

TRAVELING TO RELIGIOUS SETTLEMENT – THE MARKET’S DYNAMIC AND CAPACITY AS SHOWN BY A STUDY ON THE ROMANIAN POPULATION

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Abstract

The Romanian destinations with religious significance are faced with a constant and continuous flow of visitors, many of whom are pilgrims, but these places have also become destinations for mass tourism. The purpose of this paper is to determine the market's dimensions regarding the travellers whose destinations are Romanian religious settlements, and also some capacity indicators for this particular market. The study is the result of a questionnaire based research applied to over 1500 subjects. The results have shown a high degree of expansion for this type of travel but a low degree of market concentration.

Key words: *Market dynamic, Market share, Pilgrimage, Religious places.*

JEL Classification: *M10, M21, R10.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Pilgrimage is one of the oldest human traditions. It is characterized by the periodic movement of the people from their place of residence to a destination with a spiritual or religious significance (Cohen-Hattab, 2010). Also this type of travel incorporates psychological, social and touristic traits and characteristics at the same time, while its central point is, and has always been, a religious settlement (Turner, 1987; Graburn, 1989; Reader and Walter, 1993; Osterrieth, 1997).

Religion has been for a long time the only motivation for travelling, and it's also the oldest non-economic prompt for that (Jackowski, 2000) Furthermore, in many communities or countries, religious motivated travels are seen as a solution to diversify or revive local economic activities, especially now when it's expected that religious tourism will grow in the near future (Olsen and Timothy, 1999; Russel, 1999; San Filippo, 2001). The first sign of this development is the growing number of visitors going to religious destinations. The results of a research covering the main Romanian pilgrimage destinations, which are also monastic settlements, have shown that they represent an interesting destination for an increasing number of visitors (Stănculescu and Țirca, 2010).

This is a rather surprising fact as it was thought that religious pilgrimage will lose its social and institutional significance, as it is in the case of Europe where less and less people regularly go to church (Nolan and Nolan, 1992).

This increase of the numbers of visitors to the sacred destination can also be the result of the involvement of the central and local administration,

which has become aware of the economic potential of religious tourism. Therefore, pilgrimage destinations are now considered touristic resources, which can attract tourists interested in culture and history. Sometimes, this form of tourism is encouraged through orientation of traditional elements of the touristic offering towards the segments formed by religious tourists. (Wadawi et al, 2009) One thing is for certain: churches, monasteries, mosques, cathedrals, pilgrimage routes, sacred architecture and other elements with spiritual context are used in the advertising materials of various touristic destinations, as it can be seen in several marketing strategies created around the year 2000 (Olsen and Timothy, 1999). As a result of those marketing campaigns and also the upped interest in cultural tourism, religious sites have more and more visitors who are driven by curiosity, and not authentic pilgrims, that's why these destinations are now advertised, adapted and combined into touristic products (Vukonić, 1996; Shoal, 2000; Shackley, 2001; Olsen, 2003).

Keeping this in mind it's logical to wonder: what are the real dimensions of the phenomenon of traveling to religious settlements in a country with a main conservative religion - Orthodoxy, the second largest Christian denomination in the world; and a state – Romania where the religious freedom, the right to express and to practice religious preferences have been restricted for a long time.

Just as interesting would be to know where are the most appealing religious destination and the one with the most visitors. This type of information could offer a pertinent view over the dimension of internal tourists flows visiting the religious compounds and also critical clues for the travel agencies that are active in this field, the religious organizations that are in

charge with the monastic settlements, which are also touristic attractions, the local authorities that can develop the local communities near the pilgrimage places and other stakeholders who have an interest in the religious tourism phenomena (some authors define religious tourism as traveling to a sacred place, no matter the motivation, e.g. Vukonić, 1996).

