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The purpose of this paper is to examine the way in which Romanian monastic compounds promote their religious attraction and the degree of collaboration between monasteries and intermediaries in the religious tourism market. The study was carried on in more than 100 monasteries and showed the existence of significant differences regarding the promotion activities among monasteries because of the characteristics of the religious compounds. Moreover the results indicated there are opportunities to develop relationships and partnerships between monasteries and the other actors involved in organizing the travels with religious motivations.

Keywords: communication tools, distribution activities, religious sites, religious travel.

JEL classification: M 3.

1. Introduction

As in case of the other forms of tourism, the religious tourism should be seen into a competitive environment, in which the representatives of religious tourism supply try to attract and retain the customers or precisely try to attract a larger number of believers within sacred places. Although representatives of pilgrimage places say that we cannot speak about a competition among pilgrimage places from Romania, yet the number of visitors, the development, and the notoriety of these places vary greatly from one to other (Chiş and Ţîrca, 2009). Even if the religion or the religious needs are less important in a post-modern secular if not atheist society (Widenfeld and Ron, 2008) and the number of church attendants in Europe decreases (Nolan and Nolan, 1992), the number of visitors to religious sites is continuously increasing. Moreover religious tourism and/or pilgrimages are described as a new trend on travel market, a rapidly increasing segment (Country Brand Index, 2008).

This aspect is determined on one hand by consumer behavior, but in the same time can be a result of marketing and management instruments used by representatives of the religious attractions, even if they are not known under this name or they are not used for a commercial purpose.

Such example is the study of Pavicic et al. (2007) which presents many aspects related to management of communication and promotion to Marija Bistrica shrine.

The results of this study show that the main reason for the attraction of visitors to religious places is redemption and closeness to God; this is also the main goal when developing collaborative relationships with various intermediaries on the tourism market. Hereby we can speak about an attempt to adapt the religious tourism supply to consumers' needs, not in the sense of modifying the dogma or religious values, but using the specific communication tools and establishing partnerships between the actors in the religious tourism market. These aspects are brought up by Angheluţă et al. (2009) which presents the utility of the marketig for religious organisations, in this case the Church.

3. Objectives and methodology

The present paper has two objectives: on the one hand to identify the medium used by the most important pilgrimage places from Romania to inform the public, and on the other hand to determine the collaborative relationships with intermediary agents in order to include religious attractions in tourism programs. In other words, we want to study two major activities of religious compounds which can greatly benefit from target audience-centred orientation: the communication - promotion and the delivery of religious tourism offerings.

The hypotheses considered in this study are:

− *Hypothesis #1: The communication tools used significantly differ because of the characteristics of the religious organizations.*

− *Hypothesis #2: The degree of collaboration between religious organizations and travel agents significantly differ because of the characteristics of the religious organizations.*

As three identification characteristics of monastery were taken into consideration (the type, the size and the Metropolis Church) *each hypothesis statement was divided in three, resulting six hypothesis.*

The research was carried on among the orthodox monastery in Romania, the major destinations for religious-based travels as pilgrimages and religious tourism. The *sampling unit* was the monastic compounds represented by abbot as manager of the monastery.

Due to the difficulty in contacting the abbots, the delicacy of the subject and the high geographic dispersion of monasteries, we chose *a mix sampling method.* The research was carried out through survey method, using the interview technique. *The questionnaire was the instrument of* data gathering.

The sample included 151 monasteries from 24 counties of whole Romanian Metropolis: the Metropolis of Cluj, Alba, Crişana and Maramureş 57.55%, the Metropolis of Muntenia and Dobrogea 2.88%, the Metropolis of Moldavia and Bucovina 15.11%, the Metropolis of Oltenia 7.19%, The Metropolis of Banat 10.79%, The Metropolis of Ardeal 6.47%. Regarding the type of monastery, 51.08% were monk monasteries and 48.92% were nun monasteries. Related to the size of monasteries in terms of numbers of inhabitants, the monasteries were divided intro five categories from small monasteries (have no more than 5 inhabitants) to large monasteries (have more than 25 inhabitants).

4. Results

First, we tried to determine if the abbots think it is necessarily to carry on activities in order to attract people to monasteries, as a way to draw them closer them to God. We used a five-step scale from "certainly not" (value=-2) to "certainly yes" (value=+2). While this question may seem surprising, it is justified, because according to religious representatives' statements based on orthodox dogma, people must visit the monasteries as their own choice, not because they are constraint or influenced. This is the reason the information tools used by orthodox monasteries don't have invitations to visit them, only just schedules. Besides, the mission for many monasteries regarded the withdrawing from the world and solitude.

