

THE IMPACT OF SAINT PARASCHEVA PILGRIMAGE ON TOURISM IN IASI COUNTY

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Abstract

Nowadays, pilgrimage is a part of international tourism, being considered religious tourism, because it contributes to the development of economy, like any other type of tourism. This research paper takes into consideration the pilgrimage to Saint Paracheva, and how it helps the development of religious tourism in Iasi county, the economical implications. We try to capture the importance of Saint Parascheva pilgrimage, because year after year it bring many more pilgrims to Iasi city. In time, it could become an important place of pilgrimage at European level.

Key words: *Europe; Iasi; pilgrimage; Saint Parascheva; tourism.*

JEL Classification: *L83; Z12*

I. INTRODUCTION

At the base of economic growth and development it stands a key factor, in this case, tourism, for many people being a primary or a secondary activity (Aziri and Nedelea, 2013). Any touristic destination can be a source of interest for tourists, including every element part of it, with or without the presence of tourists: local day life, infrastructure or architecture (Gisolf, 2014). We can say that tourism contributes to the local economy in many different ways. We have to take into account the fact that touristic goods (national historical monuments, historic sites, springs etc.) are not negotiable, because their consume are in the same location, and people from other regions can enjoy them, by visiting those places (Zhang, 2015). Another point of view is the fact that tourism helps in attenuating the unbalance between regions, but also at local, national and global level. Tourism helps to diversify the economical structures, which contributes to the touristic demand and to the creation of other industries (Cioban, 2015).

In many places of the world, "pilgrimage tourism" became an important component of tourism, and if before was seen exclusively as a religious activity, nowadays it is seen from a wider perspective (Bhardwaj, Rinschede et. al, 1994). A definition of pilgrimage could be the travel to a sacred space, as an act of religious devotement, and we can talk about 3 elements, these being: the journey, the motivation (a religious one), and the destination (which it has to be sacred) (Stoddard, 1994). The destination of each pilgrimage is a sacred object, including natural elements (mountains, rivers, trees, animals etc.), cultural elements (churches, temples, relics etc.), but also human beings. The difficulty of the journey insures the blessing of the pilgrimage, and even now longer distances is an essential element of the pilgrimage and it becomes more successful and you gain a spiritual satisfaction (Bhardwaj and Rinschede, 1988). After the pilgrimage, people expect prosperity, fulfillment of desires, forgiveness of sins, access to the divine world and external happiness, and it gives you a psychological comfort (Tanaka, 1988).

II. A SHORT HISTORY OF SAINT PARASCHEVA

Parascheva name has a Greek origin, coming from the name Paraskevi, meaning "preparation", respectively preparation for the day of Sabbath, or Friday. Saint Parascheva was born in Epivat village, in Tracia, near Istanbul, in the XI century. When she was 10, she heard in a church the word of the Saviour. So she decided to give her clothes to poor people. After a while she retires in wilderness, then she travels to Heraclea, Jerusalem, and she decides to stop at a nun monastery in Jordan. At the age of 25, an angel appears in her dream and tells her to return to her native lands. She returned in Epivat, where she died. She was buried like a stranger. After a time, a sailor drowned and the waves brought him to the seashore. Some Christians dug in the ground where they found the body of Saint Parascheva which was not rotten and it smelled nice, however they still buried the sailor near her. In the same night, one of the Christians had a dream where Saint Parascheva was telling him to take out

her body and sit it in a sacred place. The Christians took it as a divine sign and placed her body in church of Saints Apostles of Kallicrateia. After praying at her relics, Christians noticed miracles (Institutul biblic și de misiune ortodoxă, 2013).