2. THE METODOLOGY AND THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this study have been to analyse the dynamic of the market represented by religious motivated travellers and to determine some indicators regarding the capacity of this particular market. Two indicators have been analysed for this: the real market share and the “affective” market share. The hypotheses that are the base of the study are:

H1: More than half the Romanian population travels to pilgrimage destinations

H2: There are series of significant differences regarding the pilgrimage destinations, which are most appealing to visitors, related to the demographic characteristics of the population considered

The investigated population was the Romanian population, of Orthodox religion and older than 15 years. The sampling method was mixed, combining stratified random sampling with the allowance method. The data has been collected with “face-to-face” surveys at the respondents’ residence using 148 survey operators from various regions of the country, email surveys and self-administrated surveys. The instrument used in collecting the data was the questionnaire. The study was carried out in 2010, and the questions from questionnaire asked information about 2009. For analyzing the data, we used the SPSS software version 14.0.

The size of the population sample was 1648 people, selected according to three benchmarks: sex, place of residence (Table 1) and age (Figure 1), to approximate as close as possible the structure of the Romanian population.

Table 1 - The investigated sample’s composition regarding sex and place of residence

Variable	%
Sex	100.00%
Female	57.34%
Male	42.66%
Residence	100.00%
Urban	57.46%
Rural	42.54%

Source: Authors’ calculations

Although it can be noted that the percent of women included in the sample is greater than the actual percent in the Romanian population, we think this fact doesn’t affect negatively the results of this

study as it’s visible that there are more female visitors to the Romanian pilgrimage places than are male ones, and also the trend for this segment is growing. This is something that other researchers have found in their studies as well, especially those investigating the typology of pilgrims reaching for sacred destinations (De Santos, 2009, Jansen et al, 2008).

The higher percent of respondents from urban area is justified because they are the real travelers to sacred places (as many of the religious compounds are placed near or inside rural area), the length of stay is longer and their travel behaviour is closer to the goals of this research from behavioral point of view.

As for age, the investigated sample contains all age categories (Figure 1), and the sample’s average is representative at national level.

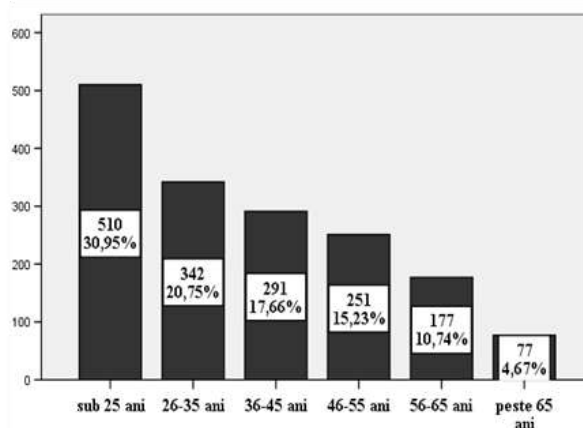


Figure 1 - The investigated sample’s composition regarding age

Source: Authors’ calculations

As it can be seen, the Romanian population average age in 2009 was 37.3 years (Romania in figures, Statistical abstract, 2010) (Radio România Actualități, 2009). The investigated population sample was 37.73 years; so using the one-sample T-test, we determined that there are no significance difference between the sample’s average and the population’s mean, therefore the sample’s mean is representative for the studied population ($t=1.127$; degrees of freedom $df=1647$; study significance level $p=0.260 > 0.05$).

The sample’ composition covers all eight Romanian administrative regions, but not to the same degree. Therefore 34.58% of respondents come from the North-West Region, 22.81% from the Central region, 14.56% from the West region and 12.74% from the North-East region, while the South-East region is represented by only 2.00% and the South, South-West and Ilfov - Bucharest regions have only 4.45%. As it can be seen the North-West region is over-represented, while the South, South-East, South-West and Ilfov - Bucharest regions have been under-represented, from where emerge the main limits of the research.

3. THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

The first question of the survey was to identify the number of trips to sacred destinations during the year 2009 also considering several periods of time: several hours, a day, a night, 1-3 nights, 5-7 nights, and more than 7 nights. By sacred destinations it was implied religious destination located outside the residence area of the respondent, as for example monastic settlements. The results were:

- Most subjects, 35% (565 people) have had a day long trip (without spending the night) to a religious settlement, 18.5% (297 subjects) have had 2 trips of this type and 11.3% (182 subjects) 3 trips. 108 people or 6.5% have visited a sacred destination for 4 times and a close percent 5.7% - 5 times. 4.8% have travelled for a day with a religious destination in mind for 6-9 times, and 3.8% (62 subjects) for 10 times. There are also 107 respondents that haven't visited any religious sites in 2009, while the rest (3.5%) made more than 10 trips, the maximum achieved being 50.
- More than half of the subjects (52.4%) have never made a trip that involves spending the night at a religious settlement, 29.6% (449 subjects) have spent one night there, 9.9% (150 respondents) have spent 2 nights, and 3.8% (58 subjects) 3 nights. The rest of the subjects – 4.3%, have made an average of 4 to 20 trips that involved spending one night there.
- 69% of those who answered have never had a 2 to 3 days trip to religious site, but 8.5% (275 subjects) did. 6.1% (90 subjects) made 2 trips of this kind and 3.1% (46 subjects) 3 trips. A small percent 3.2% made this kind of trip an average between 4-10 times.
- Most of those questioned have never made a 5-7 day long trip to a sacred place, 8.2% (119 subjects) made this kind of trip during the year 2009 and 2.5% (37 subjects) made 2 trips of this type. The rest (1.4% of subjects) made between 3-10 trips of this type.
- Regarding trips spanning over 7 days to a religious settlement during the year 2009, 92.3% of subjects never took on this type of travel, 5.2% (74 subjects) made 1 trip and 1.1% (16 subjects) made 2 trips. 20 subjects (1.0%) made between 3 to 10 trips of this type.

Making a cross-analysis of the data gathered, the conclusions is that 54 subjects have never made a trip to a religious site during 2009, while 50 subjects made trips spanning from 1 day to more than 7 days. On the other hand, cumulating the percents resulted from the analysis, here are the final results regarding religious motivated travels during 2009:

- 89.3% of subjects made at least one trip to a religious destination during 2009, where they spent one day;
- 47.6% of respondents made at least one trip to a religious settlement in 2009 where they also spent one night;
- 30.9% of those who answered made at least one trip to a religious settlement in 2009 where they also spent 2-3 days;
- 13.0% of those questioned made at least one trip to a religious destination in 2009 where they stayed for 5 to 7 days;
- 7.6% of the subjects made at least one trip in 2009 to a religious settlement where they spent more than 7 days.

Next to the 722 survey subjects that made trips involving spending the night, 60 people have had only 2 to 3 day trips, 39 subjects 5-7 days trips and 23 people trips longer than 7 days. As a result a number of 302 subjects had only trips to religious settlements that didn't take longer than one day.

All this data was determined to discover the approximated number of people that are part of the two main categories as they are defined by the World Tourism Organizations and used in international statistics: the "visitors" and the "tourist" that make the internal "religious tourism" market.

Combining the gathered data, we have identified that market's dynamic for destinations with religious context in 2009 (Table 2).

Table 2 - The travel market's dynamic for the religious settlements

The market's dynamic in 2009		N	Shares
<i>Potential market (P_p)</i>		1190*	100,00%
<i>Relative non-consumers</i>		54	4,54%
<i>Real market (P_R)</i>		1136	95,46%
From which	<i>One day visitors</i>	302	26,58% of P _R ; 25,38% of P _p
	<i>Tourists (spending at least one night)</i>	722+60+2+ +9+23=834	73,42% of P _R ; 70,08% of P _p

The difference between the calculated value of "N" (1190) and initial value (1648) is caused by the cumulated non-answered surveys that have been filtered for all variables before the analysis

Source: Authors' calculations

Due to the sample representativeness, of size and structure, we consider that the results can be extrapolated with a high degree of confidence to the Romanian market in 2009.

The next element investigated was the market's capacity for the Romanian pilgrimage destinations (Table 3). The results have shown a market that's quite fragmented, only one place of worship having a market share over 10%. This value is almost twice than the value situated on the second place, while the rest of the market shares are under 4%, a number of 60 religious destinations having less than 0.7% market shares.

