pilgrimage tourism in Slovakia has great potential for development. Slovakia possesses a wide range of sacral sights and significant places of pilgrimage, which are frequently visited by pilgrims from all over Slovakia and enjoy great popularity. Abroad, however, Slovak places of pilgrimage are relatively unknown. In this paper we present the results of a survey, which confirmed low levels of interest in religious tourism expressed by the inhabitants of the Trnava region, especially young people. The Faculty of Mass Media Communication has carried out a project called the Route of Saints Cyril and Methodius, whose main aim was to create accompanying activities on the stops of the path, thereby attracting mainly the target group of young people to the places of pilgrimage in the Trnava region.

Keywords: Trnava region, sacral sights, religion, pilgrimage, places

1. Introduction

The tradition of religious tourism is embedded in all religions. However, there are differences in pilgrimages and the way they are carried out in each faith. In the survey we carried out, religious tourism is understood as a branch which is not connected only with religion. One is considered a participant of religious tourism if he visits sacral and religious sights not only with the aim of a spiritual experience, but also with the aim of learning about them.

The benefits of religious tourism can be viewed from different perspectives. In general, they can be divided into spiritual, cognitive and economic. The main benefits of religious tourism are: reinforcing the faith of pilgrims, maintaining and appreciating the sights, creating new 'attractions' and it is also a source of income and revenues as well as an opportunity for economic and social development.

Pilgrims, regardless of their religion, head to a holy place, represented by a church, a mosque or a shrine, just to name a few. As far as the needs of pilgrims are concerned, these objects form the cornerstone of the infrastructure of religious tourism, unlike the case of common tourists, for whom they double

*E-mail: ludmila.cabyova@gmail.com

as means of localization. The high number of visits to the pilgrimage centre in a relatively short time has become the reason for building high-capacity religious sites. The mosque in Mecca, for instance, can accommodate 1.5 million pilgrims on the total area of 160,000 m² at once and in case it is crowded, there are tiled areas around available [A. Krogman, *Vybrané strediská religiozneho cestovného ruchu vo svete a ich infraštruktúra*, 15.05.2015, http://dam.fpv.ukf.sk/pluginfile.php/678/mod_resource/content/0/religiozny_cr.pdf].

Pilgrim centres regardless of the religion are mainly dominated by budget accommodation facilities. Frequently, gymnasiums and exhibition halls are used for accommodation purposes [1]. These kinds of facilities serve the pilgrims' basic need of staying overnight. Recently, along with the surge in the standard of living, new accommodation facilities which offer a higher standard of comfort comparable with world's tourist resorts are being built.

In addition, seasons of the year affect the number of visits even more. According to Rinschede [2] the tourist season in mild latitudes is bound by summer months (from April or May until October) as most of the activities are performed under the open sky.

2. Places of pilgrimage in Slovakia

Pilgrimage tourism has a long tradition in Slovakia. Real freedom of religion was established only after November 1989, thereby reinforcing the position of religious and pilgrimage tourism. There are over 55 religious places of pilgrimage in Slovakia, of which about 8 are Greek-Catholic. In this regard, Slovakia is still an undiscovered destination, although it has so much to offer. It has great potential to become a popular destination of religious tourism attracting mainly Polish, Hungarian, Moravian and Ukrainian tourists.

The biggest expansion of Marian places of pilgrimage occurred mainly from 17th and 19th century. In this area, these places were set up based on apparitions of the Virgin Mary only sporadically, with most of them established as a result of numerous spiritual healings, answered prayers, right decisions made at these locations and some of them based on physical healings. Pilgrimages are usually held on the occasion of Marian festivals, mainly in July, August and September [3].

The most common pilgrimages are made to celebrate the Assumption of the Virgin Mary into Heaven (15th August), the Birth of the Virgin Mary (8th September) and to remember Our Lady of Mount Carmel (16th July). In addition, in Slovakia, there is a strong tradition of pilgrimages on the occasion of Our Lady of Sorrows Day, which falls on 15th September and is a public holiday in Slovakia. The faithful also gather to celebrate the anniversary of the consecration of the main Marian basilica in Rome – Our Lady of the Snows (in August); in October, there are pilgrimages connected with the feast of the Protection of Our Most Holy Lady Theotokos (1st October) and remembrance of Our Lady of the Rosary (7th October).

