

Assessment of the religious-tourism potential in Romania

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This paper aims to provide a model for the assessment of the religious-tourism potential in Romania. The religious practice has been in a continuous change over the past 20 years, making the pilgrimage phenomenon to have an upward trend. In the same time, many religious edifices are becoming more attractive to visitors, as they are included in package tours, and visited by large numbers of tourists. In Romania, there are many religious places visited both, by tourists or pilgrims; it is difficult to assess their numbers and also to distinguish between religious practices and touristic visits as no studies have been conducted in this direction. They are centres of religious (spiritual) power, in which people regularly spend money and time while around them it has been developed a real infrastructure, from roads or construction of facilities to more complex services that include accommodation, stores or commercial stalls, selling souvenirs or items more or less related to religious practice. Therefore, the objectives of this paper aimed at evaluating the tourist valences of religious edifices in Romania as well as the degree of their valorisation; in order to meet these objectives, three dimensions were considered and assessed: the historical-cultural dimension, the religious dimension, and the economic dimension. Many relevant elements for these dimensions have been quantified, giving them scores based on unitary criteria. The results help to see better the differentiation/association between the tourist value and the religious value of religious edifices in Romania, highlighting particularities at the national level, which will be the subject of further analysis.

Key Words: *religion, religious tourism potential, pilgrimage destinations, monasteries, Romania.*

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Introduction

The concepts of religious tourism and pilgrimage should be clarified in order to understand the phenomenon. Religion is a set of beliefs, practices and rituals that define peoples relationship with the sacred, and how they adopt a model of existence and moral conduct to which they regularly report (Bremer, 2005). Religion by default incorporates emotional feelings and ritualistic behaviour as well as providing a moral compass for communities (Rojas-Méndez, 2013).

The industrialisation associated with the urbanisation and the modernisation of societies in European countries in recent centuries has reduced the role that religion plays in social life. In traditional societies, religious authority was unanimously recognised, and religion had an overwhelming influence on all sections of life. Therefore, religion stated the individual moral norms and influenced people decisions in crucial moments. Over time, the science evolution and the increase of the degree of education of the population replaced the religious explanation by a scientific one.

Urbanisation has an essential contribution to the process of reducing the social importance of religion. The contact with new cultures and religions undermines religious belief. Besides, the decrease in social control of the church and the traditional community on religious practice and individual faith gives individuals the freedom to choose what to believe in, and how to believe. The level of individual religiosity has also changed. Modernity has acted upon religious beliefs by decreasing religious practices, and repositioning religious values in the individual system. Religious beliefs lose their traditional content and "more and more people think in what they want to believe, not in what is imposed" (Ester et al., 1993). In this regard, a significant role is without a doubt played by the holy shrines, "a place of communion and worship" (Pearce, 1993).

Another important aspect is the development of tourism and the emergence of mass tourism. Mass tourism is a complex phenomenon, which can be approached from two perspectives: economic and social. From an economic point of view, tourism is undoubtedly a factor in the development of the touristic economy areas and of all the national economies that build the tourism industry. From a social point of view, tourism is an act of knowledge and culture (Istrate and Glacan, 1994). Considering that in recent decades there has been a lifestyle homogenization and, in some cultural and geographic spaces or for specific social categories, a loss of values and morals, many countries tried to preserve and affirm the authentic values of the religious culture for preserving the national identity. One of the ways to materialise this intention is tourism, namely, cultural tourism (Moldoveanu, 1997).

The base of this form of tourism is represented by the entire cultural and historical patrimony of a country, which can be composed of archaeological monuments, architectural ensembles, memorial buildings and collections, public parks and gardens, historical areas, rural and urban areas (Kong, 1990).

In this frame, there are also included the religious art values created over time by various religions who have led to the development of religious tourism and pilgrimage. Many visitors are getting attracted by holy places, with a different motivation than religious practice, being also interested in the cultural value of the religious edifices.

Acquiring the knowledge of the religious edifices by tourists in the multitude of aspects that they find, reveals the real object of religious and cultural tourism. If cultural-religious tourism does not necessarily imply the religious affiliation of the visitor, the pilgrimage underlines through its purpose the visit or the journey carried out by those who want to express religious devotion.