Table 3 - Top of the most visited religious destinations

	N_i (N=1648)	p_i (p=100%)
1. Nicula	225	13.9%
2. Râmeț	109	7.1%
3. Voroneț	65	3.9%
4. Cozia	64	3.9%
5. Rohia	63	3.9%
6. Curtea de Argeș	62	3.8%
7. Putna	61	3.7%
8. Moldova	57	3.5%
9. Prislop	54	3.3%
10. Bârsana	47	2.8%
11. Recea	45	2.7%
12. Tăuți	39	2.4%
13. Sâmbăta de Sus)	34	2.1%
14. Agapia	26	1.5%
15. Dumbrava	23	1.4%
16. Lainici	22	1.3%
17. Moldovița	19	1.2%
18. Florești	18	1.1%
19. Sucevița	18	1.1%
20. Bucovina	17	1.0%
21. Maramureș	15	0.9%
22. Moisei	14	0.8%
23. Neamț	14	0.8%
24. Humor	10	0.7%
25. Sihăstria	10	0.7%
26. Văratec	10	0.7%
27. Others	412	25.2%
28. No answers	76	4.6%

N_i = the frequency of stating one location; p_i =market share.

Source: Authors' calculations

Testing the hypothesis regarding the influence of the subjects' demographic characteristics has shown no significant links between them and the destinations considered:

- For sex: the chi-square test $\chi^2=3.49$; $df=6$; $p=0.745>0.05$; (to relieve the existence of a relationship we establish a 95% confidence level, namely p must be lower than 0.05)
- For age: the chi-square test $\chi^2=34.46$; $df=30$; $p=0.263>0.05$;
- For residence: the chi-square test $\chi^2=6.65$; $df=6$; $p=0.354>0.05$;

For this testing we have considered the top 7 religious destinations, which also have a market share

greater than 3.5%

All in all, there are 25 destinations that had more than 10 visitors in 2009, which leads to the conclusion that the degree of concentration for this market is quite low. However, it can be concluded that the Nicula monastery is the "leader" between religious Romanian destinations, a position that seems quite secure related to the other destinations considered. This result can be influenced by the research limits and the overrepresentation in the sample of the Central and North-West regions may significantly influence the second position held by Râmeț monastery.

Therefore the next hypothesis considered was whether the market share for each destination is influenced by the respondent's area of residence, the degree of geographical concentration being quite high.

This hypothesis was verified, the number of visits per monastery being linked with the respondents' area of residence: the closer they were the more visitors they got ($\chi^2=797.06$; $df=43$; $p=0.000<0.01$), the identified link having a high intensity (Pearson contingency coefficient $c=0.749$; $p=0.000<0.01$).

As shown in Figure 2, the most visited monastery in the Romania, Nicula gets only 2.2% of visitors coming from the South region, 3.3% from the North-East, and not even a respondent from the South-East region. Most of Nicula's visitors come from the North-West region, followed by The West region and Ilfov-Bucharest.

Not one of the top seven monasteries we identified is part of all the classifications regarding the most visited monasteries, correlated with all eight administrative regions. As expected, Râmeț monastery is the most visited settlement for those from the Central region, the Putna and Voroneț monasteries attract visitors from the North-East region, Cozia monastery is visited by those in the South-East region, and Curtea de Argeș by those from the South, South-West and Ilfov-Bucharest regions.

The respondents that seem the least dependent on one religious destination are those from the Ilfov - Bucharest region ($E=\Sigma p_i^2=0.1757$, E =Informational Energy, $E_{\min}=1/7$; $E_{\max}=1$), while the most dependent on a particular religious destination are those from the South-East region. East ($E=\Sigma p_i^2=0.6800$) and South ($E=\Sigma p_i^2=0.6105$).

Probably this classification on regions of the pilgrimage places is the most representative to the national level.

As for the places that are most appealing to visitors, but they have yet to see (Table 4), there is a higher degree of homogeneity in the responses given than in those related to the previous topic.