Apart from renowned places like Marianka near Bratislava, Šaštín – Stráže, Staré Hory or the Marian forest in Levoča, Catholic worshippers visit various less known localities when making their Marian pilgrimages.

Slovakia has got centuries-long history of making pilgrimages mainly to places connected with worshipping Virgin Mary. These places are visited mostly by local pilgrims rather than foreign tourists, whose attendance is really low. At present, such traditional places serve as inspiration for activities connecting pilgrimages to achieve spiritual experiences with history in beautiful countryside. Discovering places of pilgrimage and sacral sights is supported by several regional, cross-border and international projects. For example, the Gothic route, the Jerusalem of Spiš, the Pilgrimage route of Saint Elisabeth (Košice-Sárospatak), the Sacral Gothic Route of Liptov and central Morava or the 'Sacral velo' project.

Moreover, the so called Marian pilgrimage route crosses Slovakia as well. It goes along the I 23 long-distance hiking route from Čenstochová through Krakow, Levoča, the Low Tatras, the Great Fatra, the White Carpathians, the Small Carpathians to Bratislava. In Austria, it continues to Vienna and from there along the traditional 'Via Sacra' (the Holy Road) through the Lower Austrian foothills of the Alps and all the way to Mariazell.

In the historical framework, the establishments of places of pilgrimage are connected with legends, sacred springs or trees, discovered pictures, statues or other religious artefacts. However, the set up of today's places of pilgrimage was influenced by other motives, too. The faithful often believed that it was the statue or picture which they had found that saved them from misfortune, the horrors of war or epidemics. A lot of places of pilgrimage attracted pilgrims by its 'miracle water' which caused 'miraculous healings', although, in actuality, these places were only mineral springs with healing powers [4]. Apart from the things mentioned above, there were other facts which influenced the establishment of places of pilgrimage in Slovakia. One those was the struggle between Protestantism, which rules out worshipping the Mother of God and all other saints, and Catholicism, which promoted Marian worship in many ways [4]. As regards chronology, after the end of re-catholicization in eastern Slovakia, more places of pilgrimage were established than in western Slovakia. Going from west to east, more and more places of pilgrimage can be found which are dated later (with the exception of medieval towns of Levoča and Plavecký Štvrtok). It might be connected to the influence of educational level, as more primitive people tend to create 'miraculous events' which they assign to a particular place of pilgrimage. Therefore, there are more numerous but less significant places of pilgrimage in eastern Slovakia than in the better educated western Slovakia, where there are fewer of them, but more significant (Šaštín, Marián, Trnava). In central Slovakia, there are only two significant sites – Staré Hory and Banská Štiavnica. The more mountainous part of Slovakia lacks places of pilgrimage. It might be put down to the fixed border between Poland and the Hungarian empire, which blocked the way of pilgrims and hindered their inflow from the Polish side. The shortage of places of pilgrimage in the northern part of

central Slovakia is also caused by the so called ‘scattered settlement’, which was an obstacle to setting up larger centres with a big church and a monastery.

In general, places of pilgrimage are centred in mountainous areas, with the exception of Šaštín, which derives its origin from the sculpture which was brought to the temple.

When talking about the geographical location of places of pilgrimage, it is necessary to see the connection with trade routes. For instance, between Bratislava and Trnava lay places of pilgrimage like Čierny Kameň, Modranka and Trnava. Towards the region of Záhorie there are Marianka and Šaštín. The abovementioned places of pilgrimage lie on the important trade route towards the capital city and the river Danube. Staré Hory and Levoča are also situated on the crossroads of important trade routes [4].

Last but not least, the development of places of pilgrimage is also influenced by climatic conditions. As it was already mentioned, the ideal period for pilgrimage tourism seems to be between spring and autumn. It begins in May (which is considered the month of Virgin Mary) and it ends in October (which is dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary) It is an ideal period for making a pilgrimage on foot as well as staying under the open sky.