Religious tourism is the form of tourism that involves visits to places of worship, unique tourist attractions through their religious edifices (Rinschede, 1992). At the same time, mixed/alternative forms such as tourism pilgrimage developed, entailing, in addition to religious practice the access/use of accommodation infrastructure (Gheorghilas, 2014). However, all these forms, pilgrimage, tourism pilgrimage, and religious tourism rely on the existence of religious edifices and destinations that have developed and have become very popular in time. Also, they require travelling to these destinations, individually or in an organised group, using certain means of transport. Moreover, pilgrimage tourism also implicates practices of religious tourism but with a certain regularity of space and time, at destinations very well known. According to studies, the places of pilgrimage near homes are not necessarily the most visited, and they choose to make these religious trips even at long distances in order to have a close bond with the holy (Turner, 1973).

Pilgrimage, by definition, is a universal religious phenomenon, constituting a form of expression of religious sentiment, considered to be the oldest act in the history of humankind (Brandon, 1970). Origins of pilgrimages date back to ancient times, and as a geographical extension, its distribution is planetary. Therefore, the multiple meanings attached to the term are not accidental, and pilgrimages can be defined as travelling to a particular place, in order to worship it or to ask divinity a gift, a solution, or a miracle, or merely an act of thanksgiving (Rinschede, 1992). Over time, the word "pilgrim" has gained particular significance: the pilgrim is an individual who possesses a variety of motivations different from business, family or intellectual curiosity, but possesses a wide range of motivations, a deeply rooted need to go to a place considered holy, for devotion reasons, to seek support (Pearce, 1993).

Many authors mentioned the veneration of the earthly remnants of people declared by the clergy to be holy, as one of the most concrete forms of expression of theophany. For the person who has inclinations into the pilgrimage, this theophany consists in the fact that he admits the presence of divine grace in the conserved bodies of the saints. The contact with these is a necessary act and with a tremendous emotional burden that occurs most often in the space where the saint died or activated, and where the religious institutions officially celebrate it. Over time, pilgrimage becomes a phenomenon that goes beyond religious canons, and new elements such as searching for miracles, relics and miraculous remedies were added to it (Margry, 2008). Despite positive and negative ideas towards pilgrimages, in the following centuries, the practice continues its uninterrupted and unprecedented course, with minor changes brought by the various social, cultural, and political changes.

Pilgrimage itself, is a component of religious anthropology, a phenomenon embedded in the sphere of research and study of several scientific fields (Morinis, 1992). It was investigated directly or indirectly by geographers, historians, folklorists, sociologists, philosophers, ethnologists and, not least, by

the theologians. In Romania, numerous studies focused mainly on the situation of religious edifices and religious beliefs during the communist period. Communist repression has significantly affected all domination, some churches and monasteries have been closed, and religious practice has dropped significantly. The situation of the Romanian Orthodox Church and other churches (e.g. Greek, Catholic) was different.

The Communist regime did not only affect the internal functioning of different religions but also changed the roles played by different religious authorities and cults. Religious associations - charities and pilgrimages were forbidden. By the Reform of Public Education, all confessional schools were abolished, and religious education was forbidden in all schools (Gheorghe, 2004). By adopting these laws, the holy places were virtually forbidden to engage in various public activities, and their role was reduced to religious activity only. The situation constituted a novelty for Romania because the Orthodox Church traditionally played an important role especially in public and the political space.

Although affected by communist persecution, the religious cult succeeded in coexisting with the communist power, which ensured its survival and leads to fewer losses from the communist regime. The Communist state, although a secular state, had not issued any legislative act like separating the State and the Church (Meyendorff, 1996). Thus, the Orthodox Church was transformed into a state department, subsidised and governed by the communist power. The religious authority, situated between religious and political power, subjected to the time leaders and tried to find an optimal way of adapting. This strategy has not failed. In 1985, this authority represented the most vigorous authority in the European Communist states (Stan and Turcescu, 2000). Despite the attacks given by the Communist power to the holy places, six Theological Seminaries and two Orthodox Theology Institutes continued to function in Romania (Stan and Turcescu, 2000; Gillet, 2001). Although subjected to atheist education actively promoted in schools or media, the population has not given up on religious acts. Besides, beyond the dimensions of the political repression that affected the Romanian society and the religious cults, other factors contributed to maintaining a relatively high level of religiosity in Romania, such as the close relationship between religion and national identity.

