

**9th Annual International Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Conference:
Fátima and Levoča Sanctuary-towns: development and management
differences**

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Biographies

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Abstract

Within the social sciences, particularly as regards Geography, Economics and Sociology, Religious Tourism is debated taking into account its impact on territories, local populations and the external agents strongly connected with this phenomenon.

In any urbanized area were the actions perpetuated over decades by active agents (both public and private) that have fabricated the extant realities, sanctuaries also integrate a particular touristic system.

It is necessary to establish parameters in order to understand why some sanctuaries do not make it as far as a callow stage of development while others, through a set of synergies, are able to completely change their environs, inclusively creating internationally renowned cities. Given the extent and interconnection of elements involved in this development process, Ambrósio's Model (2007) - Development Process of a Sanctuary-Town – will be used to enable comparative studies between a large-sized shrine/town, Fátima (Portugal) and a mid-sized shrine/town, Levoča (Slovakia).

Introduction

There is a tendency among ecclesiastical researchers to examine the consequences of religious tourism while focusing on the spiritual assumptions of religion. In turn, academics centre their investigations on more pragmatic elements, distancing themselves from any spirituality inherent to religious tourism. Regardless of their motivation, all visitors/pilgrims require services, ranging from the more basic in terms of satisfaction of human needs, to the commercial development of trivial merchandise.

The creation of services and the construction of buildings, by the Church, contemplate, mainly, the spiritual pilgrims' assistance. On the part of the economic agents and the Administration the concerns are different towards religious tourism. The former aspire to profit as the number of pilgrims increases, the latter aim that religious tourism might contribute for effective planning and for the growth of development city's strategies.

Having in mind a research/cooperation project between Portugal and Slovakia for religious tourism, two case studies/two different sized sanctuaries will be considered: large-sized, Fátima (Portugal); mid-sized, Levoča (Slovakia).

The Model designed by Ambrósio (2007) reveal which stage of development have those sanctuary-towns reached. As Fátima is more advanced in the development process many of the successful strategies will be adapted to Levoča's shrine realities as proposals for its development aiming to include it in the renowned international sanctuary-towns network.

Literature Review

Literature on local and regional development based on the perspective of religious tourism is scarce. Despite the dearth of data, Ambrósio (2000) noted that three types of actors always participate in the construction of these territories: the Church, the tourism-oriented economical agents and the Administration.

After having improved his researches, Ambrósio (2007) managed to design a Model to show the stage of a sanctuary-town development, considering the role of the ecclesiastical and secular agents in those territories.

The application of the Model to specific sanctuary-towns was continued by Ambrósio (2015), in this case Santa Luzia in Viana do Castelo (Portugal).

The present article is a study supported by a research/cooperation project between Portugal and Slovakia for religious tourism. In this, the goal is to profit from previous studies, to design Levoča's Model and to advance with concrete and realistic proposals having in view the definition of development strategies for the Levoča shrine/town.

Methodology

Ambrósio's Model (2007) - Development Process of a Sanctuary-Town – reveals quite clearly which stage of development have reached a sanctuary-town.

The Model is made up of circles and squares. A first circle incorporates the equipment built by the ecclesiastical authorities for practices inherent to the pastoral objectives of the sanctuary while a second one covers the infrastructures and tourism activity support structures. A first square defines an incipient stage in sanctuary-town development but able to respond to the existing tourism inflows (with a low level of overnight demand).

The first circle in the second development stage represents the rise in religious activities and in the provision of infrastructures and facilities designed to respond to growing demand from among believers. The following circle represents the dynamics of private sector and institutional actors, both in terms of the reception of tourists/pilgrims and in promoting the site as a tourism destination. The second square represents maturity in development, demonstrating that

throughout the previous stages there had been a successful level of interaction between participants.

In order to establish which development stages reached Fátima and Levoča, data was collected and used for designing the two corresponding models. After their finalization and evaluation, it was possible to advance with strategies proposals for Levoča development having in mind the interests of both, the ecclesiastical and the secular societies.

Results

According to the data collected and the visits to both sanctuary-towns Fátima and Levoča (and also to other sanctuary-towns) is possible to say that three types of actors always participate in the construction of these territories: the Church, the tourism-oriented economical agents and the Administration.

The Church is responsible for the structuring of the sanctuary's grounds, where at its core sits the temple, demarcating the site of pilgrimage. Subjected to the sanctuary's dynamic/relevance is the number and dimension of the religious buildings.

The tourism-oriented economical agents propitiate conditions for the reception of tourists/pilgrims on the one hand, and employment opportunities for the influx of incomers on the other. In shrines where there are fewer pilgrims, private economic agents have a smaller role, since business opportunities are scarce and are often controlled by corporations of religious origin.

In quickly made popular sanctuaries, the concern with harmonizing economic development with the preservation of nature and the sociocultural environment was regularly absent or poorly articulated in any plans outlined for these areas. In less visited shrines, the civil Administration is for the most part replaced by religious corporations; these generally show a greater concern in protecting the natural and social environment.

Fatima is an example where the Administration was surpassed by the pace of the city's growth having, over the decades, implemented many corrective plans. Only in the beginning of the 21st

century the situation reversed becoming the Municipal Development Plan the guideline for all implemented actions.

This article aims to help religious tourism destinations not to make the same mistakes as Fátima or other big sanctuary-towns did and also to aware them for the necessity of planning the possible urban growth carried by the arrival of tourists / pilgrims.

Conclusion and Discussion

The schematizations/comparisons between Fátima and Levoča sanctuary-towns allow to say that in the last one, although its potential for growing, its development stage is incipient.

In fact, there's the necessity of outlining a set of growth and projection strategies in order to increase the number of visiting pilgrims/tourists.

First of all, Church has to define what role it intends for the sanctuary, in particular, if it wants to turn it in a meeting point for Slovakian Catholics. Therefore, it is necessary to plan religious activities that attract penitents throughout the year; in this case, it is essential to create the reception conditions for prolonging their stay, such as accommodation, catering, religious articles/souvenirs store and meeting / conference rooms.

If the Church succeeds in attracting many penitents, the secular agents shall act accordingly: on the one hand private investors will open or increase their business to meet the needs of the pilgrims, on the other, the Administration will incorporate in its plans the religious tourism segment as one of the Levoča's development and growth strategies.

Only the synergy of the various agents can turn Levoča in a sanctuary-town of greater national reference and possibly to add it to the renowned international sanctuary-towns network.

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