Černá characterizes new forms of religious tourism, which began to develop in Slovakia only after 1989. *‘In this case individual activities are not primarily related to the so-called localising conditions of tourism, such as churches, statues, paintings, relics, etc. The primary objective of tourists – very often young people – is to take part in a social convention, such as a festival of religious or gospel music, other cultural or educational programs designed for spiritual recreation. They are characterised by great number of attendants from the outside of the local community or from abroad, they may be regular (annual or more frequent) or thematically oriented (e.g. occasioned by the Year of faith, anniversary of the coming of Saints Cyril and Methodius to our country and the like). These events take place most often in public places from towns or villages, in amphitheatres or in sports areas conditioned to take in greater audiences. Localising conditions often play a secondary role, however (most often churches – where accompanying events such as adorations, meditation in silence, lectures, and the like, take place.) The most important festival of this kind in our country is the gospel festival Lumen in Trnava. A 3-day event, it is one of the most important regular events in Slovakia in terms of attendance (in 2013 ca. 10,000 visitors from Slovakia and abroad) and at the same time the greatest gospel festival in Central Europe.’* [5]

3. Survey methodology - pilgrimage tourism in the Trnava region

In April 2015, we carried out an interview survey using a written standardized questionnaire. The municipalities in which the survey was conducted were deliberately selected and included the municipalities which we considered the main stops on the proposed Route of Saints Cyril and Methodius. The selection of municipalities was preceded by a pre-survey, where we selected

the most interesting sacral sights of the region. The main aim of the survey was to find out and recognize the current state of cultural and religious tourism in the Trnava region. The respondents filled out the questionnaires with the help of interviewers.

The interview survey was carried out in the municipalities of: Trnava, Trstín, Hlohovec, Vrbové, Ducové, Chtelnica, Dechtice, Kopčany, Šaštín, Skalica. They are all municipalities and towns which can be considered as places of pilgrimage or places with increased interest in pilgrimage, religious and cultural tourism in the Trnava region. All the municipalities and towns fall into the Trnava self-governing region. The questionnaires were filled out in public spaces of the towns and municipalities like the town or village centre, municipal office, in front of the church, community centre or the local shop. In total, the number of completed and submitted questionnaires was 535.

4. Evaluating the survey results

In the following part of this paper, we present some results of the survey. The complete results of the research we have published in the publication *Religious sights in a light of the tourism* [6].

4.1. Have you ever come across the term pilgrimage tourism?

The question ‘Have you ever come across the term pilgrimage tourism?’ was answered by 530 respondents. According to the survey, more than a half of the respondents (54.2%) had come across the term. A similar survey was conducted in the South Moravian and Zlín regions, which are bordering regions of the Trnava region. Based on the results, we may state that the awareness of the term pilgrimage tourism is higher among the respondents from the Czech Republic with 64% of them saying they were aware of it, which is 10% more than in Slovakia.

4.2. How do you understand the concept of pilgrimage tourism?

The results of Question 2 show that more than 58% of respondents suppose that pilgrimage tourism is only for the faithful, out of whom 24.4% think that it involves only religious pilgrimages with the remaining 34.4% thinking it includes visiting places of pilgrimage. When analysing this question, we use the aid of the thoughts of František Dancák, who, in his publication, called *Religious tourism* states: “*Nowadays, there is talk about religious tourism in general terms. Visiting a temple, a church or a shrine is not a bad form of passing the time. A pilgrimage, however, is not the same as religious tourism. It’s got a higher aim. Making a pilgrimage means going to sacred places with a religious aim. That is the basic and generally recognized definition. Since the first centuries, making a pilgrimage has been a manifestation of the life of the Church. It belonged to one the forms of participation of the general public of*

believers and a manifestation of their spiritual lives for centuries. Since the first centuries it has had the basic goals like praying, fulfilling a promise, pleading, adoring and achieving that one's pleas be answered.” [7] Based on the facts stated above it is necessary to distinguish between religious and pilgrimage tourism. According to the aforementioned author, pilgrimage tourism is only for believers. In most of the literature, religious tourism and pilgrimage tourism are not clearly distinguished and they are both connected with visiting churches, temples and places of pilgrimage.