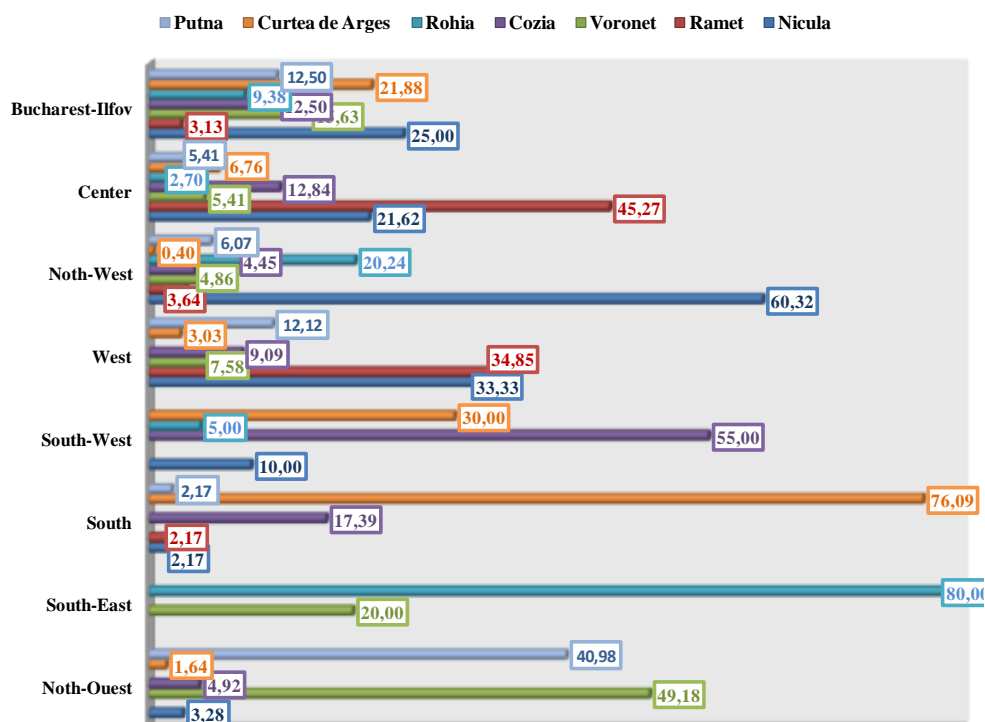


Figure 2 - The market share of the religious destinations considered regarding the respondents region of residence

Table 4 - The classification of the most appealing religious destinations

	N_i ($N=1648$)	P_i ($p=100\%$)
Voronet	201	12.3%
Moldova	196	12.0%
Putna	150	9.1%
Curtea de Argeș	99	6.3%
Cozia	94	5.7%
Nicula	89	5.4%
Maramureș	55	3.4%
Bârsana	46	2.8%
Agapia	36	2.2%
Prislop	33	2.0%
Sucevița	30	1.8%
Rohia	29	1.8%
Tismana	29	1.8%
Biserica Neagră (Brașov)	28	1.8%
Moldovița	24	1.5%
Bucovina	22	1.4%
Neamț	22	1.4%
Sâmbata de Sus	21	1.3%
Sihăstria	16	1.0%
Sf. Andrei Cave	15	0.9%
Lainici	14	0.8%
Dobrogea	13	0.8%
Râmneț	13	0.8%
Recea	12	0.7%
Văratec	12	0.7%
Humor	10	0.6%
Hurezi	10	0.6%
Others	244	15.3%
No answers	85	5.6%

N_i = the frequency of stating one location; p_i = "affective" market share

This time the classification is dominated by the monasteries situated in Moldova. They are in the top three positions, each of them having more than 100 mentions. The Voroneț monastery is at the top, with the largest "affective" market share, followed by the Moldova and Putna monasteries. On the following positions we have two monasteries from Oltenia: Curtea de Argeș and Cozia, while Nicula monastery is situated only on the sixth position. For the rest of the classification there are 8 places of pilgrimage from Transylvania, 8 destinations in Moldova, 3 from Oltenia and 2 from Dobrogea.