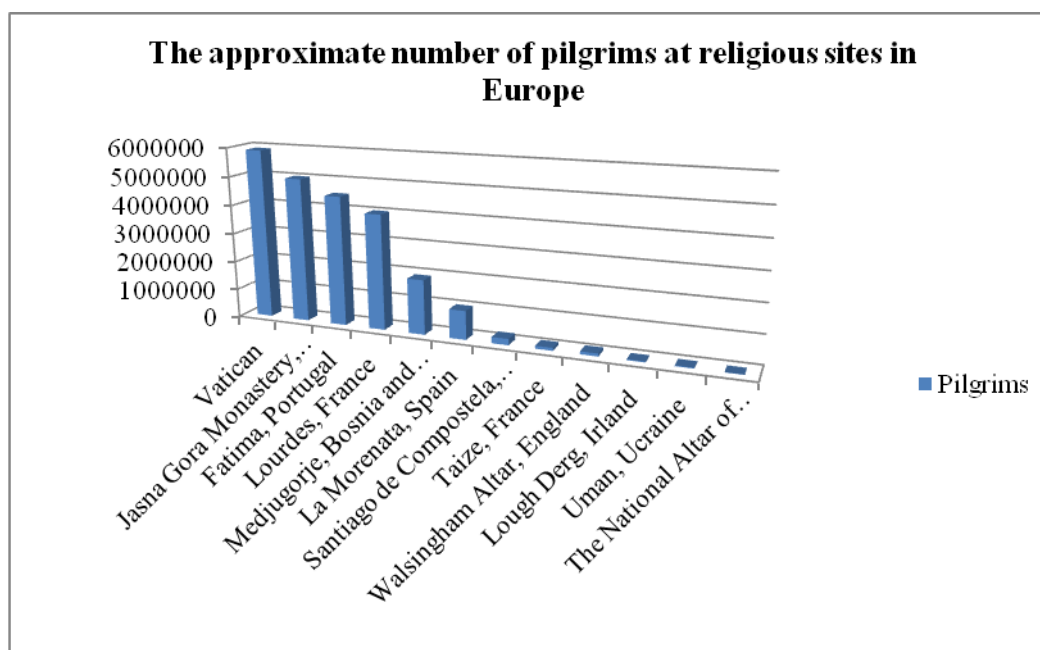
In 1238, her relics were moved to Tarnovo, in 1393 at Vidin, 1398 la Belgrad, and in 1521 at Constantinopol. In 1641, under the reign of Vasile Lupu, he brought from Constantinopol the coffin with relics of Saint Parascheva to Three Hierarchs Church. In 1889, the relics were moved to the Metropolitan Cathedral in Iasi to be in plain sight for the believers to honor her and to pray (Vasiliu, 2008).

III. METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

For this research paper we analyzed bibliographical resources, used statistical data from National Institute of Statistics regarding the overnight stays in Iasi County for 2014, and statistical data from Green Pilgrimage and www.mediafax.ro. We also carried out an interview at Inspectorate of Constabulary in Iasi County, with the public relation officer, in April 2015, regarding the last year pilgrimage at Saint Parascheva.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

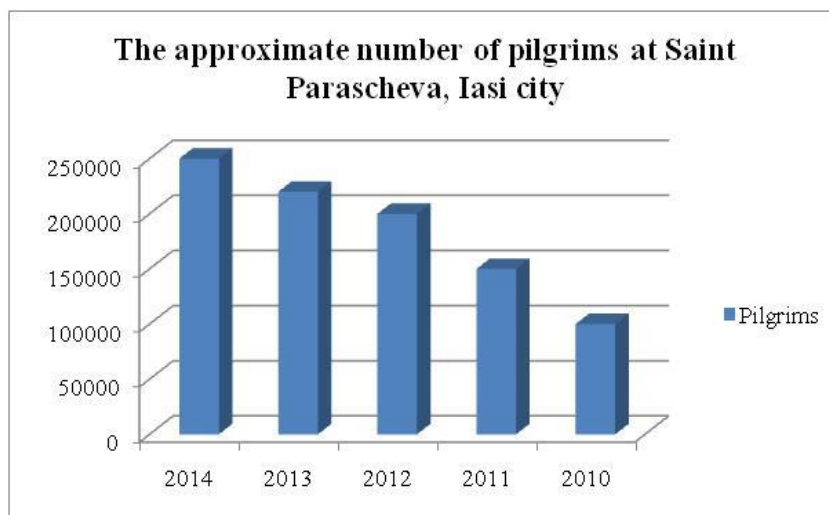
The religious or spiritual journey became known at a large scale and popularized in the last decades, occupying an important segment in the international tourism. Recently, the attention is toward the increasing number of religious journeys, this interest being determined by the economic potential of religious tourism (Olsen and Timothy, 2006).