When analysing this question, we set age as the criterion; we were trying to find out the structure of the answers depending on the age of the respondents. We found out that there are no significant differences in particular answers depending on the age (Figure 1).

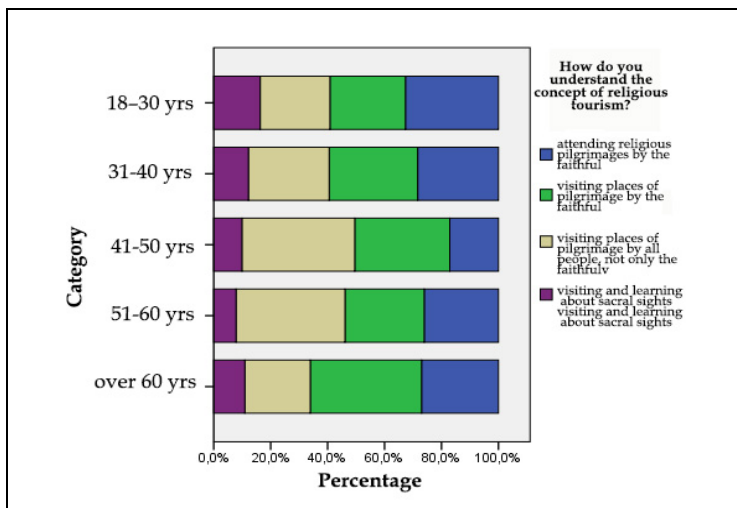


Figure 1. Understanding the concept of pilgrimage tourism depending on the age.

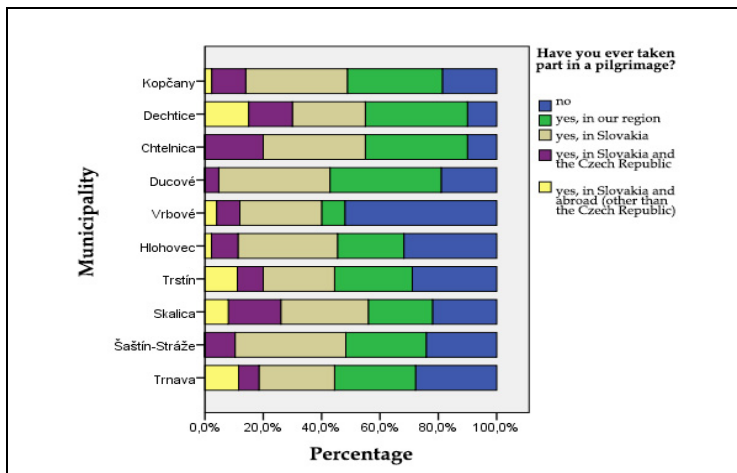


Figure 2. Pilgrimage attendance depending on the place of residence.

4.3. Have you ever taken part in a pilgrimage?

As many as 72% of respondents had participated in pilgrimage tourism. 25% of those had taken part in a pilgrimage within the Trnava region and 27% had gone to a different region within Slovakia. 8.2% of them had made a pilgrimage in the Czech Republic. These were mostly people who were geographically closer to the Czech Republic. Surprisingly, we found that in the bordering region, as many as 43% of the respondents had never taken part in pilgrimage or religious tourism. What is more, 24% of the Czech respondents stated they had taken part in religious and pilgrimage tourism in the Czech Republic as well as abroad.

Apart from the very well known places of pilgrimage in this region like Šaštín – Stráže, Trnava or Modranka, the Catholic believers come to express their reverence for the Mother of God and to draw strength and hope also to numerous less known localities which we included in our survey such as Dechtice, Dechnice – Katarínka, Dolné Orešany, Ducové, Sereď, Trstín – Hájiček, Hlohovec.

As can be seen from Figure 2, the most common answer was – no. In the town of Vrbové, as many as 52% of the respondents had never taken part in a pilgrimage and only 8% of the respondents from Vrbové had taken part in a pilgrimage in the Trnava region. The number of people who had participated in a pilgrimage abroad was low in all the places. It ranged from 15% in Dechtice to 2.3% in Kopčany and Hlohovec. In Šaštín, which is considered to be one of the most frequently visited places of pilgrimage, 27% of the respondents had taken part in a pilgrimage in the Trnava region and 37% in other regions of Slovakia. Compared with other towns, even the town of Šaštín did not see an increased interest in pilgrimages.