In Romania, the Orthodox Church contributed to the formation of national identity at the beginning of the 19th century, as in the case of other Orthodox nations in the Balkans, such as Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia. The idea of the association between orthodoxy and nationalism was heavily exploited by the extreme right of the Romanian society in the interwar period. In this context, the religious authority constituted a refuge for the population in front of the aggression exercised on multiple levels by the communist power.

After the fall of the communist regime, the coordinates of the religious field have changed. True religious liberalisation has taken place, imposed restrictions have been lifted, new religious movements have taken place, monasteries were built and pilgrimage gained important valences in the Romanian space, being considered a form of cultural tourism (Gillet, 2001).

Across Romania, there are approximately 16,000 churches and 556 monasteries that have been inventoried during this study. That represents a large

number of religious monuments, well kept, of which some, have particular artistic valences, with traditional representative architecture. Some of them date back in the feudal and pre-modern times and represent the features of Byzantine and Oriental art (Armenian, Syrian, Turkish, etc.). Transylvania, long-lived under foreign serenity, with population from other parts of Europe, with a stronger Catholic influence, assimilated and borrowed the styles of Western art: Romantic, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque.

The modern period mainly develops public architecture, religious edifices built now are less valuable architectural and artistic, bearing the mark of neoclassical or romanticism style. This religious heritage creates real opportunities for the development of religious tourism and pilgrimage in Romania. There is a very well known Romanian tradition of pilgrimage to churches, monasteries and hermitages on the occasion of grand religious celebrations that have to do with saints. There are also frequent pilgrimages to religious centres, famous for the relics of saints, wondrous icons and spiritual priests with great missionary vocation. At the same time, an essential premise in the practice of religious tourism and pilgrimage is the need for knowledge and education, especially for young people.

Comparing to communist-era, when these practices were dimmed, after 1990, on the background of the transformations in society, one can notice a steady increase in religious practices and a revival of pilgrimages as well as religious tourism. If the pilgrimage draws attention by its magnitude, especially in the last decades, an incipient form of religious tourism existed and developed in communist times. It was developed based on the existence of particular religious buildings with outstanding cultural value, promoted by the communist regime and highly visited by Romanian or foreign tourist, as the monasteries with exterior wall painting in northern Moldavia, the Brâncovean style monasteries in the northern part of Oltenia.

Whether we refer to practices of religious or pilgrimage tourism, it is essential that both are based on the existence and value of a religious patrimony. However, in Romania, the religious tourism potential, based on the existence of numerous religious buildings, some of them promoted by both travel agencies and mass media, has not yet been evaluated. Therefore, the objectives of this paper aimed at evaluating the tourist valences of religious edifices in Romania as well as the degree of their valorisation. This is a preliminary study that attempts to assess in a unitary manner, at the national level, different dimensions and elements defining this type of potential in order to represent the existing picture of religious heritage. The economic dimension itself highlights many aspects, which must be taken into consideration for future analysis.

Data and methods

In order to develop a model for the assessment of religious tourism potential, a number of 556 religious edifices (monasteries) were analysed, taking into account three relevant dimensions: the cultural-historical dimension (Vci), the religious dimension (VR), the economic dimension (VEc). Each dimension has many specific subdivisions (Tables 1, 2 and 3). The methodology applied is

based on a series of qualitative and quantitative data on which several indicators have been calculated (Gheorghilaş, 2014). The first step was to identify and make an inventory of all religious edifices in Romania and to set-up a complete database. This was a necessary but challenging task as the information is widely dispersed, various sources focusing on different aspects of the issues studied.

To collect and to organise the necessary information, all religious edifices in Romania were inventoried according to a series of features that define the dimensions previously considered. This documentation was based on different sources, starting with the official information provided by the Romanian Patriarchate; to these, information displayed by each Metropolitan Church (six in number on the territory of Romania), by Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs or by the Ministry of Tourism have been added; tourist guides, pilgrimage programs promoted by different tourist agents, reports or tourist monographs of different region or geographic area were also consulted. Each Metropolitan Church has many dioceses (archbishops and bishops) that comprise monastic settlements, namely monasteries. Where available, the websites of the archbishops and wardens were accessed, and initially, a part of the monasteries belonging to them was marked. To complete and to update the database, the collected information was verified, organised, and adjusted according to multiple criteria. For a proper and reliable analysis, own investigations were carried out, and the inventory of the monasteries was completed with the information received from priests, monks, clergy, or church officials.