But, the answers pointed up that more than 50% from the abbots consider that monasteries should definitely attract people to them ("certainly yes"), however with the reason of drawing them closer to God. The mean is $M=0.91$ *(S.E=0.128)* (Table 1). *The abbots' view significantly differs because of the type of monastery and the Metropolis Church.*

Table 1. The influence of monastery's characteristics on abbots' view regarding the necessity to attract people to monasteries

The view of abbots		Factors that influence abbots perception	
Certainly not	**11.60%**	Monastery size	F=1.001 *(p=0.421>0.05)*
Probably not	**8.30%**	Metropolis Church	**C=0.467 *(df =20; p=0.028<0.05)***
Indifferent	**5.00%**	Monastery type	**C=0.300 *(df =4; p=0.017<0.05)***
Probably yes	**24.80%**		**Z= -2.318 *(p=0.020<0.05)***
Certainly yes	**50.40%**		

C= Pearson Correlation Coefficient; Z= Mann-Whitney Nonparametric Test; F=ANOVA test.

We tried to determine if there is an opportunity to develop promotion strategies for monastic compounds, to use religious tourism as a way to achieve the spiritual mission of the monasteries. As we can see, in most of cases the abbots' view allows such approach but it should take into consideration the characteristics of the monasteries.

Regarding the communication tools used by monasteries, the results indicated the monastery guides as being the most used (especially in monks monasteries), followed by the monastery flyers (Table 2). The main disadvantages of the brochures are the low market coverage and the reduced impact because usually, they can be found in monasteries.

Table 2. The influence of monastery's characteristics on the communication tools used by monastic compounds

The communication tools used by monasteries		The characteristics of monastery which influences the communication tools used
Religious publications	**33.33%**	-
Specialised broadcast stations	**38.21%**	-
Travel guides of Romanian monasteries	**75.61%**	Monastery type: C=0.258 *(df=1, p=0.003<0.05)*; Z= -2.748 *(p=0.006<0.05).*
Monastery brochures	**36.58%**	Monastery size: C=0.270 *(df=1, p=0.002<0.05)*; Z= -3.084 *(p=0.002<0.05).*
Monastery flyers	**55.28%**	Monastery type: F=2.351*(p=0.045<0.05).*
Postcards	**35.77%**	Metropolis Church: C=0.309 *(df=5, p=0.028<0.05).*
Monastery CDs	**17.07%**	Metropolis Church: C=0.318 *(df=5, p=0.018<0.05).* Monastery size: C=0.325 *(df=5, p=0.015<0.05)*; F=3.252 *(p=0.009<0.05).*
Monastery website	**24.39%**	Metropolis Church: C=0.306 *(df=5, p=0.029<0.05).*
Metropolis websites	**37.39%**	-
Tourist information websites	**25.20%**	-
The travel agencies offerings	**10.56%**	Metropolis Church: C=0.322 *(df=5, p=0.018<0.05).*

C= Pearson Correlation Coefficient; Z= Mann-Whitney Nonparametric Test; F=ANOVA test.

Thus brochures are mostly used for the presentation of large monasteries, and the flyers for monks' monasteries. Postcards and CDs are means of promotion especially for the monasteries belonging to Moldavia and Bucovina Metropolis Church and Oltenia Metropolis Church. The monasteries from Moldavia and Bucovina Metropolis Church and Muntenia and Dobrodgea Metropolis Church are using their own website for communication, and those for Muntenia and Dobrudja Metropolis are using the Metropolis and Archbishoprics website. The last two Metropolis Churches mentioned and Vadului, Feleacului and Clujului Metropolis Church are the most often structures included in the travel agencies offers.

The communication tools with higher audience like specialised radio and television stations are used by 40% of monastic compounds. Almost 30% of monasteries are using their own website and almost 40% of monasteries are using Metropolis' website to deliver the information. Just 10.56% of monastic compounds use travel agencies and almost 25.20% of them use tourist information websites to give information. 10% of the abbots mention word of mouth advertising, and most probably the percent is higher, but we didn't included it within the predefined variables as we intend to determine just the impersonal communication tools. We consider that word of mouth advertising would be better identified if analysing the religious tourism demand.

The communication tools used by monasteries significantly differ because of the characteristics of the religious organizations, especially in case of the Metropolis of belonging, but in most situations there is medium relationship between variables.

Regarding the content of the message within information and/or presentation materials we tried to determine the explanation for the very beautiful pictures with monasteries using open ended questions: *We assume that the extraordinary content of the pictures and brochures is a way to attract the people to monasteries, being a promotion strategy.* The answers haven't confirmed entirely the hypothesis statement (Table 3).