4.4. Do you take part in pilgrimages in your town (municipality) or close vicinity within a 30-kilometer radius

To the outside observer, the Slovaks may seem as a nation of pilgrims. The famous Marian forest in Levoča itself is visited by about a half million people every year during the first weekend of July [V. Jancura, *Dovolenka, niekto radšej cestuje na sväté miesta*, 05.05.2015, [://cestovanie.pravda.sk/cestovny-ruch/clanok/4416-dovolenka-niekto-radsej-cestuje-na-svaete-miesta/](http://cestovanie.pravda.sk/cestovny-ruch/clanok/4416-dovolenka-niekto-radsej-cestuje-na-svaete-miesta/)]. Other tens of thousands of pilgrims take part in the traditional summer pilgrimages to Šaštín, Gaboltov or Litmanová. Nevertheless, our survey implies that attending pilgrimages is not so popular and sought after in the selected municipalities. As many as 42% of the respondents claim they have never attended a pilgrimage in their town or close vicinity. Moreover, only 9.1% often attend pilgrimages. Based on the results of the survey, it may be assumed that although the places of pilgrimage in Slovakia are quite frequented, pilgrims prefer to make their pilgrimages to places beyond their town or their close

vicinity. It is very probable that the same target group visits several places of pilgrimage per year.

Moving on to foreign tourists, they express even smaller interest in Slovak places of pilgrimage. Although the Slovaks travel as far as to Portugal and Mexico just to visit holy places, foreign tourists tend to avoid Slovak shrines. There are very few groups venturing to places like Šaštín or Levoča. Some travel agencies offer these places as destinations but the interest in them is minimal.

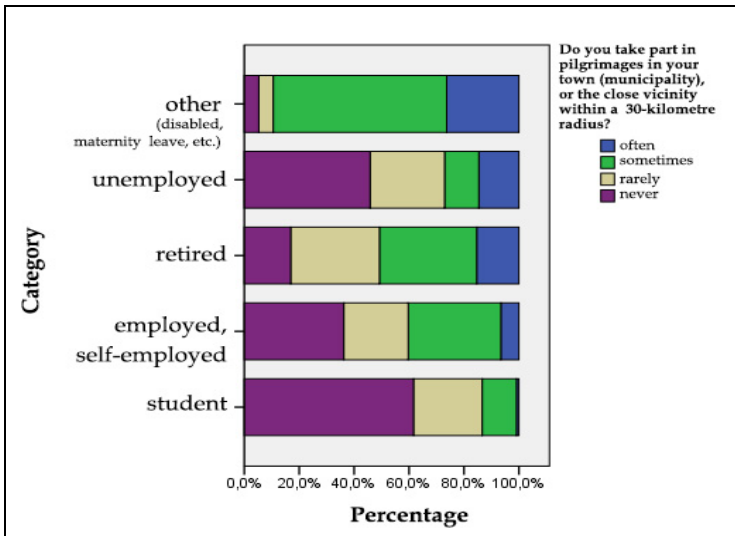


Figure 3. Pilgrimage attendance depending on the target group.

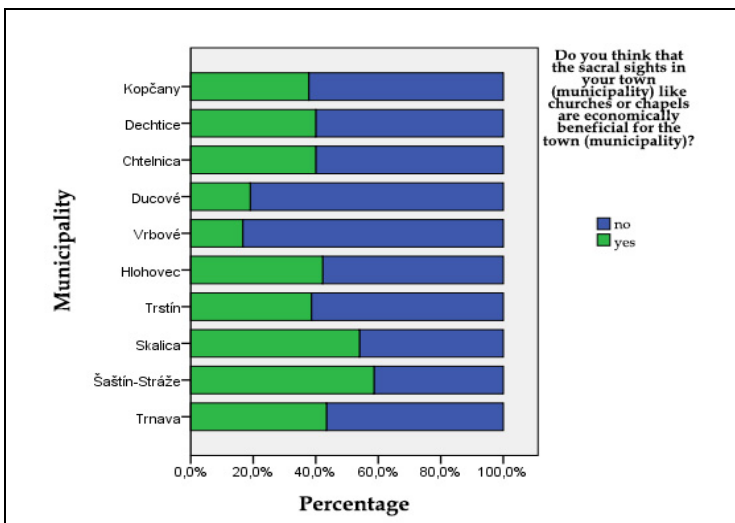


Figure 4. Economic benefit depending on the municipality.