After identifying all the monasteries across Romania, and setting up the database, representative elements belonging to three dimensions were analysed as detailed in tables 1-3. Granting scores for the subdivisions of each dimension was done according to the established criteria, from the scale elaborated. The criteria chosen for the scale is between 0 and 1 point, as follows: 0 - 0.25 point (limited), 0.25 - 0.5 point (normal), 0.5 - 0.75 point (high), 0.75 - 1 point (very high).

After awarding scores, the total value of each dimension was tracked. More precisely, for each monastery, a total score, resulting from the sum of scores obtained by all elements considered was calculated. Thus, according to the total score obtained, each religious edifice analysed occupies a particular position in the national hierarchy. For each dimension, the resulted hierarchy highlighted more clearly the historical, cultural - religious value of certain edifices at national or regional level as well as the degree of their valorisation. In order to have a clear image of this hierarchical distribution of the religious edifices at national level, taking into account their position in the national hierarchy, the resulted scores for each dimension were displayed on maps, using ArcGIS.

Results and discussion

The analysis was conducted at a national level; collected data has been processed using specialised programs. All these aggregated elements show an actual image of religious tourism potential in Romania. To better understand the spatial distribution of the phenomenon and how it overlaps on the Romanian territory, the cartographic representations for the three generated dimensions has been

Table 1. The Cultural-historical dimension (VCi)

CODE	Indicators	Observations	Score
VCi 1	Oldness	expresses the idea of seniority the year of establishment	0 – 0.25 (limited)
VCi2	Architecture	the dominant architectural elements expressiveness; stylistic coherence	0.25 – 0.5 (normal)
VCi 3	Historical personalities	a cultural / historical identity.	0.5 – 0.75 (high)
VCi 4	Conservation level	the current state of the worship place	0.75 - 1 (very high)

Source: Authors calculations

Table 2. The Religious Dimension (VR)

CODE	Indicators	Observations	Score
VCi 1	Icons	the icons and the type of icons (e.g. miraculous icons)	0 – 0.25 (limited)
VCi2	Relics	the relics present in the worship places (the ones from known / publicized saints or relics of the lesser-known saints)	0.25 – 0.5 (normal)
VCi 3	Religious personalities	the memorial value of a religious identity	0.5 – 0.75 (high)
VCi 4	Symbols	symbols that make the worship place recognizable	0.75 - 1 (very high)

Source: Authors calculations

Table 3. The Economic Dimension (VEc)

CODE	Indicators	Observations	Score
VCi 1	Accessibility	the condition of the communication paths / roads	0 – 0.25 (limited)
VCi2	Accommodation / facilities	spaces arranged for the reception of the tourists	0.25 – 0.5 (normal)
VCi 3	Price/value	ticket rates, guides, photos, etc.	0.5 – 0.75 (high)
VCi 4	Valorisation	the popularity of the places of worship	0.75 - 1 (very high)

Source: Authors calculations

used. The Cultural-Historical Dimension was generated by summing the scores resulted when evaluating attributes as: oldness, architectural style and historical personalities linked to the monasteries, the current conservation status as well. (Figure 1).

This dimension is supported by two areas of concentration of religious edifices, the North of Moldavia – which concentrated highly scored edifices and the southern part of Oltenia and Muntenia, also including many edifices with higher scores. This is mostly explained by the fact that these territories have always belonged to Romania and are not subject to foreign domination. From these areas, remarkable personalities have campaigned for the reunification of the country and the preservation of cultural heritage. On the contrary, in the Dobrogea region, the religious sites have low or very low rates; they are placed mostly in the category of the relatively recent monasteries, with valences that do not stand out. This is the consequence of multiculturalism, sustained by the influence of other religions and cultures (Turkish, Tatarian, Aromanian,

