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**THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM ON CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION  
BETWEEN R. MACEDONIA AND R. BULGARIA**

**FULL PROFESSOR ZORAN MATEVSKI, PHD**  
**ASOCIATE PROFESSOR DUSHKA MATEVSKA, PHD**

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# INTRODUCTION

- Religious tourism is focused on visiting religious sites, attractions and destinations. The main goal is to engage participants to strengthen a certain faith. In order to be able to talk about a religious tourist trip, it must be motivated above all for religious reasons. In its foundation, it contains several activities that satisfy the spiritual, cultural and social needs of religious tourists, primarily derived from the religion they belong to.

# Tasks of the research

- Identify the most important factors influencing the development of religious tourism in R Macedonia
- To determine whether and how much the Macedonian Orthodox Church - Ohrid Archbishopric is a promoter of religious tourism in R. Macedonia
- To determine whether the state through the Ministry of Culture and other competent institutions supports the development of religious tourism in R. Macedonia
- To conclude the role of the Tourist Union in the development of religious tourism
- To determine the characteristics of religious tourism in R. Macedonia
- To determine which of the mentioned factors has the greatest impact on the development of religious tourism in R. Macedonia.

# Research questions

- How much the pilgrimage as part of the ritual element of religion is important for the development of religious tourism in R. Macedonia?
- How much the doctrinal element of religion is important for the development of religious tourism in the Republic of Macedonia?
- How much is the psychological and emotional element of religion important for the development of religious tourism in R. Macedonia?
- What is the attitude of the Synod of the Macedonian Orthodox Church - Ohrid Archbishopric to religious tourism?
- What is the attitude of the representatives of monasticism as part of the MOC - OA towards religious tourism?
- How many religious events related to visiting sacred places (graves of saints, religious temples, monasteries, cult sites, sanctuaries, healing waters) contribute to the development of religious tourism?

# Research questions

- What is the attitude of the Ministry of Culture of R. Macedonia to religious tourism?
- What is the contribution of the institutes for the protection of the monuments of culture and museums of R. Macedonia for the development of religious tourism?
- How much is the Tourist Union of R. Macedonia invested in the affirmation of religious tourism?
- How many cultural events associated with certain sacred places contribute to the development of religious tourism?
- How well-designed marketing by the state allows for the development of religious tourism?
- How much is the state financially investing in the affirmation and development of religious tourism through its competent institutions?

# Methods and research techniques

- For the study of religious tourism in the R. Macedonia, a deep interview was used to examine attitudes of religious dignitaries, clergy, as well as representatives of the monastic orders of the Macedonian Orthodox Church - Ohrid Archbishopric (MOC-OA). The interview also includes representatives of state institutions dealing with this issue, ie. the Ministry of Culture and the institutes for protection of the monuments of culture and museums. The interview is structured with previously designed and formulated questions for the professors from the Faculty of Theology and the Faculty of Tourism in Skopje.

## Views on the sociological aspects of the development of religious tourism

### The Synod and the clergy of the MOC-OA

- Of particular importance was their attitude towards the organization of religious manifestations by the MOC-OA, related to visiting sacred places (graves of saints, religious temples, monasteries, cult sites, sanctuaries, healing waters) and their contribution to the development of religious tourism . In fact, it is known that the bulk of the cultural wealth in Macedonia is religious, so in this case, the contribution is significant, but it leaves room and is complemented. They also think that one should especially be thinking in the direction of well-designed marketing by the state because it will contribute to the development of religious tourism.

# Views on the sociological aspects of the development of religious tourism monks and nuns of MOC-OA

- worship as an expression of the piety of the faithful people, is not identical with the so-called religious tourism. So, there is a distinction between original worship and organized religious tourism. The authentic worshiper can not be a tourist. The devotee, unlike the tourist, is not anesthetized to the spiritual, social, moral, ethical, and aesthetic spaces of the societies through which he moves on his pilgrimage journey. He is not an observer, but a participant in historical events. The worshiper is a member of a particular community. He freely, regardless of the consequences, is identified as a believer. It can not be requested by the tourist.



## Views on the sociological aspects of the development of religious tourism

### Ministry of Culture

- Interviewed representatives from the Ministry of Culture believe that the pilgrimage as a spiritual need for worshipers has been practiced in all the eras of history to this day. It is a kind of introduction to the practice of religious tourism, given the fact that the very act of worship of the saints is accompanied by a series of additional social, cultural and trade-economic activities. For the development of religious tourism, a simple, short story based on material evidence or myths is required. In accordance with the Law on Protection of Cultural Heritage, within the framework of its Annual Program MK pays great attention to the affirmation of sacral objects as cultural and historical values in Macedonia.

## Views on the sociological aspects of the development of religious tourism institutions for the protection of cultural monuments

- Regarding the organization of cultural and religious manifestations, mayors and local self-government can be big promoters and supporters. This means that they have a significant contribution to the development of religious tourism, and if they were larger, there would be even greater ground for the development of this type of tourism. However, it is still not sufficiently represented, perhaps from the insufficient cooperation and coordination with the MOC, which should exist in the direction of supporting and organizing such events. In fact, unfortunately, the existing travel agencies are almost not interested in placing offers related to religious tourism in Macedonia. This type of agency has not yet appeared, and given the importance, it is necessary to establish an agency that will promote and present exclusively only religious tourism in the tourist offer.

# Views on the sociological aspects of the development of religious tourism

## Faculty of Theology

- The monasteries in Macedonia have not yet been put into the function of people. However, a shared vision is being developed between competent people to connect religious tourism with cultural and environmental tourism, following the example of many countries in the world. In highly developed European and world tourist centers, significant (national) shrines represent a significant factor in choosing the tourist destination. They further consider that cultural manifestations related to visiting sacred places are tied to certain joint Christian holidays in Macedonia and Bulgaria. Also, through the organization of cultural manifestations by mayors connected with certain sacred places, the development of religious tourism in border municipalities can be improved.

## Views on the sociological aspects of the development of religious tourism

### Faculty of Tourism

- some of them consider that pilgrimage as part of the ritual element of religion (worship of saints) is important for the development of religious tourism in the Republic of Macedonia. Others consider it to be of little significance, or that it is not important at all. Regarding the importance of the doctrinal element of religion (knowledge of theological truths) for the development of religious tourism in R. Macedonia, they have conflicting and different understandings, and according to some, there are few true connoisseurs of religion in the Republic of Macedonia. For the representatives of the Faculty of Tourism, the seminars, congresses and exchange of experience with countries that know how to do it professionally are important for the promotion of religious facilities.

# CONCLUSION

- Crucial factors that influence the development of religious tourism in Macedonia are: improving infrastructure; increasing the role of printed and electronic media in the promotion of religious tourism in the function of border cooperation between Macedonia and Bulgaria; interest of travel agencies; increasing the intensity of cultural manifestations in religious buildings; a well-organized offer for religious objects and everything that could stimulate the interest of the visitor to visit them; good marketing of that offer and advertising on that tourist market.