The results of the survey suggest that young people in general show a very low interest in pilgrimage tourism with as many as 60% of the respondents

in the age of 18-30 and 61% of students (Figure 3) never having attended a pilgrimage in their own town or its vicinity. Working on the assumption that they are more likely to attend a pilgrimage in the place of their residence, we were interested in the answers of the pensioners. 35.4% of the interviewed pensioners often attend pilgrimages and 32.3% of them do it only rarely. 16.9% of the interviewed pensioners had never attended a pilgrimage.

4.5. Could you please name places in your town/municipality where people go for religious reasons (to pray or to meditate)?

This was an open question. 98% of the respondents answered that the church was the place where people go for religious reasons. Answers like the chapel, basilica or cathedral were also put into this group of answers. One third of these respondents stated the exact (or colloquial) name of the church. Among the most common answers were: Saint Anne Church, the Church of Saint Michael the Archangel, Saint Nicholas Cathedral, Saint John the Baptist Cathedral, Jesuit Church, Paulinian Church, Saint Nicholas Church known as the 'Thick Church', Basilica of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Saint Gorazd Church, Saint Helen Church, the Church of Saint Margaret, the Church of the Holy Spirit. There was one church which was frequently mentioned under the name of 'evangelical church' but was not further specified.

In this question, the respondents were allowed to state several answers. This was allowed by the open question concept. Therefore, we state numerous examples of places where the respondents may go for religious reasons:

- 1) Churches, basilicas, cathedrals, chapels (the abovementioned category);
- 2) Calvary, Stations of the Cross, Marian forest, Hájiček, Kostelec, the plague column;
- 3) The cemetery, the monument, the seminary, the novena, the monastery;
- 4) A park, nature, Červená skala, Mount Boričky;
- 5) The municipal office, the community centre, Saint Trinity Square;
- 6) Urbánok, the mosque.

4.6. Do you think that the sacral sights in your town (municipality) like churches or chapels are economically beneficial for the town (municipality)?

52.2% of the respondents suppose that sacral sights do not have an economic benefit and 47.8% suppose they do (Figure 4). Looking at individual answers, as far as the particular municipalities are concerned, there is a more optimistic view of the economic benefit of sacral sights in the towns of Šaštín, Vrbové, Trnava and Skalica. There seems to be less optimism in Ducové and Vrbové.

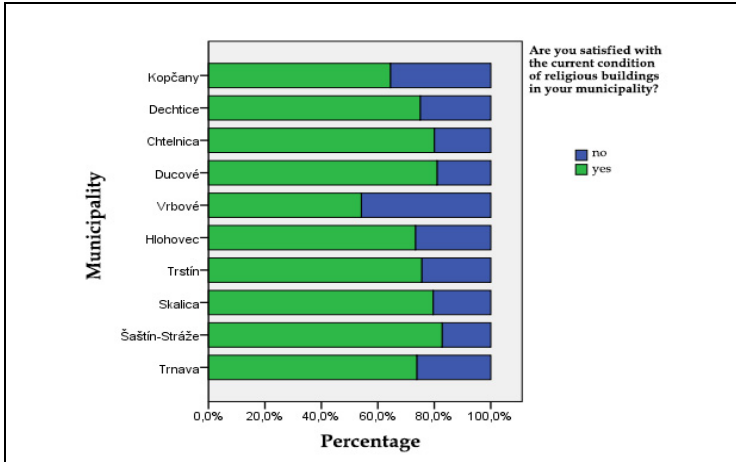


Figure 5. Satisfaction with the condition of religious sights.