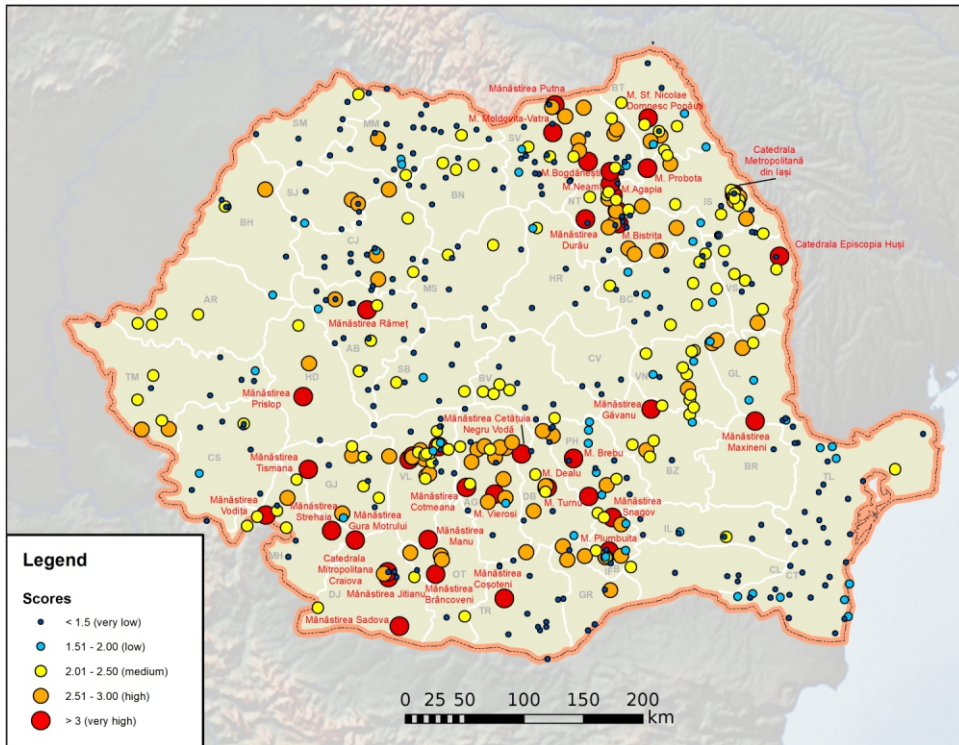


Figure 1. The Cultural-Historical Dimension in Romania

Lipovan Russians). In the centre and the western part of the country, the dispersion of places of worship could also be a result, over time, of the cultural influence of Hungarian, German, and Austrian.

When the year of establishment or the first attestation is considered, the oldest monument received the highest score (as this is the case of the ancient monasteries built before and up to 1600) while those built after 1990 received the lowest score (like most edifices from Dobrogea region). In this category are also included the monasteries that are under construction, (not finished buildings). The Vodița Monastery in Mehedinți County is the oldest documentary attested and the first monastic establishment in Romania, administered autonomously (samovlasty) according to the rules of the Eastern church (established by St. Basil the Great). From the architectural point of view, the highest value was given to the traditional style (representative for the geographical location) and the lowest, to the modern, new style.

According to the historical personalities criteria, related to the monasteries in Romania, it was given the maximum score to those having information on this aspect and the minimum to those who do not have. Through historical personalities, it is understood: rulers, writers, etc. In the case of the conservation level, higher rates have been assigned to the restored structures and paintings, and lower ones to the monasteries in ruins. The majority of the Romanian religious sites, which have suffered degradation, have already been renovated; currently, there are a rather small number of monasteries in ruin. The Religious Dimension was generated by calculating the sum of the criteria related to