Our conclusion is that the Moldova region dominates this classification, by having monasteries in the top 3 positions and cumulating over 30% of the mentions. Most likely the difference existing between the real and "affective" market share comes from the different motivations involved in choosing one location over the other: Nicula monastery has a miracle making icon of the Virgin Mary which provides for the main attraction on this destination, while the Voroneț monastery is associated with historical and cultural value, as it is part of the UNESCO patrimony. The same can be said for other 6 monasteries located in Moldova, which contribute to the inestimable religious and cultural patrimony from here (Șușu, 2007).

Therefore our conclusion is that the degree of attractiveness of certain pilgrimage places rises by adding cultural and historical values to their image. However, this type of destinations has a lower visitor's rate than the religious destination that house miracle-making artifacts and holy remains – aspects that generate a constant and continuous demand.

The next step was to test the influence of sex, age and area of residence on the preferences that the subjects have expressed in their answers regarding their favourite pilgrimage destination.

For that we have considered the first 6 positions in our classification, those that have managed an “affective” market share higher than 5%. Two factors have proven to be insignificant: residence ($\chi^2=5.52$; $df=5$; $p=0.357>0.05$) and age ($\chi^2=34.94$; $df=25$; $p=0.089>0.05$). However the expressed preference for one destination differs significantly when considering the sex of those who answered ($\chi^2=20.74$; $df=5$; $p=0.001<0.01$), yet the identified link has a low intensity ($c=0.158$; $p=0.001<0.01$).

Table 5 shows that women consider the Moldova region more attractive than their counterparts, however men have a more concise opinion regarding the exact place of worship they would like to visit: Voroneţ, Putna, Curtea de Argeş and Cozia. Testing the influence of the region over the

“affective” market share shows a significant link between the two ($\chi^2=72.11$; $df=35$; $p=0.000<0.01$) but of low intensity ($c=0.286$; $p=0,000<0.01$). It is visible that the Moldova region has the first position as an expressed preference in 5 from 8 analysed regions (Figure 3).

Table 5 - Expressed preference for one place of pilgrimage related to the sex of the subjects of the survey

	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
Voroneţ	25.1%	23.6%	24.3%
Moldova	16.8%	29.3%	23.8%
Putna	20.1%	17.2%	18.5%
Curtea de Argeş	14.0%	8.8%	11.1%
Cozia	13.1%	10.1%	11.5%
Nicula	10.9%	11.0%	11.0%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Source: Authors' calculations