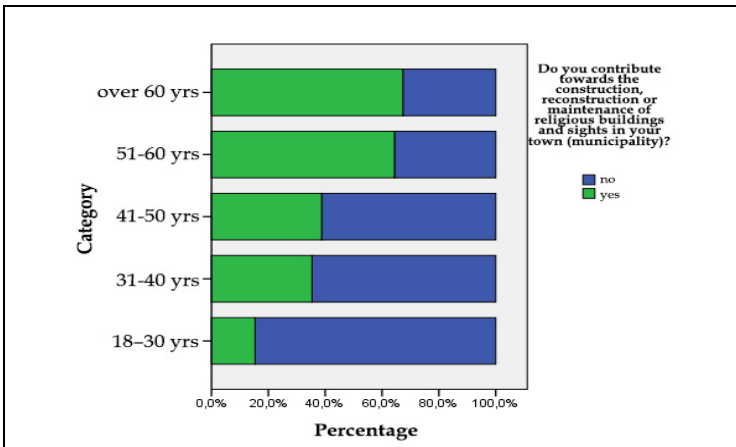


Figure 6. Contributions towards the reconstruction depending on the age.

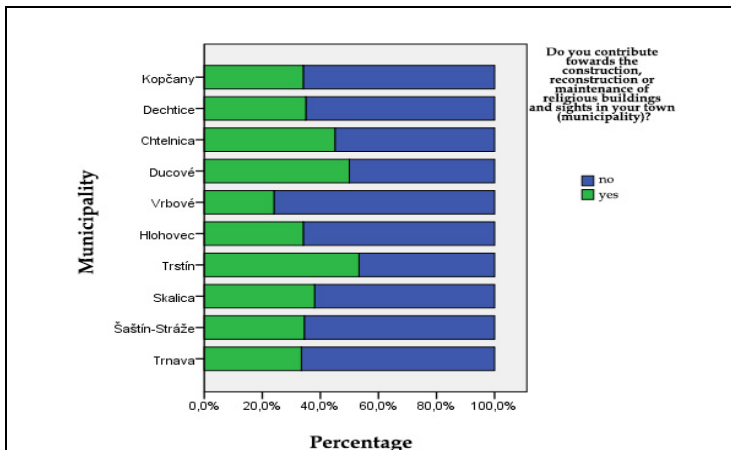


Figure 7. Contributions towards the reconstruction depending on the municipality.

Despite the fact that there are a lot of similarities among the reasons and the course of pilgrimages of the Christians, the Jews or the Muslims, there is one big significant difference. *“Christianity has had one particularity since its very beginnings: the pilgrim walks surrounded by the fellowship. The Christian knows that on their way to God, the places of pilgrimage themselves are not enough. They have to go amidst the fellowship”* says Caesar Artuire, who is a priest [6]. The need to experience the feeling of fellowship and to be stimulated by the example of others is one of the reasons for pilgrimages of people coming from all walks of life. Apart from traditional pilgrimages like the pilgrimage of the young (World Youth Day), the sick (Lurdy) or the dedicated, new and non-traditional pilgrimages emerge such as the pilgrimage of beekeepers, children or the Roma. They constitute a mass form of tourism with a relevant benefit for the region and its businesses as well as the Church.

Taking into consideration that a pilgrim is also only flesh and blood who has to fulfil their material needs even when looking for the spiritual, it can be pointed out that providing services for pilgrims and mostly for ‘religious tourists’ is a profitable business. According to the world Tourism Organisation, there was \$18bn in circulation, one quarter of which (4.5bn) was generated in Italy.

4.7. Are you satisfied with the current condition of religious buildings in your municipality?

The fact that as many as 73.6 % of the respondents are satisfied with the current condition of the sights in the municipality is pleasing. Figure 5 shows the satisfaction with the condition of sacral sights in particular municipalities.

4.8. In case your answer to the previous question is NO, what changes and improvements would you recommend?

This question was the second open question in the questionnaire. As many as 95% of the respondents who answered this question think that the most important change to improve the sacral sights is revitalisation. All answers which used the words: restoration, renovation, reconstruction or repair were put into this group of answers. Some of the answers stated a full or partial restoration.