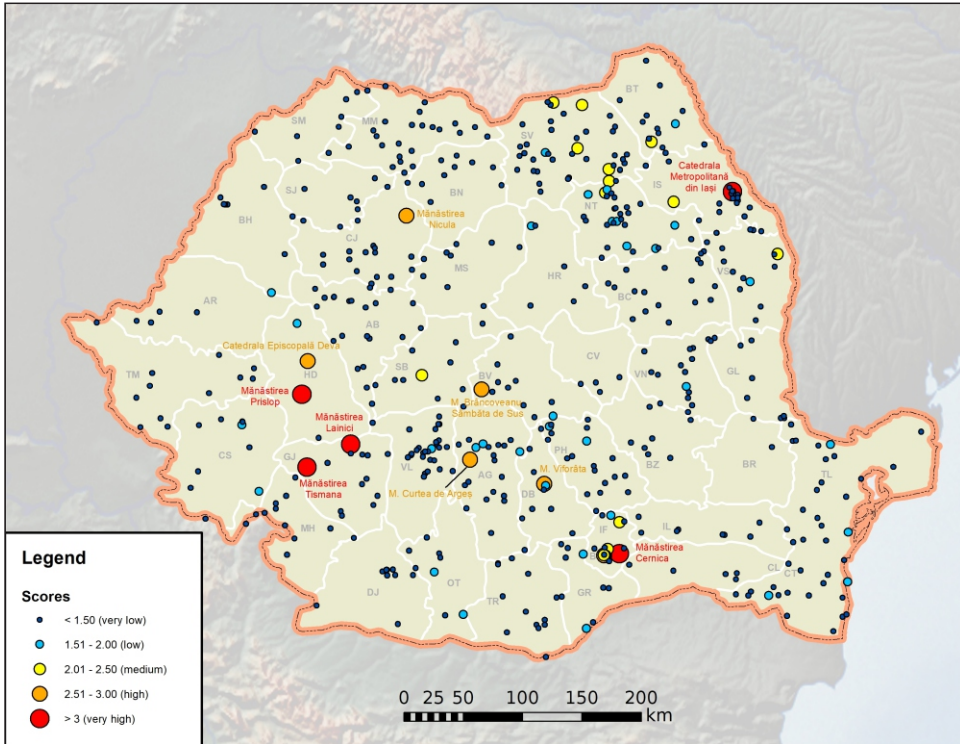


Figure 2. The Religious Dimension in Romania

religious value/significance; Icons - the maximum score was awarded (1 point) if monasteries hold ancient or miraculous icons, while for the monasteries having standard icons (after 2000 painted), the score was minimal (0.25 pct). There were also intermediate values, including standard icons and wondrous icons dated at various times (Figure 2).

From the relics point of view, the maximum value was given to the monasteries that hold mediatised motifs (e.g. Prislop Monastery, Metropolitan Cathedral in Iași, etc.) and the lowest was given to those who do not. According to the criteria of the religious personalities that were closely connected with the Romanian monasteries, the highest rate was assigned to those who hold such personalities and the lowest to those who do not own. In the same way, for the criteria related to the presence of symbols, the highest score was given to the monasteries that have mediatised symbols and the lowest to those who do not have such kind. Analysing the resulted hierarchy one can notice that only five monasteries across Romania registered very high scores. (Figure 2). These are mostly the monasteries intensely promoted by media receiving a considerable number of visitors all over the year. In this respect, one can mention, on the top of the hierarchy, the Prislop Monastery in the western part of the country (Hunedoara County) well recognized for Father Arsenie Boca, or the Metropolitan Cathedral of Iași, in the eastern part of the country, (Iași County) famous for the relics of Holy Paraskeva.

For the rest of Romania, the monasteries considered common, which do not generate tourist flows or pilgrimage that do not have religious symbols or