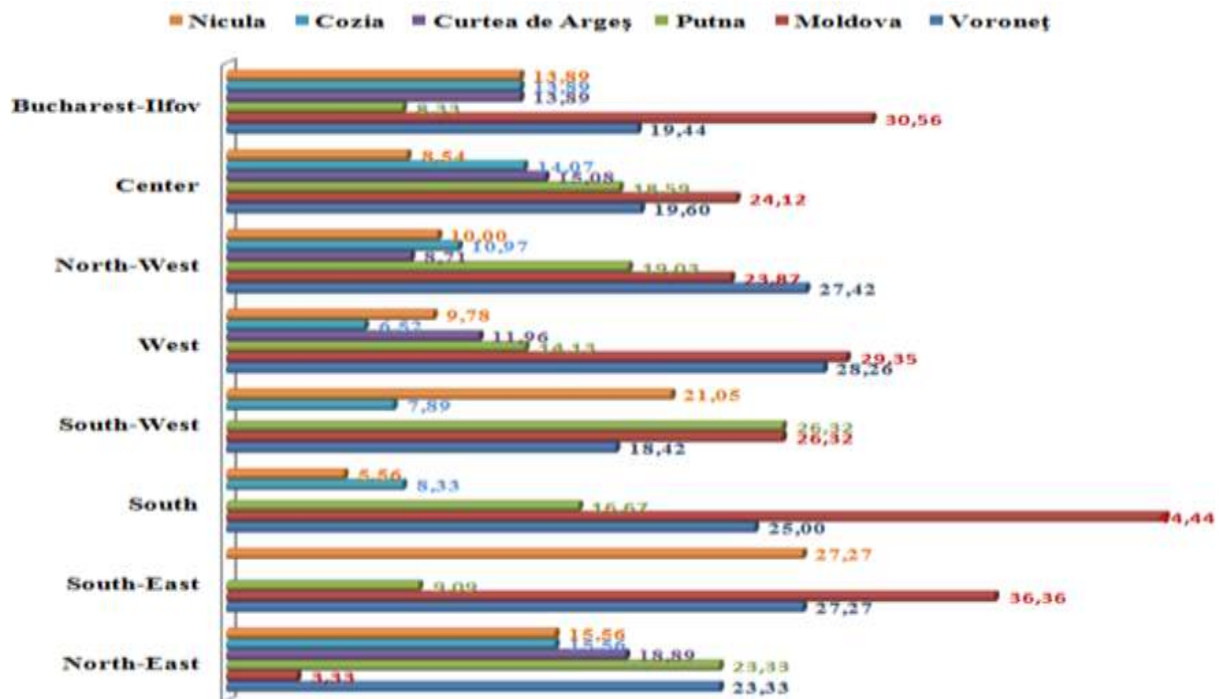


Figure 3 - The “affective” market share of the religious destinations considered regarding the respondents region of residence

Source: Authors' calculations

Hereby the classification’s representativeness for the entire market is higher comparing to the market share case.

The Voroneţ monastery is on the first position in only 2 regions, West and North-East (equal to Putna). The Curtea de Argeş monastery doesn’t show on the classification made for the South, South-East and South-West regions, and Cozia is not on the classification for the South-East region. The most

even distribution of expressed preferences for a place of pilgrimage has the Central region ($E=\sum p_i^2=0.1809$), followed by the North Region ($E=\sum p_i^2=0.1941$) and Ilfov-Bucharest ($E=\sum p_i^2=0.1941$). The highest degree of homogeneity or the highest degree of concentration of expressed preferences can be found in the South region ($E=\sum p_i^2=0.2978$), however all have low degrees of market concentration.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The first conclusion drawn from this study is that in Romania, traveling to sacred destination, especially monastic settlements, is a frequent practice for the Orthodox population. Over 90% of those who answered the survey have made a trip to a religious destination, and approximate 70% of the investigated population has also spent one night there, thus becoming religious tourists.

The analysis of the market's capacity indicators has shown the existence of a religious settlement that has the title of the most visited pilgrimage place in Romania: Nicula monastery. The market's degree of concentration is quite low, but the most visited pilgrimage places are located in close geographical regions. This fact is also made possible by the large number of monastic settlements: approximate 500, as they are the main pilgrimage places in Romania.

For the "affective" market share the region that stands out is Moldova and its monasteries, an element that contributes to that being their cultural and historical value and their better advertising than other religious destinations.

The fact that 30% of the investigated population has had a trip spanning the duration of 2-3 nights, 13% 5-7 nights and 7% over 7 nights, suggests that religious tourism or pilgrimage is one of the most frequent types of internal tourism, if not the most frequent. Even when considering that the structure and the size of touristic costs and the length of the stay associated with religious travel, cannot compare with the costs associated with "leisure" tourism or business tourism, taking in consideration the number of those

that practice religious tourism it would be a mistake to ignore its potential, especially by those who are stakeholders in the tourism industry: religious organizations and local and central authorities. All these efforts to capitalize that potential must take account of the limits of the religious settlement, and their religious significance, as there are several restrictions that must be put in place to ensure the peaceful cohabitation of the tourists with the permanent residents of those settlements. Another thing to be avoided is the over-commercialization and over-advertising of these sacred places, so the main characteristics of the place stay the same, while adopting the principles of an efficient management.

The benefits of this type of tourism must also be felt by the local communities, so that they can be protected, developed and then experience a rise in the quality of the services provided, for the purpose of gaining a durable development.

As the final conclusion we can say that the market for travels to a sacred place in Romania follows the international trend of religious tourism. The rich spiritual Orthodox tradition has left its mark over the Romanians behaviour, as the main pilgrimage places in Romania are exclusively monastic settlements or regions renowned for them.

Yet for the development of this market it is very important to create and maintain viable partnerships between all the stakeholders involved in the religious tourism phenomena, not only to meet the consumers' needs but also to realize the sustainable development in the region, looking to fructify in an optimal manner the religious touristic potential.

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