Among the remaining 5% of answers, these are the most interesting which we consider to be worth mentioning:

- embellishment of the surroundings, cleaner surroundings, a fence;
- central heating;
- more events;
- responsiveness of the Monuments Board.

We also registered one amusing answer demanding Wi-Fi in churches.

4.9. Do you contribute towards the construction, reconstruction or maintenance of religious buildings and sights in your town (municipality)?

34.5% of the respondents contribute towards the construction, reconstruction or maintenance of religious buildings and sights. As far as age is concerned, the most generous group are the elder respondents (the target groups of 51-60 and over 61) with more than 70% of them contributing towards the maintenance of sights (Figure 6). As far as municipalities are concerned, the most generous are the respondents from Trstín and Dubové, whereas Vrbové has the fewest contributors (Figure 7).

4.10. In case your answer was YES, could you please estimate the amount of your financial support which you have contributed over the last 5 years?

This question was the third open question in the questionnaire and it was only answered by those respondents who had stated they contribute towards the reconstruction of sacral sights. Over the last five years, they have contributed approximately 32,910€ in total. In actuality, this figure could be even higher, since some of the respondents couldn't state how much exactly they had contributed. On average, it amounts to approximately 180€ per respondent and about 61€ per interviewed respondent (out of 534 respondents).

The questions were followed by classification questions intended to find out the age, education, social status and marital status of the respondents. In question 16 we asked the respondents whether they were believers and in question 17 we asked how often they attended the church. 15% of the respondents go to church more than once a week and 24.8% once a week. We were trying to establish how the faith of the respondents and the frequency of their church attendance affect the participation in pilgrimages. It is not surprising that the results of the survey confirmed that there is some influence. In fact, nearly 60% of those respondents who frequently attend pilgrimages go to church more than once a week.

5. Conclusions

The survey in selected municipalities of the Trnava region confirmed the results of previously conducted surveys. The municipalities in question were those which have a potential for development of religious and pilgrimage tourism as there are significant sacral sights on their territory, many of which serve as places of pilgrimage. By way of comparison, we bring the partial results of a survey on pilgrimage tourism from carried out in 2009.

Although a pilgrimage is often connected with considerable physical effort, according to the survey of Maurizio Artur Biocchi [I. Gazda, *Fenomén púti*, 11.05.2015, http://www.postoy.sk/fenomen_puti] women and elderly people are more prevalent among pilgrims than men and young people

respectively. The results of a survey conducted in 2009 on the sample of 1,416 respondents over 18 years of age state that women account for 57% of all respondents. The share of pilgrims over 51 years of age is even higher; the respondents from the 51-65 age group account for 42% of the pilgrims and the over 65 age group accounts for 32% of the pilgrims. The reason for making a pilgrimage is faith for 68% of the pilgrims and looking for some form of spirituality for 13% of the respondents. Interestingly, as many as 90% of the pilgrims had had a strong emotional experience, mainly connected with the holy place – the destination of their journey (55%), prayer (21%) or the journey itself (17%) [http://www.postoy.sk/fenomen_puti].

The results of the survey which we carried out within the Trnava self-governing region were integrated in several other proposals. We have created the Route of Saints Cyril and Methodius, whose objective is to boost the interest in culture and sacral sights in the Trnava region with the focus on younger target groups.

The main aim of the project is to support and promote the cultural legacy of Saints Cyril and Methodius by means of cultural and educational activities, as well as to emphasize the potential of cultural tourism, including pilgrimage tourism and learning about religious sights, and the possibilities for its development [8]. The proposed Route of Saints Cyril and Methodius will allow tourists to visit the microregions of Trnava, Zlín, and South Morava, where there are a lot of cultural and sacral sights connected with religious and cultural places of interest and traditions. The intention is to create accompanying activities which could make the particular stops as well as the whole route (accessible by bike in all its length) more attractive.

The whole promotion of the Route of Saints Cyril and Methodius as well as the particular accompanying events will be carried out by the Faculty of Mass Media Communication in Trnava. We hope that through these activities we will help to build a positive image.

Acknowledgment

This paper is a part of the research project KEGA 002UCM-4/2005 Marketing of educational institutions.

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