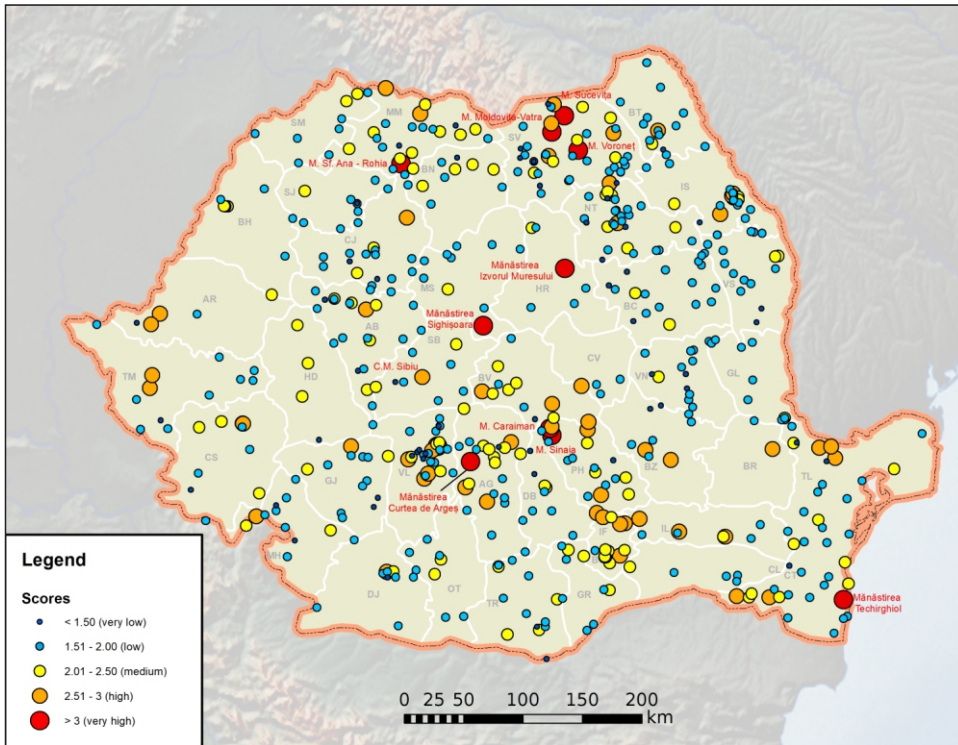


Figure 3. The Economic Dimension in Romania

representative icons, are quoted with lower rates according to their values. Considering both the Cultural-Historical and Religious dimensions, we can observe that the Prislop Monastery and Tismana Monastery (situated in Gorj Country) are placed at the top of the hierarchy, receiving higher scores. These places are significant not only from a religious perspective but also have deep historical, cultural valences (Dumbrăveanu, 2008).

The Economic Dimension was generated in the same way, by calculating the sum of the criteria mostly related to infrastructure, accessibility, or exploitation. Considering the road / transport infrastructure, the highest values were obtained by the monasteries being located on or next to the national roads, with excellent accessibility (e.g. monasteries situated in the cities, easy accessible to all) and the lowest ones, by monasteries hardly accessible, located on the top of the mountains, reached by forest roads or narrow paths (Figure 3). From the accommodation point of view, the highest score was given to monasteries that have over 50 accommodation places in their premises and have facilities for receiving tourists. A good example is Techirghiol Monastery situated in the Southern Dobrogea that has 130 accommodation places. The lowest score was given to those monasteries that do not support such kind of infrastructure, that do not have accommodation, parking, or facilities for tourists.

Exploitation is the last criteria regarding this dimension. The maximum score was attributed to monasteries that are part of the major travel agencies programs, to those that are included in programs several times throughout the year and the minimal one to monasteries that have local importance only or are unknown to people that do not live near them.

The results obtained shape out five distinct area of concentration, with relevant examples of religious edifices, which earn from the exploitation of cultural-historic and religious attributes. The north-eastern part of Romania, (Bucovina) includes famous monasteries as Moldovița, Sucevița and Voroneț. The monasteries kept their financial autonomy with funds coming from entrance fees, pilgrimage fees and accommodation. Other concentration areas are Muntenia and Transylvania that follow the same pattern as the ones situated in the north-eastern part on Romania. Singular examples are found in Dobrogea region - Techirghiol Monastery and in Maramureș region - Saint Ana Rohia Monastery. On the map, one can find such areas close to large cities, or around the capital of the country – Bucharest. An essential aspect related to this dimension is that the holy shrines have received very high scores when considering the historical, -cultural or religious dimensions but did not receive the same scores when considering the economic dimension (e.g. Prislop Monastery, Tismana Monastery, and Metropolitan Cathedral in Iași).

The scores resulted by calculating indicators related to economic dimension show that many monasteries from the top of the hierarchy perform economically, although registering different religious or cultural-historical rates. In other words, there is no necessary direct correlation between cultural or religious value and economic performance. From this point of view, very important seems to be the infrastructure and the accessibility; the media also play an essential role, by intensely promoting certain religious places.

Conclusions

This paper is aiming to develop a complex methodology for assessing the religious tourism potential in Romania. In order to evaluate the tourist valences of religious edifices in Romania as well as the degree of their valorisation three dimensions and related indicators were considered and assessed: the historical-cultural dimension, the religious dimension, and the economic dimension. Many relevant elements from these dimensions have been quantified, giving them scores based on unitary criteria. The results help to see better the differentiation/association between the tourist value and the religious value of religious edifices in Romania, highlighting particularities at national level, which will be the subject of further analysis.

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