Table 3. The reasons for the content of the presentation materials of the monasteries

The reasons for the content of the pictures of the monasteries		The characteristics of monastery which influence the abbots' opinions
To attract people, promotion	**25.64%**	
It shows the "Gift of God"	**17.95%**	
It represents the beauty of the places	**41.88%**	The Metropolis Church**: C=0.513** *(df=20, p=0.005<0.05).*
Is due to photographer skills	**7.69%**	
Others	**6.84%**	

C= Pearson Correlation Coefficient.

Most of the abbots think the beauty of the pictures and brochures is given by the fact that they capture the loveliness of the surroundings. 25.64% of abbots think the content of the pictures is to promote, to attract people and almost 18% think the beauty of the pictures shows the work of God. The Metropolis of belonging influences greatly the answers of the abbots.

Next, we tried to determine the collaboration relationships between monasteries and organized groups of visitors, religious organisations or travel intermediaries. Hereby, in 60.3% of the cases to monasteries arrive organized groups of religious associations (ASCOR, Liga Studentească etc.), mainly young people, but sometimes come organized groups of pupils, elderly persons from asylums or even children. The question regarding the collaboration with members of religious organisations was meant to determine in the case of good cooperation, if it's possible to develop cooperation relations with non religious groups who want to visit the monastery. The results indicate the possibility to establish such relationships.

Just a small percent of monasteries appear in travel agencies offers (11.50%) and 15.70% cooperate with Pilgrimage Bureaus of Metropolis or Patriarchy. More than 70% of abbots received no proposals to introduce monasteries into tourism programs, and 6.60% refused such offers. For monasteries which cooperate with Travel agencies or Pilgrimage bureaus, the proposals came from travel organizers in 72.70% of cases and the rest from monasteries.

Table 4. The collaboration between monasteries and travel organisers

Travel agencies	**4.10%**
Pilgrimage Bureaus of Metropolis or Patriarchy	**8.30%**
Travel agencies and pilgrimage bureaus	**7.40%**
Refused the collaboration offers	**6.60%**
Never received cooperation proposals	**73.60%**

Testing the hypothesis shows there are no significant differences between the nature of the relationships and the characteristics of the monasteries therefore the *hypothesis #2 is not valid.*

Next, we tried to determine if such collaborative relationships with travel planners are possible from monastery abbots' view. All subjects answered to this question even if there are no contracts between monasteries and travel agencies or pilgrimage bureaus. To determine their view we used a five step

scale from "very detrimental" (value=-2) to "very beneficial" (value=+2). More than 60% of abbots consider that the collaboration relationships with travel organisers are "beneficial" or "very beneficial" and 30% of them indifferent, and none of them think such relationships as being "very detrimental". Mean of the variable is *0.62 (S.E=0.062)* (Table 5).

Table 5. Abbots' view regarding the opportunity to develop relationships with travel organizers

The abbots' view regarding the opportunity to develop relationships with travel organisers		The factors that influence abbots perception	
Very detrimental	**0.00%**	*Monastery size*	F=1.848 *(p=0.110>0.05)*
detrimental	**6.10%**	*Metropolis church*	C=0.329 *(df =15; p=0.531>0.05)*
Indifferent	**30.40%**	*Monastery type*	**C=0.328 *(df =3; p=0.003<0.05)***
Beneficial	**59.10%**		**Z= -3.659 *(p=0.000<0.05)***
Very beneficial	**4.30%**		

C= Pearson Correlation Coefficient; Z= Mann-Whitney Nonparametric Test; F=ANOVA test.

The tests show there are significant differences between abbots view regarding the opportunity to develop relationships with travel organisers, due to the type of monastery (more suitable for monks monasteries).

6. Conclusions

The current paper presents some aspects of the communication and delivering activities carried out by the monastic compounds from Romania, representing the main pilgrimage places for Romanian orthodox spirituality. *The novelty of this subject is very high in Romanian literature, because such research wasn't carried out in our country until now.*

The results showed that communication activities are not very developed, using mainly the classical communication tools. *The most used tools to deliver information to target audience and believers are monasteries guides and brochures*. Just 25% of the religious compounds have their own website and 10% of them cooperate with travel agencies. *The communication tools used significantly differ because of the type and the size of monasteries and due to the Metropolis of belonging*. The aesthetic of the pictures from promotion materials is used in 25% of monasteries in order to attract visitors.

Regarding the cooperation with various intermediaries from tourism market, *more than 70% of the monastic compounds have no relationships with travels organizers,* such as travel agencies or pilgrimage bureaus, although *almost same percent of the abbots consider these relationships beneficial or very beneficial,* and 60% of them receive organised groups of visitors, especially members of the religious organisations.

Thereby, we can assume there *is a high potential of collaboration* between actors in the travel market and pilgrimage places, as well as an *obvious orientation of monasteries towards the usage of the most effective communication tools*, but only if the *main reason and the mission of the cooperation and communication activities is the religious experience of the traveller*.

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