Source: <http://greenpilgrimage.net/resources/pilgrim-numbers/>

Figure 1 – The approximate number of pilgrims at religious sites in Europe

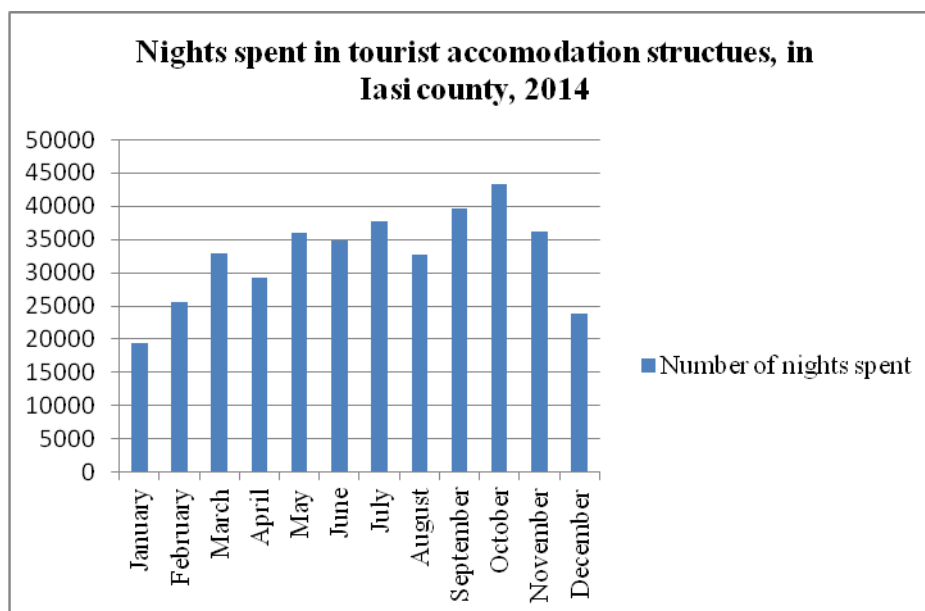
In figure 1 are represented the most important places of pilgrimage in Europe and the number of pilgrims which visit these pilgrimage places. It is obvious that the most important place of pilgrimage in Europe is Vatican with approximately 5.5 million pilgrims. It follows Jasna Gora monastery from Poland and Fatima from Portugal. The well known pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, after their last Year Report in 2013 from Pilgrim’s Welcome Office, had only 215 880 pilgrims. Adding the numbers of pilgrims, we reach more than 22 million of pilgrims only in Europe, fact that says something about the contribution to the tourism sector.



Source: www.mediafax.ro

Figure 2 – The approximate number of pilgrims at Saint Parascheva, Iasi city

As we can see from figure 2, the number of pilgrims has known an increase from 2010. After an interview in person with officials from Inspectorate of Constabulary in Iasi County, held in April 2015, they declared that in 2014 in the area of Metropolitan Cathedral of Iasi, between 10-14 October there were around 500 000 people, but only half of them (between 200 000 and 300 000 people) prayed at the relics. Between the days of 13-14 October is the largest inflow of people. In a Newsletter from Inspectorate of Constabulary, are mentioned the trajectories of the procession (Crişani Street-Saint Andrew Street-Palace Street-Stefan cel Mare Street) and row of people who wait in line to pray to the relics of Saint Parascheva (Saint Andrew Street-Ipsilanti Street-Morilor Street-Uzinei Street-Petru Movilă Street-Cloşca Street-Mitropoliei Street), the row having sometimes a length of 2 km. Comparing with figure 1, we can say that Saint Parascheva pilgrimage has more pilgrims than Santiago de Compostale pilgrimage, which is more known in Europe, recording in 2013, only 215 880 pilgrims (Informe estadistico, 2013).



Source: www.insse.ro

Figure 3 – Nights spent in tourist accomodation structues, in Iasi county, 2014

In figure 3 are represented the number of nights spent in tourist accommodation structures during 2014, in Iasi county. As we can see, the month with the highest number of overnight stays (43 392) is October which coincides with Saint Paracheva celebration and with Iasi Celebration. As an official from National Authority for Tourism declared for mediafax.ro, between 9-16 October 2014, the accommodation structures from Iasi are occupied approximately 99 %, while in a typical week of October the occupancy is nearly 40 % (Iancu, 2014a). Through this association, we can say that the pilgrimage at Saint Parascheva relics, has a influence regarding

tourism in Iasi County. It does not have an impact only on touristic accommodation structures, but also on means of transport like buses and trains. Each and every year it supplements the number of trains from the main cities like Timisoara, Bucharest, Cluj Napoca, Arad, Constanta etc. (Iancu, 2014b). It can be said that everyone benefits from the celebration of Saint Parascheva.

V. CONCLUSION

Through this research paper we try to present the importance of Saint Parascheva pilgrimage but also the impact it has on tourism. In conclusion, we can say that comparing with other religious sites, Saint Parascheva pilgrimage could be a point of attraction for foreign tourist, and it should be implemented a plan of development to make known this religious destination not only in Europe, but at a global level. As we observed before, it has numerous pilgrims coming in only 4 days, from all over the country concerning the fact that CFR supplements with trains the major cities in Romania, only that pilgrims can arrive in time at Saint Parascheva celebration.

Also, the statistical data from National Institute of Statistics, regarding the overnight stays in Iasi county, highlights October with the highest number of overnight stays in touristic accommodation structures, therefore we can say that this pilgrimage has an impact on tourism and indirectly to the economy. This kind of event should have more advertising, tourism marketing strategies in order to develop to a higher level, because it could have an impact in Europe, not only in our country.

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